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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 201**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1991-92

House of Commons

Monday 16 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mortgage Guarantees

1. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he is doing to make mortgage guarantees by his Department acceptable to building societies and financial institutions.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): The income support arrangements in respect of mortgage interest depend on individual circumstances and do not therefore constitute a generalised guarantee. From next month, changes are being made in the operation of the arrangements with the aim of making them more effective in preventing the build-up of arrears where income support is in payment.

Mr. Madden: Will the Secretary of State instruct his officials to see whether they can help constituents living in Hanover square in Bradford, who sold their homes for £1 to the British Heritage Housing Trust and are now angry that they cannot afford to buy their homes back at prices up to £51,000? The building societies are unwilling to accept guarantees given by the Department and by Bradford council because the former owners are pensioners, unemployed people and people on low incomes. Will he ensure that urgent action is taken to enable my constituents to buy back their homes and does he understand that any scheme that he introduces which relies on cosmetics and sticking plaster will not be adequate compensation for those many people who are fearful of losing their homes for ever?

Mr. Newton: I understand that there has been correspondence between the hon. Gentleman and Bradford West office about a particular case which must be one of those to which he adverted in his supplementary question. It has been fully explained to the hon. Gentleman that it is not possible to give advance assurances about particular payments when the payment of income support depends on an adjudication officer's decision at the time the claim is made. I think that that is fairly well understood. Normally the arrangements work well in terms of the general letter which is given to building societies.

Mr. Ward: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there is to be any change to help with the repossession problem, it would be humane if it were made before Christmas? Does he further agree that it would help if housing benefit were paid directly to the lender and that that would make matters much easier for his Department in dealing with other benefits?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may be aware that, in addition to the measure on which I commented in my original answer, there have been discussions with representatives of the Council of Mortgage Lenders and some of my right hon. Friends to see whether further action can sensibly be taken to help with the repossession problem. Those discussions have been constructive and are continuing.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the Secretary of State recall for the House for how many years Opposition Members have been asking him to make mortgage payments direct to building societies? How many hundreds of thousands of people might now not be homeless if he had followed that advice? Why is it that sense enters the Government's head only when an election approaches?

Mr. Newton: That is an uncharacteristically overheated question from an hon. Member who, rightly, has a reputation for the balanced way in which he puts things. He well knows that arrangements have been in place for a long time enabling direct payments to be put into force when arrears occur. Those arrangements have undoubtedly prevented many repossessions. At the moment we are seeking to improve the working of those arrangements and that has been widely acknowledged and welcomed by the building societies.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: When my right hon. Friend next meets the banks and building societies and rightly discusses with them the possibility of increasing direct payments of income support in respect of interest payments, will he emphasise that the most serious threat to the housing market and to the liquidity of the banks and building societies would be too many forced sales at prices that are too low? That in turn would lead to even more repossessions and he should tell the banks and building societies to be far more responsible about foreclosing on people's property.

Mr. Newton: The Council of Mortgage Lenders as a body, and its members, would recognise the points that my hon. Friend makes. It is on that basis that the constructive discussions to which I referred are taking place between many of the lenders and Government representatives.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that there has been widespread concern for some time about the scale of repossessions? Did he say in answer to a supplementary question that only an improvement to the existing mechanism is being considered? Would I be right in thinking that that would exclude new and more fundamental ways of trying to deal with a problem that is spiralling wildly out of control?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has drawn the wrong conclusion about an earlier answer, which I think was clear. We announced some time ago improved arrangements, as I believe them to be—we are already putting them in place and they will take effect from the end of the month—to make direct payments of income support where arrears occur. Another matter that is under discussion with the Council of Mortgage Lenders is whether a further extension of automatic direct payments could contribute to dealing with the problem.

Mr. Higgins: In any future discussions, will my right hon. Friend include building societies, banks and insurance companies, as in many instances a mortgage may be backed by an insurance policy instead of the mortgage being arranged on a repayment basis?

Mr. Newton: Yes, the talks embrace representatives of those concerned with that part of the business.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Secretary of State note that the Prime Minister, when a Minister in the Department of Health and Social Security, set in train the tidal wave of repossessions when he pushed a regulation through the House, five years ago to this very day, which disqualified a newly unemployed person from receiving half his DSS mortgage interest repayments for the first 16 weeks? Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that on that occasion the Prime Minister said:

"There is no reason"—

that is, for eviction—

"and it will not happen."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1129.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman at least apologise to the 100,000 families who have been evicted this year, especially as the Prime Minister's folly was in direct defiance of the building societies' advice at the time? Will he admit that the Prime Minister's action has caused untold misery? Will he repeal immediately the iniquitous Major disqualification rule?

Mr. Newton: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman totally misrepresents the position. The arrangements to which he referred were put in place after discussions with the Building Societies Association, during which it made it clear that a mortgagor would not repossess on the basis that the hon. Gentleman has suggested, as well as on the basis that where interest was rolled up in cases in which more than 16 weeks were involved, the Department would meet the additional interest charged on the extra payments arising. Those were balanced arrangements and in my view they have worked well. In reasonably expressing concern about repossessions, the hon. Gentleman should at least do so on a fair and straightforward basis.

Child Benefit

2. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families will gain from the three upratings of child benefit that will occur in the 12 months to April 1992.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): The answer is 6·8 million families.

Mr. Bowden: Will my hon. Friend confirm that 40 per cent. of people who gained from the upratings would not receive a single penny—perhaps I should say a single ecu—if they lived in socialist France?

Mr. Jack: I am delighted to confirm to my hon. Friend that the structure of our child benefit scheme ensures that the first child receives benefit, unlike the position under the scheme in France. He may be interested to know that several European countries have extra conditions on entitlement—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Perhaps it is, but at least it gets the facts out and that is something certainly lacking on the Opposition Benches.

Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain have means tests. In Belgium, Italy and Portugal, there are links to insurance status. I hope that those facts impress the House.

Mr. Allen: To the issue of mortgages and pensioners, we now add child benefit—another part of the Government's real social charter. Is not the Minister thoroughly ashamed of his record on child benefit? The Government are trying to make good what they put wrong during the previous 10 years, but second and subsequent children still receive £2·05 a week less in real terms than they would have received if the Government had maintained child benefit at 1987 levels. Millions of pounds have been taken from mothers and children. Is not the Minister thoroughly ashamed of himself?

Mr. Jack: I say very quietly to the hon. Gentleman that we need no lessons on that subject, given the record of the previous Labour Government, who reduced benefits to families by 7 per cent. in real terms whereas we have increased them by 29 per cent. During the period when

child benefit was not uprated, we did not stop helping families; we gave £600 million in real terms to low-income families. In the 12 months to April 1992, child benefit will increase three times and other benefits will be uprated. That is a record of which we can be proud.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend deserves congratulations on the Government's child benefit record over the past couple of years. Does he agree that the policy of family support extends to family credit? Will he contrast the 300,000 people who are receiving family credit with the impact of a minimum wage policy, which would have a devastating effect on many families and, of course, on single people?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend adverts to an interesting statistical coincidence. Well in excess of 2 million successful claims have been made for family credit whereas, according to some estimates, a minimum wage would put 2 million people out of work.

Cumbernauld Office

3. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the reorganisation of his Department at its Cumbernauld office; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): With the formation of the Benefits Agency, local offices were combined to create more effective management units. In the case of Cumbernauld, the former local offices at Glasgow Springburn and Cumbernauld were brought together.

Mr. Hogg: Is the Under-Secretary of State aware of the great concern among the public and the caring agencies about the decision to move senior management from Cumbernauld to Springburn? Is she aware of the widespread belief that Cumbernauld as a community has lost out on important benefits such as community care grants and budgeting loans? Will the hon. Lady therefore again consider reorganisation in the office in my constituency and whether it would be more appropriate for senior management to be located in Cumbernauld, to look after the needs of the community of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth properly?

Miss Widdecombe: The people of Cumbernauld have no reason to fear that they are getting less of a service than they were getting before. None of the core facilities or the facilities directed towards the general public have been moved to Springburn; the finance and personnel section is the only one to have moved.

Community care grants and provision under the social fund are worked out on a district basis. Nevertheless, the particular needs of client groups are taken into account when working them out. Recently, there has been a substantial increase.

Occupational Pensions

4. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners have an occupational pension *(a)* now and *(b)* in 1979.

Mr. Newton: The latest figures available show that, in 1988, 51 per cent. of pensioners received income from occupational pensions compared with 41 per cent. in 1979.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that such schemes give pensioners greater financial independence, but low inflation and low taxation are needed if they are to be totally effective and pensioners can get that only from a Conservative Government?

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend and the history of what happened under the previous Labour Government bears that out.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Secretary of State consider those pensioners who do not have occupational pensions or whose pensions are so low that their overall incomes are low? Bearing in mind the bitterly cold days last week, would not it be wise to trigger the cold weather payments? Why should so many pensioners be so desperately poor that they dare not keep their homes heated adequately because, understandably, they are frightened that they will be unable to pay their quarterly bills? Will the right hon. Gentleman today authorise cold weather payments, which, after all, amount to only £6 a week?

Mr. Newton: There are two points. First, as the hon. Gentleman knows, over the past three years we have directed about an extra one third of a billion pounds—including money that is to be paid additionally next April—to less well-off pensioners on income support for precisely the reasons that the hon. Gentleman outlined. Secondly, he will be aware that we have a much-improved scheme of cold weather payments in place this winter. Payments have already been triggered in a substantial number of areas and, thanks to the arrangements that we have made for automatic payment which were not in place last year, the first payments should be going out this week.

Mrs. Roe: While welcoming the good news about the increased proportion of pensioners with occupational pensions, may I ask my right hon. Friend to confirm that during the past 12 years the Government have fully met their pledge to protect state pensions from inflation and that during the past two years state pensions have risen by 15 per cent.?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is right in both respects. Alongside that, on the firm base of the state retirement pension, we have directed additional help to less well-off pensioners in the way that I described.

Mr. Meacher: Why is it that after three years of pension fund scandals stretching from Hanson to Maxwell, with dozens in between, the right hon. Gentleman still has not made any legislative proposals for reform of the pension fund law? Why is it that after three years he will still not legislate for an independent chairman, for 50 per cent. employee representation, for full and up-to-date disclosure of all relevant financial information, for prohibiting stock lending and for a proper statutory framework for trust law? Will he take on board the fact that if he continues to dither and procrastinate as he is now, the next pension fund crisis will be on his head?

Mr. Newton: Far from not legislating, we have passed a substantial amount of legislation on a number of occasions including, most recently, the Social Security Act 1990, under which early next month I shall introduce the further regulations on self-investment to which many references have been made. The self-investment regulations—we have had to take great care over the transitional

provisions to avoid damaging firms and pension funds—are a good example of the need to act with proper consideration rather than to rush about with half-baked suggestions, as the hon. Gentleman so often does.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in the past few years there has been a rapidly increasing number of pensioners, but that the value of occupational pension schemes and the real income from them has also increased rapidly?

Mr. Newton: Yes, they have and that is substantially because of the way in which the Government have restrained inflation much more effectively than did the previous Labour Government.

Social Fund

5. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he proposes to make any early changes in the operation of the social fund and in the availability of funds to local offices.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Since April we have made available additional funds of over £43 million to district office budgets for loans and grants. From today social fund officers will be using the completely revised guide which has been introduced in all district offices.

Mr. Pike: Does not the Minister recognise that, even with these additional funds, if the fund is the final back-up of a system for people in the most urgent need of one-off payments, there is still too much budget limitation at local offices, which have to pay more attention to the availability of funds than to the need of the person applying? Does he recognise that the repayment of a loan is still too much of a limiting factor in granting loans, which should be granted anyway to the people in most urgent need?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman will have heard me say before that we are dealing at the margins of the social security system with those in exceptional circumstances who have exceptional needs. I believe that the social fund, managing a controlled budget with discretion at local level, is the right way to proceed, but, of course, we are looking forward to the reports from the social policy research unit at York and others in the not-too-distant future when there will be an opportunity to review the whole system.

Mr. Hind: I thank my right hon. Friend for listening carefully to the representations that I and many Conservative Members have made about the increase in the social fund, especially for the people in Skelmersdale of whom he took note when I made representations to him.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that among his priorities are people who find themselves homeless and without furniture or other items? Under the social fund and the additional money that he has made available, will they be given a high priority in the deliberations of local officers?

Mr. Scott: As I think my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has power to make directions and to issue guidance on the social fund. Guidance is also given at local level. It is for the individual social fund officers to use their discretion on whether payments are made.

Mr. Bradley: The Minister is incredibly complacent about the operation of the social fund, on which many thousands of people rely to make ends meet. Is he aware of the abysmally low success rate in many cities? Is he further aware that when a grant is applied for jointly with a loan, there are massive variations among district offices in those cities? In Manchester, for example, the success rate in Wythenshawe is 5·7 per cent., in Chorlton it is 8·7 per cent. and in Rusholme it is 13·6 per cent., despite all three offices having spent their full allowance, including the additional money from February and September this year? Will he urgently consider the amount of money in the social fund to ensure that people are treated equally under this abysmal system whenever they go to social fund offices throughout the year and regardless of which office they apply to?

Mr. Scott: I reject any concept of its being an abysmal system. In August this year, we provided substantial extra resources for the social fund because we recognised the pressures in offices. All offices received an increase of at least 10 per cent. and those under most pressure received up to 40 per cent. in additional resources. I challenge the hon. Gentleman's presumption about discretion. If there is discretion at local level, there will be variation between different offices when judgments are made by social fund officers. The combination of a fixed budget and the use of discretion is an appropriate way in which to meet exceptional needs.

Income Support

7. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the increase in the value of income support for a single pensioner aged over 80 years from next April.

Miss Widdecombe: There has been a widespread welcome for the uprating announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State which provides for an additional £60 million above normal uprating for pensioners who are over 80 or disabled. That and the 7 per cent. uprating for income-related benefits, nearly 3 per cent. more than the retail prices index, underline our resolve to protect and raise the living standards of the less well-off people of our nation.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her reply. Is she aware that because of the ravages of inflation, the average pension of 400 roubles in Moscow is now only enough to buy 1 kg of sausages? Does she agree that that is a dramatic contrast with the increase of one third in the real value of benefits since the previous Labour Government left office?

Miss Widdecombe: Perhaps an even more pertinent contrast, which my hon. Friend may like to consider, is the startling one between the fate of pensioners under the previous Labour Government and the well-being of pensioners under this Government. It is true that pensioners' average total incomes have grown by 34 per cent., whereas for the whole period of the previous Labour Government, they increased by only 3 per cent. The ravages of inflation under the Labour Government, if not

of Moscow proportions, are a solemn warning about what would happen to pensioners in the unlikely event of Labour taking power again.

Mr. Hardy: How many sausages can a British pensioner over the age of 80 buy, while keeping his or her house warm?

Miss Widdecombe: The retirement pension is regularly uprated in line with prices to enable pensioners to buy necessities. The rise in income-related benefits in line with the Rossi index, which was 3 per cent. more than the retail prices index, gives even greater buying capacity to pensioners who rely on state benefits.

Residential Homes

9. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have benefited from real increases in the income support limits for those in residential care and nursing homes over the last three years.

Miss Widdecombe: Over the past three years, there have been four increases in the income support limits for people in residential care and nursing homes—in April 1989, April 1990, August 1990 and April 1991. Further increases, well above inflation in most cases, are proposed from April 1992.

Some 265,000 income support recipients are expected to benefit from the increases.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Those increases are most welcome, but can my hon. Friend assure me that elderly people no longer requiring medical treatment will not be discharged from NHS hospitals, where they pay nothing, into residential accommodation, where, despite those welcome increases, they will be required to contribute out of their savings until those savings are pretty well exhausted?

Miss Widdecombe: I can confirm that it is a requirement that, if the national health service believes that continuing health care is appropriate, it is obliged to provide such care, either in NHS premises or, if necessary, by contract with the private sector. It is not the case that savings have to dwindle to nothing: ordinary income support limits apply.

Mr. Frank Field: Does the Minister accept that, although many home owners provided a fine service, many others know that they have the Government over a barrel and push for excessive increases? Is she not rather ashamed —as a member of a Government who pride themselves on targeting—to come to the Dispatch Box and read to her hon. Friend a whole list of universal increases? When will the Government pay attention to the Select Committee on Social Security and go for targeted increases, thus saving taxpayers a great deal of money and ensuring that, at the end of the day, no one is evicted from private residential or nursing care facilities?

Miss Widdecombe: My concept of universal benefits and that of the hon. Gentleman differ somewhat. The increases are wholly geared to those on income support. For universal benefits, we must look to the slightly cracked proposals of the Labour party, including its proposals for the old-age pension and how it would not target benefits.

Pensioners (Central Heating)

10. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioner households have central heating; and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Mr. Scott: The latest figures available show that, in 1989, 70 per cent. of pensioner households had central heating, compared with 43 per cent. in 1979.

Mr. Carrington: That dramatic increase is warmly to be welcomed, particularly in view of the very cold weather that we have been having. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that very satisfactory increase reflects the Government's success in ensuring that pensioners have benefited enormously from this country's rising standard of living over the past 12 years?

Mr. Scott: The figures that I gave in response to my hon. Friend's question about central heating are replicated by those for other consumer durables over the same period, and reflect a considerable increase in pensioner living standards under this considerable increase in pensioner living standards under this Government—an increase of some 34 per cent. from 1979 to 1988.

Mr. Lofthouse: But surely the problem is how many pensioners can afford to use their central heating. Given his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) a few moments ago, can the right hon. Gentleman say in how many areas cold weather payments have been triggered? Is it just a few?

Mr. Scott: I cannot give the figures. Severe weather payments have been triggered in a number of areas during this period of exceptionally cold weather. In a sense, I am disappointed that the Meteorological Office was unable to trigger in advance on this occasion. The Met Office tells me that it wanted to study the matter with care, as this was the first such period of cold weather since the new system was introduced. It will be studying the pattern that has occurred this time, and hopes to be able to make improvements in future.

Hon. Members: How many?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Scott *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Scott: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I did not want the right hon. Gentleman to answer a question that had been asked, from a sedentary position, but perhaps he intended to add to his reply to the supplementary asked by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse).

Mr. Scott: Since I have been asked, the answer is 25.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Given the huge increase in occupational pensions, and the fact that 75 per cent. of newly retired people now have savings, can my right hon. Friend confirm that, over the past 10 years, pensioners' average income has increased to no less than five times what it was under the Labour Government, when income from savings fell by 16 per cent.? Can he also——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Not at this stage. One question, please.

Mr. Scott: The increase in pensioner incomes in each year of this Government's period of office has been greater than the increase over the whole period of the last Labour Government.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: In the context of ensuring that pensioners can heat their houses, what meetings has the Minister had with other Departments following his meeting with me and the Cold Weather Credit Campaign earlier this year?

Mr. Scott: Obviously we are concerned with the campaigns of the Department of Energy and the Department of Health. We have regular meetings to ensure that the impact of cold weather on the old and vulnerable is as small as possible and that they, their neighbours and friends, and organisations that help them are as well advised as possible about meeting the needs of vulnerable groups.

Mr. Favell *rose*——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I think that I should call the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) in terms of balance.

Mr. Favell: The new proposals for discovering whether elderly people require residential or nursing care will be most welcome. Has my right hon. Friend discovered that people who choose to stay in their own homes, and particularly privately owned homes bearing in mind maintenance and other costs, often live a less attractive life than people in many residential homes?

Mr. Scott: I believe that it is a matter of balance. Many people can enjoy a high standard of living in comfort in surroundings to which they have been accustomed throughout their lives, with the necessary support. Other people may well need help in residential and nursing homes, and we have substantially increased the amount of support that they can receive.

Family Credit

12. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long it now takes to process claims for family credit on average.

Mr. Jack: In November the average clearance time was 17·5 working days. The family credit unit has now beaten its clearance time target of 18 working days in each of the last four months.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that some people have to wait a long time before their family credit is paid? Often that occurs because employers are reluctant to supply information and that causes real hardship. People in my constituency have difficulties in paying their mortgages because the payment of their family credit is slow. Will the Minister make it clear that it is the duty of all employers to furnish information as quickly as possible? Would it not be better if payments could be made within seven working days rather than the time that it takes now?

Mr. Jack: I looked very carefully at the recent correspondence concerning constituents which the hon. Gentleman has referred to us in relation to that subject. I am pleased to say that we can offer hope for improvement on two counts. The first relates to people who are normally employed. Next April, we will introduce a new administrative formula that will significantly improve processing time and cut down errors. The formula has been referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee, which does not want to consult on it, but would like us to implement it as soon as possible.

Secondly, we have asked the social policy research unit at York university to carry out research in respect of the self-employed. That work is going well and I hope that we will have the conclusions by the middle of next year.

On both counts, we will ensure that the job is done speedily. However, it is up to employers to speed up their response. The new arrangements that I have outlined will provide employers with a form to give information to employees applying for family credit, and that should speed up the process.

Pensioners

13. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated proportion of pensioners who own their own homes.

Mr. Newton: In 1988, 49 per cent. of pensioners owned their own homes.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is that not encouraging evidence of the extent to which pensioners are sharing in the advance towards greater independence and higher living standards? Is there not an extra benefit for those fortunate enough to own their own homes in that a state pension related to the retail prices index, which includes housing costs, contains a concealed bonus for them?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is certainly right to believe that it is an advantage and evidence of the success of our policies that a growing number of pensioners have the extra independence that owning their own homes can bring. That trend is also reflected in the ownership of many other things, including telephones, central heating and cars, for which the increase between 1979 and 1988 has been quite dramatic.

Invalidity Benefit

14. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many referrals concerning claimants in receipt of invalidity benefit were sent to the regional medical officer from his Department's local offices in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* so far in 1991 and *(c)* what percentage of the total number of such claimants these referrals represent.

Mr. Scott: It is not possible easily to identify invalidity benefit from other incapacity benefit referrals. However, in total, 824,000 referrals were made in 1990, representing 29 per cent. of claims live at any point during the period. Up to September this year, there were 694,000 referrals, representing 25 per cent.

Dr. Godman: How do the referrals figure in terms of national averages for the two offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow? Why is such a hard line taken towards people who, in the eyes of GPs and consultants, are manifestly unfit for any kind of work? One constituent of mine has been referred to the regional medical officer 15 times since

1985. That is harassment of the worst kind. It is a case for the Parliamentary ombudsman. It is malpractice, and that hard line should be thrown overboard.

Mr. Scott: Of course, if the hon. Gentleman would like me to give him figures for his own constituency offices, I will do so in writing. If he wants to raise any individual cases, he knows very well that I will do that. His talk of harassment and hard-nosed approach hardly squares with the figures. The case load for invalidity benefit from 1978-79 to 1991-92 has increased from 600,000 to 1·35 million. Obviously, it is right that we should be careful about expenditure on that scale, but I take note of what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I will give him such information as he requests.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Investment Policy

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement about the Commissioners' investment policy.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing the Church Commissioners): The Church Commissioners' long-standing investment policy is the effective and prudent management of the assets entrusted to them, to achieve the best total return for the furtherance of their primary object, which is the financial support of serving and retired clergy.

Mr. Marshall: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend upon the success of the Commissioners' investment policy, which has enabled them significantly to increase stipends? Does he agree, however, that it would be more effective for the Church if stipends were related to performance rather than minimum stipends?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend will appreciate that performance-related pay in the cure of souls is a difficult concept. Nevertheless, the Church of England is actively engaged in a programme of appraisal of clergy performance, with which are linked proposals for consideration of the terms and conditions of service of clergymen, including the continuation of the parsonage freehold.

Redundant Churches Fund

30. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how much has been granted to the redundant churches fund in each of the last two years.

Mr. Alison: The redundant churches fund received £1·7 million from the Department of the Environment and £760,000 from the Church Commissioners in 1990, and £1·8 million and £774,000 respectively in 1991.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: My right hon. Friend will, I am sure, endorse the importance of fostering sacred and secular links. He may be aware that the custom of displaying royal arms in churches has fallen into abeyance since Queen Victoria's time. Will he make representations within the budget to which he referred to urge the Commissioners to restore that agreeable practice in the 40th year of this monarch's reign?

Mr. Alison: It is true that, from 1660 onwards, it became compulsory to display the royal arms in every church as a reminder to clergy and the congregation that the monarch was the head of the Church. If that practice has declined somewhat, it has been because nobody had any doubt that the Queen was the head of the Church. However, should Mr. Delors and the European Commission cast envious eyes at the Church of England from Brussels, it may be necessary to encourage the reintroduction of the painting of the royal coats of arms on parish churches in England.

Mr. Frank Field: How often in the past two years have the Commissioners ignored the advice of the redundant churches fund, and how many historic buildings have been lost thereby?

Mr. Alison: I think that only one historic building has fallen prey to the failure of the Commissioners and the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches to meet, consult and agree. The work and co-operation of those bodies is very vigorously, sensitively and carefully carried out to ensure that redundant churches of note are not demolished.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that fewer churches would be declared redundant if they were less expensive to maintain? In that context, will he assure me that the Church Commissioners are continuing to press the Treasury for relief from VAT for repairs to listed buildings?

Mr. Alison: I assure my hon. Friend that that is the case.

Theft

31. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what has been the amount lost through theft in respect of Church Commissioners' property over the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: The majority of the Commissioners' property—commercial, residential and agricultural—is leased to tenants who would naturally insure against theft themselves. The Commissioners therefore do not have details of individual cases, and cannot estimate the amount lost overall.

Mr. Banks: I hope that the Commissioners are concerned about the prevalence of theft from churches for which they are ultimately responsible. The number of artefacts that is now leaving the churches rivals the number at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. In my day, it was just the lead from the roofs that went missing, but it is now anything that can be put into the back of a lorry. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of an excellent book that has been written and published by the Staffordshire police, who are so very good at smuggling guns into Brixton gaol, which tells churches how they can be made more secure to stop things being taken from the buildings? Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that all churches have access to that excellent publication?

Mr. Alison: Yes, and I shall certainly take careful note of the hon. Gentleman's point. However, the Church Commissioners are not directly responsible for parish churches. The hon. Gentleman talked about smuggling arms into prison. Although the Church Commissioners are more concerned to ensure that bibles are, if necessary, smuggled into prison, we shall certainly be on the lookout for guns being smuggled into churches.

Mr. Lawrence: Does my right hon. Friend think that my National Lottery Bill might be the answer to many of the Church Commissioners' prayers, as one of its objects would be to benefit our heritage, the proudest part of which must be some of our churches? Does he agree that making money available to the Commissioners for that end would play a substantial part in helping to secure those parts of the Church that are of extreme value—the things that are now being stolen?

Mr. Alison: I should emphasise to my hon. and learned Friend that praying is never a gamble and that the income to be derived from gambling is a great deal more volatile than that which is likely to be derived from praying. We shall stick to the safe old ways.

Mr. Carrington: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is considerable concern about theft from redundant churches, which are so frequently not protected against people breaking into and vandalising them? Will my right hon. Friend now make representations to the redundant churches fund, so that sufficient money can be made available properly to secure those churches until an alternative use is found for them?

Mr. Alison: Yes, I take note of my hon. Friend's point, which should be a practical preoccupation for diocesan authorities. As my hon. Friend will know, demolition is sometimes an option when a church is declared redundant, but, generally speaking, the use of that redundant church for alternative beneficial social purposes is quickly arranged.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: As somebody who is very interested in and responsible for redundant churches in Scotland, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether, since it is Christmas, he thinks that it would be charitable of the Labour party, so that the the redundant churches can be repaired, to return the £26 million that were given to it by Mr. Robert Maxwell?

Mr. Speaker: That is a bit wide of the question. I am not certain that the Church Commissioners are responsible for churches in Scotland, but let us hear the answer.

Mr. Alison: I am particularly glad to have a reminder of the Christmas spirit from so distinguished a Scottish colleague. That can only mean one thing in this context, but fortunately the Church Commissioners are not responsible for church buildings in Scotland.

Ordination of Women

32. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what financial estimates the Church Commissioners are making in respect of the effect on their expenditure of the introduction of the ordination of women; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: In the event of the draft legislation being enacted, the cost to the Church Commissioners would depend on how many clergy resigned who were eligible for financial assistance. The cumulative cost to the Commissioners' income per 100 men has been estimated at £4·5 million spread over up to 20 years, although that could be offset by savings to the Church of England of over £2 million over that period as a result of the departure of clergymen. Those clergy would also have access to the Church's retirement housing scheme.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend and those whom he represents accept that those people—I am not one of them—who oppose the ordination of women have a right to their conscience? Will the Church Commissioners make continued provision for them and for their churches, even if they form part of a schismatic movement, as they have every right in conscience to do?

Mr. Alison: I can confirm that it is the deliberate intention of the General Synod of the Church of England to make certain that, if the House endorses the ordination of women—should it come before us, which it may not—clergymen who depart on conscientious grounds will be provided for. The Church of England is determined on grounds of principle and general sensitivity in human relationships to make good provision for those who feel that they are bound to resign their livings.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Godman, but the question is about the Church of England.

Dr. Godman: May I respectfully suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that, if he and the Church Commissioners are worried about the intended and unintended consequences of the ordination of women, they could seek wise advice from the Moderator of the Church of Scotland? We in Scotland have some fine women ministers, who carry out their duties in an honourable and decent manner.

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman refers to "women ministers", but, alas, the very word "minister" illustrates the controversy. A minister is not necessarily a priest, and it is the ordination of the priesthood that causes the difficulty.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House Sittings

33. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any plans to present further evidence to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House; and if he will make a statement.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The House will be aware that I have already submitted a written memorandum and given oral evidence—in a personal capacity—to the Select Committee. I have indicated that I would be willing to have a further meeting with the Committee if it wished me to do so. I am sure that the whole House looks forward, as I do, with great interest to the forthcoming recommendations of that Committee.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Leader of the House confirm that one of his recommendations is a four-day week for Tory MPs? Will he bear in mind the fact that he has a cheek to recommend that on behalf of his colleagues, when more than 200 Tory Back-Benchers have 500 moonlighting jobs between them? If they are too busy to do a five-day week, how come they can take on all these extra jobs? Nineteen ex-Cabinet Ministers have 59 directorships between them. The right hon. Gentleman should recommend, one Member of Parliament, one job only.

Mr. MacGregor: I have not recommended to the Select Committee that we should have a four-day week. It is a travesty of the suggestions being put to the Select Committee to represent them in that way. As I have told the hon. Gentleman before, some Members of Parliament from constituencies way beyond London feel that it is important that they should be able to go to their constituencies on Fridays. They have important activities to undertake there. It is nonsense to suggest that it is a four-day week. For most Members of Parliament, it is at least a six-day week.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that he will seek to implement any changes in this Parliament rather than the next?

Mr. MacGregor: That depends, first, on when the Select Committee reports, and, secondly, what it says and whether its proposals commend themselves to the House. I understand that the Select Committee hopes to report well before Easter. If it does so, that will reflect considerable credit on the Committee. It has a heavy job to undertake and it has received a great deal of evidence. I hope that it can meet that timetable so that Parliament can meet its recommendations.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: When my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover refers to a four-day week, he simply misunderstands what is going on. I spent seven hours journeying to London today. It will take me another six or seven hours this weekend. Many of us spend 12 or 15 hours a week travelling to and from our constituencies. My hon. Friend completely misrepresents the position when he puts it to the House of Commons and the British public that Members of Parliament are getting off with a shorter week.

Mr. MacGregor: On this occasion, I find myself 100 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting to see a dispute on the Labour Benches. On this occasion, I find myself 100 per cent. in agreement with the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and in total disagreement, not for the first time, with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Visitors' Facilities

34. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what facilities are available for visitors to the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Visitors in Members' parties are able to tour the line of route at times when it is open and they and other visitors are admitted to the galleries when the House is sitting and to Committees sitting in public.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should make visitors a little more welcome when they arrive at Victoria Tower, especially after a long journey? There are no toilets and there is nowhere to sit down, which is especially a problem when there are many people milling about at peak times.

Mr. MacGregor: We endeavour to do so in every way possible, but my hon. Friend will be aware that the main constraint is accommodation in this place.

Ms. Gordon: What progress has been made for wheelchair access to the Jubilee Room and the Grand Committee Room?

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said on a previous occasion, approval has been given for the installation of a chairlift up to the Grand Committee Room.

Mr. Favell: What can my right hon. Friend do to encourage Members who represent constituencies in London and nearby to invite their visitors to come here early in the morning? My constituents from Stockport have to get up at 5 or 6 in the morning to get here for midday. They are then faced with an enormous crush because everyone arrives at the same time.

Mr. MacGregor: This will largely depend on the willingness of Members to co-operate. I appreciate my hon. Friend's suggestion, because my constituents often face the same difficulties. I will consider what can be done, but I suspect that it is up to individual Members.

Mr. Flynn: Is it not a continuing disgrace that visiting parties of the disabled, pensioners and children are denied the simple hospitality of a cup of tea or a place to rest while the political and business cronies of hon. Members are royally entertained in this Palace at subsidised expense? Why does the Leader of the House deny the publication of information that he gave me two years ago on the political complexion of those hon. Members who entertain most? Why is that information now a state secret?

Mr. MacGregor: On the second point, because it is not relevant. Bookings are undertaken by individual hon. Members in their parliamentary capacity; it has nothing to do with political representation.

On the first point, the Catering Sub-Committee is due to consider the results of a feasibility study to determine whether reasonable catering facilities can be provided fairly close to the Palace.

Working Hours

36. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent representations he has received about the hours of working of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I have received a few letters both from hon. Members and members of the public regarding the review of sittings of the House. It is not surprising that there are not many to me, because the representations at this stage are being made to the Select Committee.

Mr. Marshall: At the risk of being accused of making a sexist comment, may I assure my right hon. Friend that any success he has in this will be warmly welcomed by the wives of Westminster? May I also suggest, however, that one of the consequences of altering the hours at which the House sits will be that it will be more difficult for children to come round in the morning?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend could have avoided being sexist by referrring to the "spouses" of Members. That would have been a more accurate description, because husbands also encounter difficulties in this respect. I was keen to set up the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and keen to give it the evidence I did, not just to improve the position of families but for a wide variety of other reasons. If we can conduct more of our business at more civilised hours, it would help a little. The issue of children visiting the House will be one of those taken into account and considered by the Select Committee.

Mr. Hardy: Has the Leader of the House seen the early-day motion that I tabled last week? It has been signed by a significant number of Members, who seek to see the time of Question Time on Monday changed because of the inadequacies of public transport due to inadequate investment, crime, terrorism or bad weather, which may get worse in the next few months. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider that proposed change sympathetically, so that hon. Members can get down here to ask the questions that may appear on the Order Paper in their names?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will put his point to the Select Committee, to which it falls to make recommendations on that matter.

Mr. Waller: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that there would be strong opposition on both sides of the House to any disproportionate loss of private Members' time? Will he consider the fact that ten-minute Bills, which I think he has proposed abolishing, are especially valued by many hon. Members? They are an opportunity to raise issues when many hon. Members are present, and their loss would not be acceptable.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right to talk about disproportionate loss. If we seek to change the hours, which may involve reducing the number of hours that we sit, we must consider a proportionate change across the board. It was in that context that I made my recommendations. I was suggesting moving the time at which private Members can have business raised in the House to a more high-profile period of the day. I also wanted my recommendations to be balanced. However, it will be for the Select Committee to make recommendations to the House, for the Government to consider them and to make proposals to the House and, ultimately, for the House to decide.

European Standing Committees

38. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column *415*, what recent representations he has received about the modus operandi of European Standing Committees A and B; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have recently seen copies of several Members' submissions to the Procedure Committee's first stage review of the operation of the revised scrutiny arrangements. I look forward to receiving the Procedure Committee's report soon and shall consider carefully any recommendations it might contain about the operation of the new European Standing Committees.

Dr. Godman: Following Maastricht, is it likely that the modus operandi of those Committees will change? Will there be an increase or decline in the work load? Several of the permanent members of those Committees feel that changes must be made in terms of both of the permancy of the chairmanship and of the need to provide specialist advisers to those permanent members.

Mr. MacGregor: It is too early to say whether there will be an effect following Maastricht. The Committee is considering both the specific points that the hon. Gentleman made, and I expressed my own views on them to the Committee in my oral evidence.

Mortgage Repossessions

3.31pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may recall the brief reference by the Secretary of State for Social Security earlier this afternoon to today's meeting between Ministers and the Council of Mortgage Lenders on the subject of mortgage repossessions. The issue is clearly of grave concern to hundreds of thousands of families who risk losing their homes, and to local authorities that will have to shoulder the burden of the homelessness that might ensue. It is also of grave concern to owner-occupiers who must fear the catastrophic impact on property values if so many houses are repossessed. Yet there has been no formal statement from Ministers. They may have nothing to offer, but that has not stopped them holding press conferences or making public statements.

Have you, Mr. Speaker, had any intimation from Ministers that they intend to make a statement, today or in the very near future, that would at least enable the House to question Ministers about that meeting and to show that, even if Ministers have no solution to offer, the Opposition have?

Mr. Speaker: I agree that it is an important matter. That is why I allowed a long run on question 1 today—*[Interruption.]* It was longer than I would normally allow. I made inquiries about the press conference and I am assured that it had nothing to do with this matter. The hon. Gentleman's point will no doubt have been heard by Ministers responsible.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause

TRANSITORY EXEMPTION FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS

'.—(1) After paragraph 5 of Schedule 1 to the 1988 Act (personal community charge: exemption) there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"*School leavers*

5A. A person is an exempt individual on a particular day if—

(a) he is aged under 20 on the day,

(b) the day falls within the period of 6 months beginning with 1 May 1992,

(c) immediately before that date he was undertaking a qualifying course of education, and

(d) the course was not undertaken in consequence of an office or employment held by him."

(2) After sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 6A of Schedule 1A to the 1987 Act (personal community charge: exemption) there shall be inserted the following sub-paragraph—

"(1A) If such a person as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) above ceases to undertake such a course of education on or after 30th April 1992, he shall continue to be exempt until the start of the earlier of the following days—

(a) 1st November 1992,

(b) his twentieth birthday.".'.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.33 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: New clause 17—*Abolition of 20 per cent. community charge contribution and extension of community charge rebates to students from April 1992*—

'.—(1) In subsection (3) of section 131 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 (community charge benefits) in paragraph (a) the words "and is not there shown as undertaking a full-time course of education on the day" shall be deleted;

(2) In subsection (5) of that section after "concerned" there shall be inserted:—

"up to 100 per cent. of his liability for personal community charge contributions";

(3) Sections 1 and 2 above shall have effect from April 1992.'.

Government amendments Nos. 127 and 128.

Mr. Portillo: Although the Bill is principally about the council tax, the new clause relates to the community charge and what is known as the student gap. At present, exemptions from the personal community charge exist for 18-year-old school pupils in respect of whom child benefit is paid, and 18 and 19-year-olds who are on qualifying courses of further education. But about half of the 200,000

[Mr. Portillo]

people who fall into either of those categories go on to full-time education and become entitled to student relief of the community charge.

At present, however, there is a student gap, which may last for a few weeks or a few months, separating the exemptions from the day on which a person enrols on a full-time course of education. Although it is possible for such a person to claim community charge benefit during that time, thus reducing his or her liability by up to 80 per cent., we accept that the administrative burden imposed on both the individual and the charging authorities is unnecessarily heavy. We therefore propose to relieve local authorities and school leavers of that burden by exempting, until 31 October 1992, 18 and 19-year-olds who are undertaking a qualifying course of education on 1 May 1992.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I suspect that new clause 33 is the forerunner of numerous similar Government-inspired changes to a Bill which the Government assured us, when they dragooned it though its Committee stage, was in pristine and perfect condition and would need no amendment. This is, I suspect, the beginning of a process that will lead to much the same outcome as was brought about by the hundreds of Government amendments—sometimes running into four figures—that have been tabled to similar Bills. If such an outcome does indeed result, it will show just how damaging the guillotine and the resulting truncation of Committee debate have been.

We none the less welcome this particular representative of the genus. If all the others deal with small issues in a way that improves the Bill, we shall have less ground for complaint. The new clause is undoubtedly good news for the group of students who will benefit from the closing of what the Minister described as the student gap—I believe that the Government's estimate is 200,000. This is, of course, part of the slow, gradual, painful process whereby Ministers are forsaking, step by step, all the policies and principles that underpinned the poll tax. One by one, the arguments that were said to justify it are being abandoned.

New clause 33 does not go far enough. Typically, the Government have had the courage to concede by implication that they have lost confidence in what they legislated for so confidently just a short time ago. What they lack is the courage and confidence to pursue their conclusions to their logical outcome. As a consequence, students are still not entitled to rebates, and the 20 per cent. contribution rule remains, along with all the damage that it does—especially to local authorities that are struggling to collect the poll tax.

Our new clause 17 would extend to students the right to claim community charge and, in due course, council tax rebates. Students are undoubtedly a section of the population who have suffered substantial hardship as a result of Government-inspired measures. I have a student daughter myself, and I know from her accounts—and from her constant recourse to the parental purse—that life is indeed very difficult for students. Their grant has been frozen in real terms at much below the level at which they could expect to survive on it; they have been denied entitlement to income support, housing benefits and rebates; there are no jobs with which they can supplement their incomes during vacations; and those who find themselves desperately hard up discover, when they turn to the hardship fund, that it has already been exhausted.

For all those reasons, I think that students are particularly deserving of help. The Government's proposal is welcome, but it only scratches the surface of the problem. Our new clause 17 would establish their entitlement to rebates, which would benefit them greatly.

We expect to have an important debate tomorrow afternoon on the 20 per cent. contribution rule, which the Government insist on retaining until 1 April 1993; but our new clause 17 would also have the effect of abolishing, as from 1 April 1992, this 20 per cent. contribution rule. If it were abolished, that would have the blessing, as far as I am aware, of every local authority association, the Institute of Revenues, Ratings and Valuation, and the Child Poverty Action Group, the very strong blessing of the citizens advice bureaux—and the enormously authorititative support of the Audit Commission, which, in its report, had this to say on the subject:

"Local authorities say that large numbers of income support recipients are in arrears with community charge payments for 1990/91. These chargepayers make up a very small amount of the total value of outstanding community charge. Pursuing these defaulters for such small amounts is not a good use of scarce recovery resources when there are much larger debts outstanding. The Government have already accepted that there will be no minimum contribution to the council tax. Abolition of the minimum 20 per cent. community charge contribution for income support recipients would ease the administrative burden on local authorities very considerably."

I do not intend to rehearse at length—the opportunity for that will come tomorrow—the powerful arguments, financial and practical, which would support the abolition of this rule at the earliest possible date. Today I shall content myself with quoting what I hope by now is a familiar argument for the Minister, advanced by the Audit Commission. It is that the attempt to collect the 20 per cent. contribution from those on income support costs £15 for every £6 net revenue raised. Even on grounds of simple housekeeping and accounting, that ought to conclude the argument.

It is not even as though the Government have adhered to their own reasons for refusing to act on this in the past. They have conceded, by abolishing the 20 per cent. contribution rule for the council tax, that there is no ground in principle for maintaining it. We all recall that in the heyday of the poll tax the one principle that Ministers and Conservative Members were most reluctant to abandon was that everyone should pay something. That principle has now been abandoned; the Government no longer advance or maintain that position. They abandoned the principle for the council tax, so no argument in principle remains.

The Government then resorted to the argument of practicality. They said that it was impossible to abandon the 20 per cent. contribution rule because income support rules had been constructed on the basis that a 20 per cent. contribution had to be paid. They said therefore that if the rule was changed there would have to be a consequential change for the social security rules. That argument no longer applies because no consequential change is now required. The Government have abandoned any pretence that income support payments include an element that would cover the 20 per cent. contribution, so they can do

away with the 20 per cent. contribution rule at the earliest practical opportunity, with no difficult practical consequences for income support.

We are left with a slightly opaque, not to say metaphysical, argument from the Minister of State. He maintained that the rule was an essential concomitant of the poll tax because it was a personal tax, yet we are told that in respect of the council tax, which is also, at least as to 50 per cent., a personal tax, there is no difficulty in doing away with the 20 per cent. contribution rule. If it can be abandoned in the case of the personal element of the council tax, it is hard to see why it cannot be abandoned immediately for the poll tax. If it were abandoned, the burden on local authorities of trying to collect what the Prime Minister described as a virtually uncollectable tax would be substantially lightened, and that would be of great benefit.

Ministers are fond of criticising local government because many local authorities are less than 100 per cent. successful in collecting the poll tax. If they were serious about helping local government with that difficulty, they would abolish the 20 per cent. contribution rule. That is what our new clause 17 would do. I commend it to Ministers, but, bearing in mind our debates in Committee, I confess that I do not do so with any great hope that they will see sense for once and will accept this sensible recommendation.

3.45 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I welcome the Secretary of State's intention to fill in the student gap, but I am bound to say that I can see no logical reason for attempting to collect the 20 per cent. from students now that the Government have conceded in the new council tax that students will not pay it. My council and students would very much like the 20 per cent. contribution to be abolished for the final year of the tax.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I am a bit bemused about the definition of a student and should like to have it clarified for England, Wales and Scotland. The Government have moved away from their view that everybody should pay the poll tax and are making some amends. However, the plight of students is well known to every hon. Member and it is absurd, especially in Scotland, that local authorities are trying to collect the 20 per cent. from students for 1989-90.

Earlier in the debate a Scottish Office Minister was present, but he has departed. Do the Government have figures for Scotland about the number of students involved and the cost to local authorities of trying to collect this tax? The Government have abandoned in the so-called council tax not only the rule that everybody has to pay but a key element of the poll tax—accountability. There is no strict relationship between local authority finances and the accountability of councils to the electorate who may or may not be paying.

Although the Government proposal is welcome, it flies in the face of all logic. They are redressing a gap but not accepting the other enormous gap of students in Scotland being asked to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax from 1989 onwards. Local authorities are chasing up and down the land trying to collect taxes from people who may have moved three, four or five times. That is nonsense. The cost is exorbitant and the Government should take this opportunity to tell that to local authorities, especially in relation to students, although there are other categories to which we may refer in other clauses and amendments. The Government are getting into an absurd position and they should recognise that.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I do not question the fact that in some parts of the country students are finding it difficult to make ends meet. Like the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), I also declare the reverse of a pecuniary interest because we are paying out to our student sons and daughters. Some students have been placed in difficulties by local authorities that have set a community charge that is so far beyond the reach of people that even the 20 per cent. required from students makes life difficult. Students in my borough of Wandsworth and in other, mostly Conservative, boroughs whose community charge was below target have no problem, because an element of the student grant meets 20 per cent. of the reasonable charge. The difficulties arise in Labour boroughs where authorities have rashly and ineffectually overspent.

I welcome new clause 33, which deals with the student gap. It takes up the issues that I raised with Ministers in Committee. They said that they would consider the problems that I drew to their attention and would produce a solution on Report. I think that the hon. Member for Dagenham could have been a little warmer in his support of the Government's proposal. As the hon. Gentleman said, the new clause deals with a comparatively small problem in terms of the number of students who are affected by it, but to them it is a real problem.

We know that until the end of December the family of the school leaver is still eligible for child benefit. There would, therefore, be exemption until then. However, after the end of September there is no longer that eligibility. It would be nonsensical if a young person who was waiting to go to college was required to pay. It is surely to be welcomed that students will not find themselves in that position. I use this opportunity to say that local education authorities throughout the country have, in the context of the debate, reached only the end of October. All too often, student grant decisions are being taken at such a slow pace that even at that stage a student's place in higher education may not have been confirmed. There is a message to local education authorities to be quick about getting student grants to students.

That must be in addition to the helpful remedy that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has adopted to eradicate the anomaly that was built into the system.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): The proposed changes are welcome. They will offer a little help in moving towards meeting what can be described only as a considerable task.

Students have had a hard time in recent years. New clause 17, which would abolish the 20 per cent. requirement, receives our warm support. It would provide enormous help. Surely the Government could accept it on the ground of cost. The Audit Commission and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives have told the Government that the cost of collection of the 20 per cent. requirement is two and a half times the sum that is collected. If the Government wish to act in addition to their desire to help people, there is the argument that removal of the 20 per cent. obligation would be extremely cost effective.

[Mr. David Bellotti]

There are good reasons to help students, whose grants have decreased in value in real terms. The pressure on parental contributions is making life extremely difficult during the recession. This is at a time when the Government are trying to encourage more young people to go into education. The requirement that we are discussing is running counter to other Government policies that are designed to help young people to move into further education. The Government are well aware of the few in the 16 to 19-year-old range who are in education in this country compared with the numbers in other European countries and in other countries throughout the world. That comparison relates to both further education and training.

We welcome the improvements that are to be made, but there is much more that could be done. Students are always willing to make a contribution if they have sufficient money to do so. At present, they just do not have enough money. One of the reasons why they receive moneys late through local education authorities—I take up the comments of the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis)—is that LEAs do not have staff available to them to process the many applications that are made in July and August because of the Government's power to cap local authorities. Even in Conservative-controlled authorities that have always been held up as being cost effective, and certainly not profligate, it is difficult to bring in extra staff for two months of the year to process grant applications. There are many more applications than there were, because there are, in many instances, no real jobs for young people. As a result, they are being forced into education, but, at the same time, they are not receiving the grants that they deserve.

By supporting new clause 17, we would be supporting also several parts of the Government's policy. I hope that the Government will find it possible at this stage to make concessions and to help the students.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I wish to make a plea on behalf of Scottish students who, after all, had the poll tax imposed on them one year before it came south of the border. There are bound to be many more students in Scotland than elsewhere who will be pursued for arrears, and that point has been made adequately. It is ludicrous to pursue people for their debts when the cost of collection is two and half times the amount of the debts. Given the poverty in which those students find themselves, will the Minister consider having an amnesty for those students? The 20 per cent. payment will be seen by people, particularly students in Scotland, as a sign of the Secretary of State pursuing political dogma over economic sense.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) got off to a pretty poor start when he talked about the Government coming forward with hundreds of amendments. We have tabled one new clause, which covers ground not covered by amendments in Committee, and five sets of amendments, all of them arising from the Committee proceedings. The hon. Gentleman is really expressing his profound disappointment that the Bill was so well drafted that it was not necessary to have rafts of amendments. So flimsy was the Labour party's attack on our proposals in Committee that we did not discover any chinks or openings in our policies. The spirit of Committee means that, when one finds measures that can be improved, one proposes amendments, but the Labour party did not unearth aspects of which we were unaware. The Committee gave us two or three matters to think about, and we are happy to introduce measures to deal with them.

It was clearly anomalous that students should leave school expecting to receive an 80 per cent. discount on their personal community charge when they become students in higher education but in the brief intervening period be subject to a full community charge, less any income support to which they are entitled. It is right that we should end that anomaly.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for Dagenham, who has a student daughter, is keen to take students back into the benefits system. Our taking students out of the benefit system is a major step forward. To have available to people who have withdrawn voluntarily from the labour market to pursue their studies the benefits which have been provided by Parliament to those without resources or income because of circumstances beyond their control is to give entirely the wrong message to students. The fact that we have amended income support and housing benefit to take students out of that benefit system has been a great step forward.

Mr. Gould: The Minister has clearly demonstrated why he proved so impervious to the powerful arguments which we put to him on so many issues in Committee—he is totally out of touch with the real world.

Mr. Portillo: Many parents believe that it would be, and was, wrong to have their student sons and daughters brought into the benefit system. That system was not intended for students. The fact that students are not provided for in that way is a great improvement.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Surely the Minister accepts that the student grant was geared to take students through the long summer vacation, when they got no money. The Government removed their access to benefit, leaving them with a 16-week period during the summer without benefit. How is that gap bridged?

Mr. Portillo: The financing of students should be by a combination of grant, loan and moneys which they may be able to earn and not by bringing them into income support or housing benefit, which would be absolutely wrong.

The hon. Member for Dagenham made a point in which he was erroneously joined by the hon. Members for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti). He quoted the Audit Commission's figure which purports to show that collecting from students and the other 20 per cent. payers costs more than is collected from them. As I explained in Committee, that is a wholly erroneous figure. The £6 that the commission quoted purports to be the difference between what is made available through income support to those who pay 20 per cent. and what they were paying back in addition in community charge. That is a completely false comparison. What matters is that, as the Government have made moneys available to those on income support so that they can pay their 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge, those moneys should be collected. The amount at stake is £440 million and the average cost of collection now stands at £12·50. If

the Opposition want to make a comparison, the fact is that the average 20 per cent. payment is about £50 and the average cost of collection is about £12·50, so £37·50 stands to be collected over and above the collection fee.

Mr. Bellotti *rose*——

4 pm

Mr. Portillo: The comparison quoted by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) and others is false, because, taking account of the fact that the Government are paying large sums in benefit to help people to make the 20 per cent. payments, it implies that that would have to be withdrawn. That would involve a heavy cost which the Government are not prepared to undertake. I think that the British public also believe firmly that, as money has been voted from taxpayers to income support recipients so that they can meet their 20 per cent. contribution, that money should be used for the purpose for which it was intended, especially since the headline figure of the community charge was reduced by £140. That means that the average now being made available as an addition to income support more than covers the average 20 per cent. being sought.

I shall quote some figures which show that the additions now stand at £1·31 a week for single people and £2·62 a week for couples, but as the estimated net average community charge level for Great Britain this year is £2·10, that would imply that the average 20 per cent. contribution was 80p a week for single people and £1·60 a week for a couple. Therefore, the amounts that we are providing in income support are much higher than the average that those people are being asked to pay.

Mr. Bellotti: The figures that the Minister has just given and the ones that he gave in Committee are not in dispute. However, does he know of any other tax under which the Government would put money into a system and give it to people while expecting to get it back, then not get it back and pay extra money in order not to get it back? That is the situation in this case. Have the Government any similar ideas for such taxation schemes, because if one took that scenario further, the country would be bankrupt in a very short time?

Mr. Portillo: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not intend to give any encouragement to the people who are not paying, but there is no question of an amnesty, as suggested by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey). Moneys have been made available to people on benefit in order that they may pay their contribution to the community charge and we have every right—as do the taxpayers—to expect that those moneys are paid to local authorities for the purpose for which they were intended. Therefore, there will be no amnesty and local authorities will continue to enforce the payment of the 20 per cent. contributions.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I was about to answer the point that he made. He wanted to know what was the definition of a student. New clause 33 and the two amendments would close the student gap, so we are talking about 18-year-olds who are at school and whose parents receive child benefit for them and 18 and 19-year-olds, whose parents do not receive child benefit, who are on a qualifying course. Such a course could be described as further education as opposed to higher education. The regulations state that the person must be on a relevant course and that the relevant hours of that course must exceed 12 hours in a week. A relevant course is one that lasts for more than three months, is not higher education, not a correspondence course and must usually be followed during the day, not at night school. We are trying to ensure that those who are at school or at college—doing A-levels, for example—and who then cease to be in that position but who are going on to higher education do not have to pay community charge in the short gap between leaving one part of their education and moving to the other.

Despite the Opposition's rather testy and ungenerous reception, I am sure that the provision will be welcome. I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) said. It will be of great help to all if local education authorities are able to make quick determinations. I commend the new clause and the associated amendments to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Cr j 8-4lause 1

COMMUNITY CHARGE IN SCOTLAND

'(1) Before 9th July 1992 the Secretary of State shall cause to be published a report, to be called the Community Charge Report, on the effects of the Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Act 1987.

(2) The Community Charge Report shall assess the effects of the Act on—

(a) the cost, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of financial administration in local government;
(b) the public acceptability of local taxation;
(c) the levels of services provided by local authorities;
(d) the state of local democracy;
(e) the incidence of local taxation.

(3) Before publishing the Community Charge Report the Secretary of State shall consult the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, representatives of consumers and such bodies with an interest in the impact of taxes on persons with low incomes as appear to him to be concerned.'.—*[Mr. Dewar.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take the following:

New clause 5—*Scottish annual report*—

'( )—(1) The Secretary of State shall prepare an annual report to Parliament on the workings of the council tax.

(2) In preparing his report under subsection 1 above, the Secretary of State shall have particular regard to effect of the tax on:

(a) people who live on their own;
(b) people who occupy property provided solely through their employment; and
(c) people who rent their property.'.

New clause 7—*Cost of the council tax in Scotland*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall within six months of the introduction of the Council tax, publish a report detailing the cost of introducing the tax.

(2) The report prepared under subsection 1 shall contain the costs accrued by local authorities, whether met out of central funds or not and the cost of valuing the properties.'.

New clause 8—*Effects of the Community Charge*—

'.—(1) Before 9th July 1992 the Secretary of State shall cause to be published a report, to be called the Community Charge Report, on the effects of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (the Act).

(2) The Report shall assess the effects of the Act on—
(a) the cost, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of financial administration in local government;
(b) the public acceptability of local taxation;
(c) the levels of services provided by local authorities;
(d) the state of local democracy;
(e) the incidence of local taxation.

(3) Before publishing the Report the Secretary of State shall consult the local authority associations, representatives of consumers and such bodies with an interest in the impact of taxes on persons with low incomes as appear to him to be concerned.'.

New clause 10—*Discounts*—

'.—Sections 11 and 12 below shall not come into effect until such time as the Secretary of State has produced a report on:
(a) the incidence of discounts,
(b) the cost of administering discounts,
(c) the use of council tax benefit as a means of reducing council tax liability for those on low incomes, and
(d) the steps which billing authorities are to take for the purposes of ascertaining whether the chargeable amount of council tax is subject to any discount.'.

New clause 12—*Annual report*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall prepare an annual report to Parliament on the workings of the Council tax.

(2) In preparing his Report under subsection 1 above, the Secretary of State shall have particular regard to effect of the tax on:
(a) people who live on their own;
(b) people who occupy property provided solely through their employment; and
(c) people who rent their property.'.

New clause 13—*Cost of the council tax*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall within six months of the introduction of the council tax, publish a report detailing the cost of introducing the tax.

(2) The Report prepared under subsection 1 shall contain the costs accrued by local authorities, whether met out of central funds or not and the cost of valuing the properties.'.

New clause 27—*Non-payment (inquiry)*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall publish a report detailing the level of non-payment of the community charge for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

(2) Any report under subsection (1) above shall include details of the amounts outstanding from charge-payers liable to the 20 per cent. contribution.'.

Amendment No. 15, in clause 117, in page 78, line 29, at end insert—

'(1A) Section 11 shall not come into force until the Secretary of State has produced the report required by section *(Discounts)* above.'.

Mr. Dewar: The new clause raises a matter of considerable substance which will delay the House for a significant time. I understand that Ministers are not too keen to remember that once proud flagship, the poll tax. I do not intend to spend time rubbing salt in wounds, although I recognise the temptation and have been encouraged by my hon. Friends to do that. We want to look forward, although I cannot help remembering the speeches made in 1987 on the subject of the poll tax and the extent to which the predictions made then, not only by the Opposition but by many others, have turned out to be justified.

I remember the derision which met the Tory Reform group when it said that the popularity of the poll tax was dropping as fast as a stone over a cliff. I remember with some amusement the Minister of State, Scottish Office saying that the opposition by the Tory Reform group to the poll tax legislation was the first and most pressing reason why that tax should be supported. It has always struck me as an intellectually interesting but not very substantial point.

The clock has moved on and, understandably, Ministers now want to walk by on the other side. I warn them that I see no great advantage in concentrating on the new form of the rating system which they are now introducing. The more people look at the small print, the less they will be convinced.

New clause 1 seeks to place on the Government the duty of producing a report that will deal with the record of the poll tax and the current situation which it has created, both for those who have to pay it and for local government which has to maintain services on it. It would point to the lessons which should have been learnt by central Government but which we fear may not have been.

It is important to stress that there is a genuine reason for a report, and that is our apprehension that as a result of the very tight timetable which has been ruthlessly enforced on the debate many of the details of the new system will not be properly considered. There is a real fear that many of the disadvantages which linger administratively with the poll tax and which still plague us may be imported into the new system. The report and examination proposed in the new clause would do something to guard against that danger. That point is given added weight by the fact that Ministers are always anxious to deny that the new system is a form of rating system based on capital valuation, which it evidently is.

I do not have the advantage—I use the word tentatively—of having much experience of the style of the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities. I am not familiar with it, but I have already noticed that it is deadpan and perhaps funereal. The hon. Gentleman argued that it was a great step forward for the student community to leave it virtually without any means of support for large parts of the year—particularly during the long vacation. I found that a very individual approach to the problem and would venture gently to suggest that it will not command universal support among students in my constituency or, I suspect, any other constituency.

My own view is that the present system may appear tolerable to students and their parents if those parents are in a position to make a substantial parental contribution without financial embarrassment; but I must tell the Minister—and this goes to the heart of some of his arguments—that, in all my years in Parliament, I cannot remember a time when students have been more bitter and more genuinely distressed by their economic situation than they are at present. I use the word "bitter" having given the matter considerable thought. There has been a series of demonstrations and I have had a series of approaches from individual students—particularly the heads of one-parent families going late into higher education—who feel that they have been betrayed and who, frankly, would be appalled by the way in which the Minister has just dealt with the subject.

The preparation of the report that we seek would enable us to examine the impact of the poll tax on a whole series of aspects of local authority finance and life, which is set out in the new clause. The report would consider the economy and efficiency of local government finance. It is

a cliché hardly challenged these days that local government, at least, has had to live through a nightmare in which confusion has shaded into chaos as the poll tax has continued on its most unfortunate course. It has cost two or even three times as much to collect as the rates, and we have had a network of incomprehensible adjustments, transitional allowances and reduction schemes, all moving into each other to produce a system which I certainly—and I make no bones about this—have the greatest difficulty in understanding and in explaining to people who come to me with questions that are beyond the reasonable compass of people not professionally involved in dealing with such systems.

It is also important that we consider the justice—or, rather, injustice—of what has happened and try to learn lessons from that. I do not want to repeat the familiar arguments about a flat-rate tax unrelated to ability to pay. To be fair, the Secretary of State has accepted for some years that the poll tax was essentially unjust and indefensible and said so at quite an early stage. It appears that the Government now accept that and, presumably —although I do not say this with very much confidence —the right hon. Gentleman has managed to persuade the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland and the phalanx of no-turning back Members who surround him in his departmental fastness of that fact. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has been able to convince his colleagues that the poll tax was an inhumane system which is rightly being abandoned on that ground if no other.

It is important that the lessons to which I referred are learnt, and that would, I hope, be one of the consequences of the report for which the new clause would provide. There are others, and I shall briefly sketch them in. First, there is the impact on local government services, which has undoubtedly been considerable. Secondly, there are the problems of non-payment. Thirdly, there is the reduction to dangerous levels of the percentage of revenue controlled by local government itself—now down to 12 or 13 per cent. in Scotland and even lower, I think, in Wales.

Although that phenomenon has been politically convenient for the Government, it has been condemned by local authorities and professionals across the whole range because, in the longer term, it will undoubtedly undermine and weaken local democracy in a way that, whatever our political persuasion, we may come to regret. It has preserved and built into the system a gearing factor which I find repugnant and which undoubtedly puts local authorities in a consistently difficult position, not least in dealing with burdens and statutory duties placed upon them by central government.

Another aspect with which I hope the report will deal is the damaging undermining of confidence in local government as a system, and in local government finance in particular. I take that point very seriously from a non-partisan point of view. Many of my Conservative friends share that view. That undermining is partly the result of the past 10 years of Government policy—the "pay as you use" approach to local government services, the privatisation and competitive tendering. It was also, however, partly the result of the non-payment campaign run by other people in other parts of the political spectrum. The proposition that local government taxation is a voluntary imposition which people may take or leave as they wish has insidiously gained currency. That view may cause acute problems for any local government system in future.

4.15 pm

Those are all areas of genuine importance about which real points can be made and where an impartial survey that would bring together the facts would be a considerable service for debate and the future planning of local government financial systems. There is a tendency for Conservative Members not to face up to what has happened, but to talk in vague and general terms about a lack of consensus and support for the poll tax. Well, that is a self-evident truth. The reasons for that lack of support and the imperative of trying to avoid the mistakes which created that situation are matters of pressing concern that fully justify the proposition in new clause 1.

I want to refer now to my particular interest, and that, of course, is the situation north of the border. There is no doubt that Scottish local government is in crisis. The poll tax has been a disaster, the full extent of which is only now becoming evident. The shortfall in income for the first two years of the tax is about £350 million. My regional authority of Strathclyde has lost £190 million between 1989-90 and 1990-91. The figure for Lothian is £76·5 million, and for Tayside it is £21·9 million. The position in 1991-92 is as bad if not worse. After five months of this financial year, £584·7 million was unpaid, representing more than 70 per cent. of the expected income for this financial year.

I recognise that Ministers accuse councils of not doing enough to collect the tax. That is an easy way for them to escape their responsibilities and to avoid facing up to what has been happening. As the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), will know, there have been advertising campaigns in the press and on television. Non-payment has been condemned by local authorities in the strongest terms. No fewer than 3 million summary warrants have been taken in the courts. There have been 100,000 arrestments and 550,000 voluntary agreements to cover payments of arrears. No one is proud of the fact that we have been driven to that. No one is proud of the present position. The figures are evidence of the misery and confusion created by the Government's blunders.

Ministers bear the first and greatest burden of guilt, but others must take their share of the blame. Nationalists who have argued for non-payment must also answer a heavy charge. The non-payment campaign was never more than political opportunism dressed up as principle. Among the nationalists there must be some at least who have been unwilling travellers on a dishonourable road. I remember the nationalists' former leader, Gordon Wilson, advising against a rash and selfish adventure, but he could not hold the line against the heady populism advocated by those who ultimately replaced him. The party joined forces with Militant Tendency openly and, on that issue, without reservation.

It was extraordinary to find the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) publicly defending the Anti-Poll Tax Federation—an organisation that advocates and practises the tactics of violence. He was defending a demonstration during which cars were damaged, 29 people were arrested, and a police station was besieged. Many nationalists must be uncomfortable about the company that they keep on that question.

Labour, too, was under pressure over non-payment, but a responsible party does not advocate irresponsibility. There were a number of good reasons for not advocating non-payment. It has carried weight with Labour, but apparently not with the nationalists. Politicians who hope to make law cannot pick and choose which laws to obey. It is a luxury which they cannot afford and which sets a dangerous precedent. Predictably—I speak with some feeling about my experience in my own constituency—many people living in modest circumstances were tempted by non-payment. They now face the problems of debt and debt collection. The nationalists, the authors of that misfortune, can offer no help. How can the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) or any of his colleagues look in the eye of a pensioner who is threatened by a sheriff officer? All that the nationalists can do—they certainly do it—is to complain about the inevitable consequences of their own actions, blaming everyone but themselves.

Non-payment was bound to affect local government services—it was designed to do so. Marginal reductions in funding hit many of the most vulnerable in the community. The SNP, in its search for party advantage, has made a significant contribution to that disaster. This year, Strathclyde region has been forced to cut £34 million from its budget. When a library closes or education services suffer, people are entitled to ask, "Is this the price that we are now paying for the SNP non-payment campaign?" Its actions have pushed up bills for everyone else. In Lothian this year the poll tax was £48 higher than it would have been if it had not been for non-payment. The SNP must take direct responsibility for that increase. The addition is, in a real sense, the Sillars surcharge or the Salmond tax.

We are entitled to hear the SNP's current position. It ended the non-payment campaign, but not because it was satisfied with the Government's alternative to the poll tax—it did not even wait to see the details. The one decisive factor was the growing unpopularity of non-payment itself. SNP Members are not satisfied with the proposals in the current Bill—after all, they opposed it on Second Reading—but they are not sufficiently dissatisfied to risk continuing non-payment or indeed to seek a place on the Committee considering the Bill. Nationalist Members apparently take the view that those whom they represent do not need a voice on a wide range of issues debated in the House. That is a deliberate decision, but it is not one on which their constituents have been consulted.

A year ago—I remember it very well—the nationalist candidate in the Paisley, South by-election, a member of the party's national executive committee and, indeed, a member of the new-fangled shadow Cabinet, was asked what he would do if the sheriff officers were at his door. The answer that he gave was clear and practical in personal terms—he would reach for his chequebook and end the embarrassment. Every hon. Member knows that that solution is not open to many of my constituents or to many of those who listen to the nationalist soft-sell on non-payment. There was no pretence in the housing schemes, and in the battered inner cities non-payment was only for those with a chequebook and who could take the strain. Thousands and thousands of ordinary Scots are now paying the price for that.

It is no surprise that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities reports that 70 per cent. of those in debt were originally entitled to a poll tax rebate at some level. Rebates of course—I regret this—can be backdated for only 56 days. Many who would have been entitled to rebates now face huge bills which they have no hope of meeting. I advise the hon. Member for Eastwood that the Government should act now to abolish the 20 per cent. rule—there is no excuse for not doing so—and allow those in debt to claim the rebates which should have been available to them all along. The Government must bear the main responsibility for all the pain and suffering, but the SNP is also guilty. The role that it has played has been irresponsible and contemptible.

Throughout this debate, and throughout all the years of argument and discussion, the Government have sought to avoid the clear implications of what they were doing and have been guided by blinkered ideology. A report of the kind for which we argue in the new clause would highlight lessons to be learnt and perhaps bring some good from the fiasco that the poll tax has been. I hope that it would concentrate Ministers' minds on the need to give practical help to those who have suffered. It might also reinforce the view, which badly needs buttressing, that local democracy must be a foundation for freedom in this country. Providing an independent voice so that local communities can run their own affairs is an important part of our democratic structure. All those things have been damaged by the poll tax experience and they must now all be rebuilt.

I said earlier—I do not retreat from this view—that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was one of the early converts to the obvious. He was one of the first Conservative Members to be converted. I can still remember the speech that he made on 16 December 1987 because I was struck forcibly by it. He said that the poll tax "will build on a platform of crude regression which seeks to make equal in the eyes of the tax collector the rich and the poor, the slum dweller and the landed aristocrat, the elderly pensioners living on their limited savings and the most successful of today's entrepreneurs."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 114.]

The right hon. Gentleman meant that and, to be fair to him, he acted upon it when he had the opportunity. The tragedy is that, although the right hon. Gentleman has had to capitulate on the principle in many ways and has forced many of his hon. Friends to do so rather less willingly, he has got many of the practical details wrong. Many of the practicalities will lead us back into trouble. The report that we seek would throw light on that possibility.

We must also remember that many of those who surround the Minister—many Conservative Members—have learned nothing and wish to learn nothing from the poll tax experience. I note that only a year ago, on 5 December 1990, the Secretary of State for Scotland said: "we must not lose sight of the strength of the underlying principles that are already embodied in the community charge."

In a particularly spirited passage, the right hon. Gentleman continued——

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Scottish people need to be reminded again and again that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) willingly and eagerly voted for the Scottish poll tax Bill.

Mr. Dewar: Indeed, he did. We had an exchange on that point in a recent debate when, by chance, the right hon. Gentleman was present. That just shows that the laws of chance work in wondrous ways. Although I do not want to make much of it, I explained to the House then that there was a good defence and an alibi and that the right

hon. Gentleman offered us the explanation that he had asked the Secretary of State for Scotland about it and had done what he was told. That might be close to a Nuremberg defence, but it is at least something that can be advanced for the right hon. Gentleman.

The Secretary of State for Scotland showed absolutely no doubt about the rightness of what he was doing when he defended the poll tax. I was particularly touched by the right hon. Gentleman's thought in that debate a year ago when he continued:

"Is it sophisticated"—

that was supposed to be dramatic irony—

"to have a method of payment for local services based solely on the bricks and mortar in which one happens to live?"—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 397-400.]

The right hon. Gentleman then went on to describe at some length something that sounded very much like the council tax that he will now no doubt defend. On that occasion——

Mr. McKelvey: The Secretary of State would embrace it.

Mr. Dewar: My hon. Friend is probably right because I will say this for the Secretary of State for Scotland: he is not a man to see the fine tuning in any argument; something is always absolutely black or absolutely white for him.

Many strata of opinion remain in the Government and in the Conservative party. The Government may well be swept away to the Opposition Benches shortly and I very much hope that that will be the case. However, I advise whoever is in government that there is genuine virtue in looking dispassionately, professionally and with an expert view at the record of the poll tax, and especially at the administrative details, to try to ensure that we do not import into the new system the seeds of self-destruction that Ministers so foolhardily built in to the flawed and totally unjust poll tax a few short years ago. I believe that what we have suggested is worth doing. This is a good new clause. It would set in train what might be a useful antidote to some of the dangers about which we are so well aware and for which many of our constituents are still paying the price.

4.30 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): It will surprise several hon. Members that early on in the debate we are able to talk a little about Scotland. While I am grateful for the new clause, which I support, I wonder whether it will help the disappointment at the endeavours of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) to stop an amendment tabled in Committee by the Liberal Democrats to abolish the poll tax in Scotland a year early. Of course, it was guillotined.

It is right that we should examine the impact of the poll tax in Scotland as well as the rest of Britain, for no consideration was ever given to what its impact would be in Scotland. In the Scottish context, it is particularly ironic that the poll tax should be replaced by a property tax, because it was the unfairness and hardship caused by the rates in Scotland which led to the hurried and disastrous introduction of the poll tax.

As we have heard so often, the Conservatives had no mandate to introduce the poll tax in Scotland. They were warned of the consequences at the time, but they paid no heed. Indeed, they failed to listen to the Scottish people in the 1987 general election, when the disintegration of the Conservative party in Scotland started. They failed to pay any attention to the results of introducing that tax. Of course, we see the consequences for the Conservatives now.

It must not be forgotten that the hardship caused by the poll tax, the difficulties in collecting it and the overwhelming public opposition to it—the factors cited as the reasons for abolishing the tax—not only existed for a year longer than in England and Wales but were ignored when only Scotland suffered. The crisis in local government caused by the poll tax is more acute in Scotland because of that extra year of cost and chaos.

The Prime Minister has led in giving the general impression that the poll tax has been abolished. Non-payment is already at critical levels, as we heard from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). Next year, non-payment will increase as people think that the bills do not apply to them. That is the case at present. Hundreds of thousands of people think that the poll tax has been abolished, so they think that the bills which come in are simply the result of a mistake by the computer.

The high level of non-payment is the reason why we are committed to abolishing the poll tax a year early in Scotland and, for one year only, putting the cost on national income tax. It would be a practical means of ensuring that local government services are provided, that the excessive waste and cost of collecting the poll tax is avoided and that the hardship of the 20 per cent. charge is ended. It would also be a symbolic gesture. It would mean that the Government acknowledged at last that they were mistaken in forcing the tax on to the Scots.

Of course, the lack of a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers means that English and Welsh taxpayers would have to contribute to the abolition of the poll tax in Scotland. That is regrettable but unavoidable, but, as it was English Members of Parliament who voted for the tax in Scotland, it has a certain justice. Unless the poll tax is abolished in Scotland, the cost to local authorities will be insupportable.

I make a particular plea to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), about the position in the Western Isles. I do so following an invitation from the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) to meet council members of Western Isles council who came to the House to brief Members of Parliament.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Office has said that it will meet those councillors, but unless Ministers are prepared to help the people, it could be the end of the Western Isles and the people in them. They have struggled for hundreds of years and suffered a great deal. They should not be called upon to suffer further. After all, the Government have a responsibility and they must share culpability for what happened, because the council was not warned about the collapse of Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

The Government cannot leave that council to sink. This country owes the Western Isles and its people a great deal. I hope that the Minister will give them the greatest consideration and say, "Yes, we will help you, the people of the Western Isles."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I am listening closely to what the hon. Lady is saying. I hope that she will recognise

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

that the Secretary of State has authorised the Western Isles to borrow £24 million this financial year to meet its requirements. I am sure that she will also acknowledge that the community charge paid by those on the Western Isles is between £26 and £28 per annum. That charge is a fraction of the average paid by other community charge payers in Scotland.

Mrs. Michie: I am aware that the Secretary of State has allowed the council borrowing powers, but it requires £3·5 million to service its borrowing requirement.

The poll tax on the Western Isles may be high or low, but the fact is that jobs will be lost, schools will be closed and we will witness a further emigration of people from the region. That will mean an end to that people's culture, language and way of life, as they will be unable to survive in the Outer Hebrides.

Taxpayers in Scotland, England and Wales should be told the cost of introducing another local tax. The administrative costs of valuing properties, introducing new software and establishing new billing methods will fall on the taxpayer—local and national. In the interests of accountable government, the electorate must know the true cost of collecting the new tax and correcting the Government's mistakes. That is the purpose of new clauses 7 and 13.

New clauses 5 and 12, in common with new clause 1, intend to force the Government to report to Parliament "on the workings of the council tax".

The Government must not be allowed to ignore the consequences of their actions as they sought to do with the poll tax. I assure the Government that the new council tax will throw up many anomalies and unfairnesses. They must be noted and corrected. If the will is there, the Government will acknowledge and correct their mistakes.

We welcome the discount system for single people. Tomorrow, my party hopes to persuade the Government to increase it to 40 per cent. Whether we succeed or fail will not alter the fact that the impact of the council tax on single people must be carefully monitored by reports to Parliament.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): The local tax system proposed by the hon. Lady is based upon an ability to pay. I find it rather surprising that she now says that she accepts the discount system, which covers everyone, whatever his income. The hon. Lady is now proposing a 40 per cent. discount, which would mean that the better-off would get even more.

Mrs. Michie: That is not what I am saying. I do not like the council tax; nor do I like the Labour party fair tax or whatever it is called. We would like the introduction of a local income tax, based on the ability to pay.

In Scotland, a higher proportion of people rent rather than own their homes. Therefore, they obtain no benefit from the capital benefit of the property in which they live, unlike homeowners.

The council tax, especially in areas such as Edinburgh, will penalise renters. People who rent privately lost when the poll tax was abolished becaue many private landlords did not pass on their savings to their tenants. Now they will lose again because their bills will depend on the landlords' circumstances, not theirs. How that will be conducted should be reported to Parliament.

The council tax will also cause many problems to people in tied housing or similar property provided for and through employment. Many examples of occupations that cause concern should be reported on. An obvious example is Church property. It has often been in Church hands since the days when the status and income of Churchmen were higher than they are today. Manses, especially in Scotland, used to be given a 50 per cent. derating, but that no longer seems to be the case.

I am particularly concerned about farm workers in owner-occupied or tenanted farm houses. They must often live in large, old and rambling farm houses. We all know the crisis that agriculture is in at present. Farm properties provide no income, and the principle that the value of a house can be calculated by its size and potential price on the property market must not be extended to agriculture. Farm houses have been traditionally low rated and, on Second Reading, the Secretary of State for Scotland said that they would be placed in a lower band because of the present state of agriculture and the lack of demand for such houses. At least he recognises the problem, and I hope that the Minister who replies will say that agricultural houses will be placed in a lower band.

Others in tied housing, such as schoolteachers, school caretakers and policemen, will also be adversely affected. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood, will recall that, in 1989-90, the rates portion of the rent allowance for police officers was abolished without compensation. That meant a reduction in earnings of between £45 and £57 a month, and it affected more than 2,000 police officers in Scotland. Rural areas like my constituency of Argyll and Bute were even more affected, because 80 per cent. of police accommodation there is of necessity tied housing.

The rent allowance that included the rates portion was long regarded as part of a police officer's take-home pay. The Government refused to implement the award of the police arbitration tribunal, which included that rates element. The allowance used to be linked to property, and I hope that it will be restored and police tied houses will also be put in a special band.

Those problems will have to be carefully monitored if we are to avoid the chaos of past years. The reports are for the future. They are designed to ensure that the Government accept their responsibility for the cost and workings of the council tax and that they do not seek to blame any failure of the tax on local authorities. The priority for Scotland is the immediate abolition of the poll tax to rescue the people and Scottish local government from a complete shambles and near-disaster.

4.45 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): It is interesting to note that no Tory Members now rise to defend the poll tax, despite the fact that it was introduced in Scotland against the will of the people.

Mr. Maxton: They are coming in now.

Mrs. Fyfe: If they speak in the debate, it is unlikely to be in defence of the poll tax. However, the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) may be in a state of mind to do so, but that remains to be seen.

The new clause is worth while because accountability is good for the soul. It occurs to me, however, that for that

to work one must have a soul. When the poll tax was pushed through against the democratic will of the Scottish people, it was obvious that the last thing that the Government cared about was the needs of other people. They had no consideration for those who were too poor to pay it, and compassion was distinctly lacking on the Conservative Benches. They were determined to push that medicine down everyone's throats and it was not surprising that people spat it out so vehemently.

Today, no one is left to defend the poll tax, except perhaps one or two isolated individuals who may speak in favour of it—who knows? However, there was a time when the Tory Benches were packed with hon. Members who knew better than the people of Scotland what was best for the rest of us.

If the report were drawn up, it would be a useful task. It would remind us of certain facts regarding the introduction of the poll tax. For example, when the poll tax was being drafted, the Government were warned by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Rating and Valuation Association, as well as local government accountants and town clerks throughout the land, that it would be utterly chaotic. CIPFA published a chart for the benefit of its members on how the poll tax would operate. It was not being contentious or using it for publicity purposes but wanted to aid its colleagues in local government who had to contend with operating the tax. The report caused much amusement to those of us who served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill for England and Wales. We thought that, if that was supposed to be simplicity, heaven knows what complexity would be like. But the Government went ahead and ignored all the warnings. Likewise, they ignored public opinion, which was expressed vehemently at the time of the general election and which has been repeated at every possible opportunity since.

There is an amazing contradiction between the Government's attitude to last week's discussions at Maastricht and their attitude to democracy within the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister poses as the defender of Britain's right to do as it pleases and not have nasty foreigners telling us what to do, but within the United Kingdom the Conservative party was willing and determined to impose a poll tax on the people of the United Kingdom, whether they wanted it or not. I shall be interested to hear whether they can straighten out that contradiction.

The poll tax has had an enormous impact on services and jobs. Strathclyde region alone expects to lose some 750 jobs if lost moneys cannot be restored quickly. That will have an enormous impact on Strathclyde region, not only for those 750 jobs but for the community at large through the loss to the local economy. I do not know how the Government can regard that with equanimity. They know about the unemployment in the west of Scotland, particularly in Glasgow. They are faced with a serious loss of jobs on top of all the job losses in the past, yet they are determined not to respond in an obvious and sensible way. If they extend the measures under the council tax to the poll tax and allow those who will pay 20 per cent. to pay nothing, that would at once resolve the problem of lack of Government money. It would still not resolve the problem entirely, however, because the main problem is a sheer lack of Government support for local government.

The Government have always claimed that the poll tax was about enhancing local democracy. It has been noticeable how many people, especially young people, have removed themselves from the electoral register. Because they simply could not afford to pay the poll tax, they have deprived themselves of the right to vote. The Government know that thousands of people have done that and that the electoral roll has gone down considerably in many areas, especially in impoverished urban areas.

The Government are assiduously trying to build up the electoral register by seeking Tory voters in every country in the world, but they are not prepared to encourage people to come back and become entitled to vote here. It is necessary for the victims of Government decisions who are living here to assert their democratic rights, or for others to assert those rights.

The Minister has told us that he considers the Bill to be without serious defects of any kind. The Government had introduced a few paltry amendments of their own, but had accepted no amendments from Labour—because, apparently, we had said nothing that they did not know already. That remark will stick in all our minds. Once again, the Government are saying that they know exactly what they are doing: they know what they are doing to students, student nurses and people suffering from Alzheimer's disease whose partners do not pay poll tax and who are billed in their stead, regardless of their own mental condition.

People will be dumbfounded to learn of the big change in the legislation—the duke will no longer pay the same as the dustman. He will now pay three times as much. All over the country, people will be saying, "That is a big democratic advance." There will be enormous anger over the continuing injustice of the Government"s notion of how local administration should be financed, and a good deal of disquiet about the fact that all single individuals will receive discounts, regardless of their personal circumstances.

That is nonsensical, and it contradicts the Government's own stated policies. They have consistently refused social security benefits to the very needy, on the ground that they are targeting the neediest. Is it "targeting the neediest" to hand out discounts to people who are already extremely well off? The Government's entire policy is a shambles, and they will soon be slung out because of it. We shall ensure that the country knows what they are doing. It is they who will have to pay, and they will do so, whether it is in February, March, April, May, June or July.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): It is difficult not to think that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) did not want a new clause to enable the issues that he mentioned to be investigated, but, rather, wanted a new clause to "involve" the complicity of the Scottish National party in opposing the poll tax by persuading certain people not to pay at a certain time. I worry about the state of the law when a lawyer starts using the technique of "guilt by association".

Mr. Dewar: I did not.

Mr. Douglas: I shall make every effort not to misquote the hon. Gentleman. None the less, he gave the House the clear impression that he was associating the Scottish National party with Militant Tendency in regard to violence. The hon. Gentleman nods his assent. If that is not a McCarthyite technique, I do not know what is.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): That is a very serious accusation.

Mr. Douglas: It is. People have been expelled from the Labour party because of such association. It is serious to accuse someone of a McCarthyite smear.

I am pleased to be speaking after the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe). I note that the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) is also in his place. Not so long ago we all sat together in Glasgow, in a committee of 100: I shall not refer to the other hon. Members who were with us, as they are not present today. We suggested then that we should protect those who could not afford to pay, and who would be confronted by all the rigours of the law so beloved of the hon. Member for Garscadden.

Mrs. Fyfe: I clearly remember a time when the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars)—who, I am sorry to say, is not here today—was so anti-Trot that he threw people out of the party that he had drawn together in the mid-1970s, whether they were Trots or not. Now he finds himself associating with them. That is very strange.

Mr. Douglas: I do not know who the hon. Lady means. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) is not here, however, and I am courteous not to refer to any hon. Member who is not present and whom I have not given notice of my intention to do so. Hon. Members generally try not to do that, as far as is humanly possible. Nevertheless, I can tell the hon. Member for Maryhill that I am quite willing to answer for my part in the episode that I mentioned—with a degree of pride, but not vaingloriously.

The hon. Lady does not deny that, along with other hon. Members who are present today, she advocated non-payment.

Dr. Godman: I thought that the hon. Gentleman pointed at me then.

Mr. Douglas: No, indeed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have considerable respect, does not think that any of my remarks concern him.

Other matters would require investigation in a report. The hon. Members for Maryhill and for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) mentioned a mandate, but the hon. Member for Garscadden did not refer to the fact that the Tories have no mandate in Scotland. That is because he is a Unionist. He is quite capable of standing up and blaming everyone except himself for the imposition of the poll tax.

I remember, in January 1988, pleading with the hon. Gentleman to tell the Leader of the Opposition that we should show some guts, and that, when the Leader of the Opposition went to Edinburgh, he should not suggest that we go cap in hand to pay the poll tax. The hon. Member for Garscadden cannot gainsay that—and that is not guilt by association. The hon. Gentleman should stop acting like a big wean, and behave like a man.

Although he did not mention it in his speech, the hon. Member for Garscadden takes some responsibility for a matter that should be examined in any report: the imposition of poinding and warrant sales. He and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) thought nothing of parading through Glasgow behind banners proclaiming, "No warrant sales here". Examination would reveal that Labour authorities had used the threat of poinding to coerce the people referred to by the hon. Member for Maryhill who cannot pay and thus have no choice. What has the Labour party done to defend them?

The hon. Member for Garscadden has used the Nuremberg defence—"I had to obey the law". It was like a pantomime to see the hon. Member for Garscadden running past Knightswood Cross with his pamphlet, "Garscadden News No. 1", saying, "Rejoice, rejoice" and telling people that, in effect, Labour had killed the poll tax.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman took part in the "don't register" campaign and ran about trying to persuade people not to register. Then he caved in. However, I am talking about the hon. Member for Garscadden, who, as I say, was running around distributing "Garscadden News No. 1"—we await issue No. 2.

Mr. Dewar: At least I am not running away from the constituents who elected me.

Mr. Douglas: Neither am I, and I never have. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is not here today. I would not be a member of a party from which the Leader of the Opposition could expel me. It is a measure of the gutlessness of the Labour party that someone like the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East can get thrown out of it for taking a stand rooted deep in the traditions of the Labour party.

5 pm

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) wanted me to give way to him earlier. I have attacked his posture on non-registration. New clause 27 is after something not dissimilar from what the hon. Member for Garscadden wants: an examination of non-payment and why people cannot pay. Strathclyde has done a survey showing that 70 per cent. of those who did not pay could not pay. These people do not need persuading; their economic circumstances rule out their ability to pay. That is why most people did not pay.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of a mandate. Having been elected under one party label by his constituents, having reneged on that party label, having then stood under his new party label in a local government election and having been defeated, and having declared his intention to stand under another party label in a different constituency, does the hon. Gentleman think that he should perhaps return to the people of Dunfermline for a mandate?

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman is not correct. I never stood with another party label in a local government election in my time in the Scottish National party. I have fought many elections and I know that a losing candidate gets the blame. I have taken the blame when I have lost. but, oddly enough, when one wins, it is the party that has gained the victory, never the individual.

We got the poll tax because people were thirled to the party banner. This is not a House of free-standing men and women; they are dragooned through the Lobbies by the Whips. The hon. Member for Garscadden would have to take the same medicine if he came to power because he

believes that he is entitled to govern here if he gets a mandate in the United Kingdom, regardless of what happens in Scotland.

The United Kingdom mandate is spurious. How can the Labour party say that it has a mandate for the United Kingdom when it does not even put up candidates in Northern Ireland? People who, like me, opposed the poll tax rightly argued that the Government never had a mandate in Scotland. I challenge the hon. Member for Garscadden to face me in debate on this issue. He will be asking the electorate to give him and the Labour party their votes to pursue particular policies. Thereafter there will be little discussion and the hon. Gentleman will not be arguing about the sovereignty of the Scottish people from then on.

The hon. Member for Garscadden had the temerity to sign the claim of right in the Scottish convention. It concerns the exercise of the rights of the Scottish people. I shall give way to him on this if he has the guts to stand up. It seems that he does not like what I am saying much —perhaps my language is a little too industrial for him —but I would be willing to engage in this sort of argument with him in Garscadden.

Mr. Wilson: What about Dunfermline?

Mr. Douglas: Yes, there too. *[Interruption.]* Why is not the Labour party asking for a by-election in Coventry? I have fought more elections than some Labour Front Benchers have had hot breakfasts and I have already said that losing candidates always take the responsibility.

Mr. Wilson: What about the Co-op?

Mr. Douglas: I did not hear that, but if the hon. Gentleman will get off his backside he can repeat it.

Mr. Wilson: The Co-op has been a good meal ticket for the hon. Gentleman and it is odd that at this stage in his career he should depart from anything and everybody who put him where he is today—and three times throw away a Labour seat. That is a matter between him and his conscience; but if he has any conscience left, why does he continue to draw his salary under the label of a party he was not elected to serve as a member of?

Mr. Douglas: That is not really worth answering. Any obligations that I have to the Co-operative movement have been honourably discharged, and there are hon. Members here who know that. I have more than repaid my obligations to the Co-op. In any case, that is not part of this discussion.

If we are to have a report, let it examine every aspect, including ability to pay. The council tax does not take that into consideration; nor do Labour's proposals. My party makes it plain that a tax related to ability to pay must be related to income. The tax in Scotland will raise about £800 million and cost about £80 million to collect—£1 for every £10. There will be no relationship to ability to pay and there will be a register of sorts, although it will not be called that. The tax will involve a costly benefit system for the 100 per cent. discount scheme and there will be searching tests for those who are eligible for 25 per cent. and 50 per cent. discounts.

My party has produced figures to show how a local income tax could be put in place in Scotland. I do not have the figures for every region or district with me, but in general terms the proportion of revenue raised by local government is about 14 per cent. in Scotland—to be raised from the equivalent of non-domestic rates either under the poll tax or the council tax. If that is the average over the length and breadth of Scotland, it is reasonable to assume that for some local authorities it will be under 5 per cent. That means that this paraphernalia is necessary to collect £1 in £20. There has been no indication from Labour that it will abandon the Government subvention on that. Labour has not said whether it would try to collect more or less than the Government are trying to collect through local revenues in the non-business sector.

Why has Scotland had to impose so much administration at such great cost? It is because the Government will not face the fact that Scotland could have a local income tax that would be easily and cheaply administered and would avoid all the bureaucracy and cost. I am not arguing the case for England and Wales. Part of our new clause relates to the 20 per cent. rule which the Government have partly abandoned. I plead with them to abandon it completely from 1 April 1992 and to make it retrospective in Scotland.

About 3 million warrants are out and another of our amendments, which I hope will be reached tomorrow, deals with poinding and warrant sales. Such methods for the recovery of small amounts are acts of terror. The hon. Member for Garscadden or the hon. Member for Cathcart should make it clear when winding up that Labour is utterly opposed to Scottish local authorities using this barbaric device. They should dissociate themselves wholly and entirely from it.

Mr. Maxton: I understand that the hon. Gentleman's party chose not to seek membership of the Committee that examined the Bill. It certainly asked us to boycott the Committe. In Committee, I moved an amendment to take the warrant sales procedure out of the Bill. I was supported by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and by my hon. Friends. If the hon. Gentleman had sought a seat on that Committee, I think that he would have got one and would have been able to vote against warrant sales.

Mr. Douglas: It is not the same thing. I apologise if I have not made myself clear. I have asked the hon. Gentleman to make it plain that Labour is opposed to the imposition of warrant sales.

Dr. Godman: In the short time that I have been in the House, many of my hon. Friends have established an honourable record for seeking to introduce a more humane form of debt collection. I refer in particular to my hon. Friends the Members for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). Some of us seek a more humane form of debt collection.

Mr. Douglas: I accept that. It is no accident that two of the hon. Members that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mentioned were, in the early days, among the leading proponents of a non-payment campaign—I apologise, I have got that wrong. Certainly the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun, who is in his place, will accept what I have said in relation to him.

The SNP and Members from other parties introduced a Bill to abolish warrant sales. If the poll tax is dead and, like the hon. Member for Garscadden we should be saying,

[Mr. Douglas]

"Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice", the hon. Member for Garscadden or the hon. Member for Cathcart should use their position as Front-Bench spokesmen to make it clear that Labour is opposed to the use of poinding and the threat of warrant sales to impose a tax that is dead. If they cannot do that, they should not use their Front-Bench offices slanderously to attack other parties and accuse them of supporting organisations that seem to promote violence. I do not think that it is worth while asking the hon. Member for Garscadden for an apology, but he should, as a lawyer, reflect clearly and cautiously on what he has said.

Mr. Maxton: Has the hon. Gentleman ever shared a platform at a rally with Tommy Sheridan and members of Militant Tendency?

Mr. Douglas: Wait a minute, this is really getting in. The answer is, yes, of course. I have shared platforms with many individuals, but I have made my position clear on those platforms. That is exactly what I said at the beginning of my speech. This is a clear case of trying to get guilt by association. The hon. Member for Maryhill has shared a platform with Tommy Sheridan.

5.15 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: I want to put it on the record that I have never done any such thing.

Mr. Douglas: I withdraw any hint or any tendency that I may have had to smear anybody. My memory may be failing me, but I have clear memories of the hon. Member for Maryhill being at rallies at which Mr. Sheridan was at least present. I have clear memories of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray), who is in his place, being at similar rallies. I have no hesitation in saying——

Mrs. Fyfe: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I really must put this on the record because of its effect on my credibility. I have gone out of my way to tell people that I refuse to share a platform with that particular gentleman and that if other people cared to do so, that was their affair. I always said that I would not, I think for fairly obvious reasons.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is very wide already. It would be much better to concentrate on the new clauses.

Mr. Douglas: I withdraw any implication and apologise to the hon. Member for Maryhill. That is the least that I can do. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Provan is in his place and he can interject if he wishes to do so.

We would welcome any report that examines the process of the poll tax since its imposition in Scotland in 1989, and any report that directed itself especially to the plight of those who could not pay, substantial numbers of whom found themselves in conflict with the law because of their poverty. I have no hesitation in saying that the Scottish National party and I, before I was a member of that party, in standing beside those who could not pay made a major contribution to the downfall of the poll tax in Britain. I would not suggest for a minute that we were entirely responsible for its demise, but we made a significant contribution by showing that people could take a local initiative and say, "Enough is enough." If the people of Scotland had taken the advice of the hon. Member for Garscadden and that of the Leader of the Opposition and paid up and obeyed the law and supinely touched the forelock, the poll tax would have had a credibility that no one in the House thought that it ought to have had. That is a credit to the people of Scotland who opposed the tax from its inception by overwhelmingly voting against it, especially in the election of 1987.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): As someone who has spent his life as a conciliator—someone who hates disputes and who cannot bear to see the children falling out—I feel that I should intervene with some quiet words that will enable the prodigal sons of Garscadden—the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—and Garscadden elect to come together in harmony and peace. I am a humble lawyer who has done his best to settle cases rather than fight them to ensure that it was understood that dispute was not a proper way to resolve disputes.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) left the Labour party on a policy of leaving also his country. He has deserted and left those who elected him. I remind him that guilt by association is a doctrine that is central to the law of Scotland. If he imagines that he will stand for the Scottish National party, having deserted Great Britain, Dunfermline, the Labour party and the platforms on which whoever the fellow that he mentioned stood, and on which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) never stood, I remind him that the doctrine of concert is alive in Scotland and is central to its Scottish specialty and authority. If he is to direct accusations at the hon. Member for Garscadden, who is a distinguished laywer, when he is intent on departing in the direction of the SNP, he might learn one minor principle of the law of Scotland. He should bear it in mind before he starts accusing others of guilt by association.

The marvellous fall-out that we have seen this afternoon is a typical example of Scotland in Europe. We love each other so much that we cannot bear not to express our hatred. We have been given a useful example of the nationalists' position.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West talked about the warfare of those who would not pay what is called the poll tax—in other words, the community charge. It has always seemed to me sensible that people should pay a standard charge as a licence fee to enjoy local authority services. After all, no one objects to a standard licence fee for a car, whether he has an Austin Seven of 1935 vintage and drives two miles a year, or an even older car of the sort that my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) drives because he bought them when he was 18, or a Rolls-Royce in which he travels round and round the world every day and night. Equally, no one objects that we all pay the same television fee, whether the individual watches it or never watches it, whether the screen is a mile wide or an inch wide.

I have always said that it would have been much more sensible to introduce a tax to which there was added a licence fee for a television to join the licence fee and insurance for a motor car. Such a tax would amount to about £250 a year.

I have never heard anyone argue that those who cannot afford to pay their poll tax cannot afford to pay their

television licence fee or for their car licensing. If we assume that they are honest, I have not heard it argued that such people cannot afford to insure their motor cars. Let us be very careful about the "Can't pay, won't pay" approach. Before the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West deserted his electorate, how many people did I speak to in Murray's bar who, when swallowing another beer or another whisky, were asking, "Are you going on the 'Can't pay, won't pay'?" The veracity and philosophy of the hon. Member are extremely suspect, as are those of the members of his party who say that they are standing for what are called the people of Scotland.

The people of Scotland? Let us talk about the people in Scotland. We know that 80 per cent. of the people of Scotland live in England and that 80 per cent. of the people in Scotland are not Scots, including most of the leaders of the SNP, who are second generation Irish. I am unimpressed by the wonderful plea that is put forward. My family has been in Scotland for only 1,000 years or more, and I can trace it back. I am not particularly impressed when those who desert their constituents, their parties and their principles argue to me and others about what should happen to the people of Scotland when they are talking about those who happen to live in Scotland.

I fought the 1974, 1979 and 1983 elections in the knowledge that the Labour party had said that it would bring in a tax of this sort. All of my colleagues fought those elections on the basis that we believed that such a tax would be wrong. I am in the greatest difficulty in understanding why suddenly a tax of this sort should become utterly right.

Let us not forget the argument of the hon. Member for Nowhere—I suppose that that is the right way to describe him now, but I talk about the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West—on ability to pay. The tax that we are discussing will be levied on someone who, perhaps, married in 1920 and is now widowed. The house in which she lives was bought for £500, for example, and it is now worth £200,000. On the basis of a later clause, which I shall try to remove from the Bill, a snooper, on his own say-so, will be allowed to enter properties and look round them without a warrant. Surely that is an extraordinary proposition.

If we are to argue about inability to pay, I hope that the hon. Member for Nowhere will support my amendments in the light of the unfortunate widow, who for no reason of hers——

Mr. Douglas: I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will use their eyes and will note that if anyone is in suspended animation, it is the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am sorry. I did not understand the intervention, partly because it included such long words. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain it to me afterwards in a moment of suspension and animation.

The system will be based on an assumed income from a capital asset over whose value the original buyer has no control and which he cannot sell, any more than a tortoise can sell his shell, because it is his home. The business of "can't pay" is important.

Complications are introduced when we consider a person who is a district nurse for three hours a day, two days a week. A man may have to return to his temporary residence because of the presumption that, for the purposes of the Bill, a "day" remains the same day as when it started. I did not know that we needed a Bill to say that a day is presumed to be the same day as when it started —I always took the view that that was a decent assumption. I assume that even Scotland in Europe will take that line. It may, however, be contrary to the common law of Liechtenstein.

The amendments all complicate what is an already absurdly complicated Bill. I remember when I was a child. I loathed rice pudding and, when given too much of it, I would say, "That is not fair." Nanny would say, "Life is not fair, laddie." The system would be fair if we charged everyone on the basis that we charge for a pint of beer, a loaf of bread or a television licence—whether the Duke of Plaza Toro or the Member for Nowhere. I wish that we would do that, and I am sorry that the Bill is doing the opposite.

5.30 pm

Dr. Godman: We have just listened to the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn), who is something of an institution in Scotland. It is not for me to criticise him, because I seek his support on other matters, particularly to preserve a famous historic building which is tottering. I do not say that the hon. and learned Gentleman totters; he has kindly agreed to support my campaign to preserve that fine building.

I shall not join the attacks on the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas)—or the hon. Member for Nowhere, as he was described by the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross. To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, when I faced the crisis of the collapse of the Scott Lithgow shipyard, he gave me much help.

I wish to ask the Under-Secretary about the position of Scottish and English merchant seamen. Under the poll tax, Scottish merchant seamen have been discriminated against compared with their English colleagues. The evidence demonstrates that English merchant seamen have been able to argue more easily before tribunals the case for removing them from poll tax registers than have their Scottish counterparts. Even when Scottish and English merchant seamen have served on the same ship, Scottish seamen have had to pay the poll tax, whereas English seamen have been given discounts. Will that discrimination continue with the council tax?

My sympathy lies with Scottish merchant seamen who have been discriminated against, but I also have much sympathy for the people on abysmally low incomes who cannot afford to pay the poll tax and who face the indignity of warrant sales. As has been said, poinding is an humiliating experience. The Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 reduced the harshness of warrant sales, but they are still a squalid form of debt collection. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) served on the Standing Committee on the Bill which lessened the hardship caused, but poinding remains a humiliating experience.

People close to me have gone through poinding and tell me that it is distressing when sheriff officers come into their homes. Even with the Debtors (Scotland) Act, it is a miserable affair for those in Scotland who are pursued for debt. Many of my constituents on low incomes listened too eagerly, perhaps naively and certainly unwisely, to the non-payment campaigners and now find themselves in deep trouble because they followed those sleekit

[Dr. Godman]

hypocrites. Those campaigners cannot help them now. In that regard, my constituents are lost and will have to face the intrusion into their homes of sheriff officers. Where do we find the non-payment campaigners? They are not opening their cheque books to help constituents who supported their campaign.

The poll tax and the attendant problems caused for ordinary people feature largely at my surgeries, and I believe that the same happens at the surgeries of most of my hon. Friends and other Scottish Members of Parliament. Constituents raise the subject of the poll tax much more than their problems with the Department of Social Security, and that is important, given that about one third of the people I represent are in direct or indirect receipt of social security payments—a dreadful statistic.

To a considerable extent, the Government's handling of the poll tax in Scotland—which was introduced with the enthusiastic support of the present Secretary of State—has brought about the demise of the Conservative party in Scotland. We are facing the likelihood of a major constitutional crisis in Scotland, chiefly because of the Conservative party's insensitive and uncaring governance of the nation. Scottish Conservative representation in the House of Commons is down to single figures; following the next election, it will be even lower, no matter what happens to the overall position of the two major parties in the next election.

Even during the Prime Minister's so-called honeymoon period, I have been convinced that the number of Conservative seats will fall below 326. I genuinely believe that the Government will lose the next election. They certainly deserve to do so in Scotland because of their actions. Although the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross and the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) have just survived, they too may become Members for Nowhere after the next election.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn *rose——*

Dr. Godman: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman want to intervene? It appears not—perhaps he is in a state of suspended animation.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn *rose——*

Dr. Godman: The hon. and learned Gentleman can now wait for a minute or two.

The new clause calls for an assessment of the levels of services provided by local authorities, and that is very important. In my constituency, services have been reduced —reluctantly—by Strathclyde regional council, and those reductions harm the most fragile and vulnerable groups in our communities. I refer mainly to the elderly and others who will suffer because the provision of the home help service is being reduced instead of increased. What will happen to those who are discharged into the community from psychiatric units and from long-stay mental hospitals when an authority such as Strathclyde, which has a fine social work department, cannot provide the help that such people need? The reductions in services have largely been caused by the failure—an honourable failure—of Strathclyde regional council to collect the poll tax.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was confused by my reluctance to allow him to give way to me. I thought that he was confused, but that is another matter.

I am one of the most vulnerable in society, but I did not have central water, I had no dustbin collection or sewage provision, no one mends my roads, I do not use the local library and I have no children to educate, so I get nothing. However, thanks to the Government, now I at least have sewage collection, rubbish collection and central water. As one of the more vulnerable members of society, I am very grateful.

Dr. Godman: I am not sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman is one of the most vulnerable in our society, but I suspect that he is one of the most confused in his part of Scotland. His reference to his vulnerability plainly reveals his confused thinking at the moment, but it is not always so confused. The hon. and learned Gentleman has a fine forensic approach to these issues, and I look forward to hearing his speeches later.

The level of services provided by local authorities is a very worrying issue in my constituency because Strathclyde regional council is now so badly placed with regard to finance because of its inability to collect the poll tax from people who sometimes can pay but will not pay, but, much more often, simply cannot pay.

I genuinely believe that we are facing a political and constitutional crisis in Scotland, which has been brought about by the insensitive and uncaring Government. If their representatives in this House are reduced to, at best, two or three, that is merely what the Government and their representatives deserve.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I did not want to intervene in the socialist split between the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National party and the Labour party, all of which are confused about how to proceed with the collection of a form of local government tax. The people of Scotland will begin to wonder where the Opposition stand when they hear speeches such as those that we have heard today.

We tend to forget that the reason why we are introducing a simplified form of rate collection is that the old rating system was unpopular not only in Scotland, but throughout the United Kingdom. The reason why it was so unpopular is exactly the same reason why the community charge and now the council tax are unpopular —local authorities spend far too much money. Only when we get on top of that issue and make local authorities understand that they are meant to be good housekeepers and not to spend money rashly and unrealistically will we get local government expenditure down to the equivalent levels of 10, 20 or 30 years ago when all elected councillors —many of whom were independent—made a point of thinking about those whom they represented. Their first priority was to keep expenditure down and to provide the best services possible within their budgets.

Budgets are now set at extortionate levels and when, naturally enough, the Government or the local population say, "Steady", local authorities say that there must be dramatic cuts. However, the cuts are in the budget, not in expenditure, and that is what we have difficulty in bringing home to the people of Scotland. All over Scotland we see in local and national newspapers talk of cuts in this and cuts in that, but the cuts are in proposed budget

expenditure, not in real expenditure which has, of course, increased year in, year out as has the revenue support grant under the present Government.—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, it has.

5.45 pm

It is time that the people of Scotland realised that it is elected councillors suggesting budgets that are quite unacceptable which is the cause of the trouble in Scotland today, especially when we bear in mind the substantial progress made with the uniform business rate which, in the long run, will be of tremendous benefit to businesses and in which there can be only an increase related to inflation, as opposed to the substantial increases of a few years ago.

The Minister rightly introduced capping for some local authorities, but I hope that he will bear in mind the low base from which some authorities began in recent years. One can perhaps understand the capping of authorities that are spending £400, £500 or £600 while others are spending £150 but are capped because they started from a fraction of a base level of the higher spending authorities. For small rural district councils it has been difficult even to maintain expenditure at inflation levels, let alone to try to keep within the capping level of about 4·5 per cent.

I hope that when the Minister replies he will take the chance to highlight some of the singularly unpopular proposals from the socialist parties, such as the rating of farm buildings, local income tax and other suggestions which are quite unacceptable in Scotland. The new clause asks for another layer of bureaucracy and for officials to spend months preparing reports and papers when they should be preparing their work for the introduction of the new council tax. Time is not on our side in terms of preparation for April 1993. Any diversion of effort by local authority officials to provide the information required by the Opposition—much of which they could probably research in the Library in an hour if they tried—is quite unnecessary. For those reasons, and because the Opposition have made such a miserable case, I hope that the Minister will reject the new clause.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I will try not to stray too far from the new clause, although you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have said that this is a wide debate. The main point of the new clause is that we want the Government to carry out a proper survey of the effects of the community charge and to study the

"cost, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of financial administration in local government".

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has already told Ministers that local administration throughout Scotland is in a desperate position. If Ministers do not address the problem of non-collection of the poll tax, the poll tax for next year and the following year will rise astronomically. Resistance to the payment of the poll tax will probably rise accordingly. The Government must address the problem of the total debt, which is about £357 million of unpaid tax for the previous two years.

Local authorities must be given back some power so that they can decide the practicalities of collecting certain debts and whether the cost involved in trying to collect them is worth while. Despite the figures that the Minister gave, I am convinced, as are many local government finance officers, that it is costing more in some cases to attempt to collect the back payments than it is to forget about them.

I am not saying that we should simply have an amnesty. The Government would find an amnesty for all those who have not paid unacceptable and I understand the reasons for that. However unfair a tax is and however it discriminates against the poor, we must realise that it is a tax under the law. In any campaign, there is a problem if those with ability to pay pull others into the campaign, especially those who are too poor to pay.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) said that I, among others, was involved in a campaign of non-payment. That is correct. I stand here without shame to say that I believed then that those who could afford to pay but who would not pay bore the responsibility at least to put up some resistance to a tax that had been imposed on us. However, I qualify that comment and the local paper can be produced to show that I did not invite those who would be in difficulties over the payment of the tax to become involved. I did not see it as a form of elitism to say that I put forward the argument that people like me should resist payment for the moment. I stated publicly that I fully understood that I would have to pay not only the tax, but eventually the surcharge. I did not want those who could not afford to pay the tax to be put into the embarrassing situation of having debt collected, not only for the tax that they had not paid, but for the 10 per cent. surcharge. I ultimately paid what I owed and the 10 per cent., although I did so reluctantly because it was a lousy tax. Time has shown us that it is a bad tax.

Conservative Members who waxed eloquent about the virtues of the poll tax are disappearing like snow off a dyke. However, they did not disappear when it came to marching through the Lobby, probably asking each other, "What is this tax all about?" The answer was, "It is going to Scotland, old boy, so just go through as the Whips have told you." No one gave any real consideration to that abomination or to the difficulties that it would cause for the poor people in Scotland.

The Opposition and some Conservative Members doubted the wisdom of the tax. Those to whom I am not allowed to refer—they sit in the jury box over there—told the Government that the tax was ill thought out, that it would be difficult to collect and that it would create difficulties for the Government. However, Scottish Ministers embraced the tax eagerly because they saw it as the best thing for Scotland since sliced bread. Even now, some of them argue that the poll tax was fair and good, and they say that they do not understand why its collection went so wrong.

The Government cannot blame those who are not paying for the downfall of the tax because that would defeat the dogma attached to it. I believe that those in Scotland who did not pay played some part in the demise of the tax. When Conservative Members who had trotted so gleefully through the Lobby discovered what the effect of the tax would be on England and on their constituencies, they studied it and understood that any tax that is written down on the back of a fag packet cannot be acceptable to the people.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I hope that my hon. Friend will not be annoyed if I give a marginally different point of view. It is passing into mythology that the Tories introduced the poll tax in Scotland to punish the Scots. The opposite is the case. The former Prime Minister introduced the poll tax because she honestly thought that

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

it would be the saviour of Scottish seats in the 1987 election. It was meant to be beneficial to the Scots. That shows how bad the Government's judgment was and why, when the difficulties were discovered, the English said that they did not want to touch the poll tax with a bargepole.

Mr. McKelvey: My hon. Friend is right. To be fair, the former Prime Minister, the present Prime Minister, Ministers and Conservative Members failed to understand the background of Scotland's history and heritage. They failed to understand that Scots will simply not accept a tax being forced on them—I believe unconstitutionally. We are a Union and I can see no reason why there should be a different form of tax in one part of the Union from that in the others. Ministers would not accept that view and what has become of the community charge is almost history.

The matter will not be allowed to rest. The poll tax has not been abolished, although many people in Scotland imagine that it has. The collection of the poll tax and the pursuit of people who are too poor to pay still goes ahead. I have never accepted the collection of debt by warrant sales, especially for domestic debt. Many of us fought hard and long to abolish poinding altogether. It may be acceptable for a council that is done by a big business man, because the only way in which it can get back its money may be to get its hands on his business. What is obnoxious to me and to many other Labour Members is a form of debt collection that aims to humiliate the person from whom the debt is being collected. Such a form of debt collection is inhuman and should be resisted. As soon as possible, especially for Scotland, we should consider closely the matter of poinding and we should dispose of it as a means of collecting domestic debt. It is a disgrace and should never be pursued.

I do not agree with members of councils, whether SNP or Labour-led, which with relish set officers on to the collection of the poll tax. They are misled. However, once the debt is handed over to the sheriff officers for collection, they will use warrant sales to collect the debt. They will then be resisted, as has been shown.

Mr. Douglas: Surely the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that such a course of events is acceptable? There is some control over the sheriff officers and the messengers at arms. It is not a perfect control, because they are not properly controlled through the court system, but there is control. The creditor has a responsibility to acknowledge that the debt that is being pursued will not be gathered under the poinding schedule. We are in a queer trait, indeed, if local authorities—Labour controlled or otherwise—do not say, "This is nonsense. Halt the process there."

6 pm

Mr. McKelvey: Local authorities cannot take that decision. Once the matter is in the hands of the sheriff officer, the officer determines how the debt is collected. Local councils can say to sheriff officers, "We do not want you to pursue the matter through warrant sales," but the sheriff officers are contracted to do a job and can say, "If we can collect the debt only by means of a warrant sale, that is what we will do." The authorities cannot control the means by which sheriff officers collect the debt as long as it is collected legally. I do not like the practice—we must fight against it and change it—but, unfortunately, for the time being at least, sheriff officers have the legal right to use poinding.

We must examine that difficulty ourselves. It is no good shoving the blame on to a local authority and saying that debt collection should not be pursued through warrant sales because, ultimately, they are forced to undertake poindings. Such proceedings ought to be resisted locally and they are resisted locally.

What about those who have the ability to pay but who are still not paying? They are responsible for a large part of the £537 million worth of debt that directly affects local authorities' ability to provide services. When we realised that there was a threat of that happening, I and many others to whom I spoke who had previously resisted payment said, "There is one thing that we will not do: we will not jeopardise services or jobs in our community by our campaign of resistance and non-payment." When we realised that that threat existed, we withdrew.

The Scottish National party, on the other hand, pursued the issue and encouraged people not to pay, saying that it was leading a campaign of universal non-payment. When members of the SNP realised that the difficulties in which local authorities were placed would reflect badly on them, they washed their hands of the matter.

As I said at the time, I have some local experience of resistance to paying rent, which I gleaned during rent campaigns. I vividly recall carrying a banner saying, "We will not pay the increase in rent in the Dundee district." At the other end of the banner was someone who I knew had paid his rent. I asked, "Why did you pay your rent, Jimmy?" He replied, "It was not me, Willy, it was my wife." The domestic pressure on many households is such that some womenfolk who knew that, ultimately, they would be left to pay the rent said, "It is all right having a non-payment campaign but when it fails, as it will fail" —and it did fail—"who will pay the rent? Who will be lumbered with the debt?"

Hundreds of people in Scotland who were either too poor to pay or who were duped into taking part in the non-payment campaign as a way of destroying the tax now find themselves having to pay not only the debt but the surcharge. That is grossly unfair.

I have two constituency cases about which I shall happily tell the Minister—indeed, I have probably written to him about them already. The first concerns an old lady in a private nursing home who does not even receive her pocket money because it is taken from her as part of her rent. She has no visible means of support, except that she is being looked after by that private nursing home. Yet that old lady is still being pursued by sheriff officers for non-payment of the 20 per cent. that she should have paid last year. Does it make economic sense, and is it humane, to pursue elderly and frail people to collect the 20 per cent? What is it costing? I do not believe that the cost of pursuing those too poor to pay is less than the sums in respect of which they are being pursued.

My second constituency case concerns someone in receipt of benefit from the Department of Social Security. The sheriff officers have asked the DSS to stop part of the payment and pay his poll tax. The Department has replied that, because that person is paying so much in loan repayments, he is now under subsistence level and cannot pay the poll tax.

Why must we pursue poor people such as those for non-payment of the 20 per cent? Would it not be better to return to local authorities the discretion that they enjoy in other areas and say to them, "By all means, pursue those who can pay and will not pay. Home in on them. But, in cases of genuine poverty and difficulty, involving the elderly, the frail and the poor, you can write off the debt as uncollectable."

The trouble is that political dogma is being allowed to overrule economic sense, and that that dogma says that everyone must pay the tax. That was the basis on which the tax was introduced: everyone had to be accountable. It is arrant nonsense to say that pensions and benefits have been uprated to allow for the payment of the poll tax; people simply do not believe it. Is it not nonsense to say to someone, "I will give you £1·50 so that you can pay the £1·50 that I propose to tax you"? Why could not the sum have been paid directly? Because that would have defeated the object and negated the dogma, which said, "We want you not merely to pay the tax but to know why you are paying it."

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I have some sympathy with the second part of the hon. Gentleman's argument, which concerns the pursuit of those who cannot pay. Equally, I sympathise with the argument that people who can pay ought to pay. But I have been trying to follow his argument that every tax should be related to people's ability to pay it. Is the hon. Gentleman arguing, on behalf of the Labour party, that VAT and Customs and Excise duties should be abolished and replaced by a tax related to income, wealth or something of that nature? I have worked out on the back of a cigarette packet—and this bears no relation to my ability to pay, which is nil at the moment —that, if we followed that argument, we should have a standard rate of income tax of between 45p and 50p in the pound. That would be nonsense. We have indirect taxation —as we should have indirect taxation—and there should be taxes on spending as well as on income.

Mr. McKelvey: I am sure that the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) would not disagree that, in collecting taxes, we must take into account people's ability to pay. Whisky is extremely heavily taxed. The Government get a heavy whack for every bottle consumed. It is one thing for a person to decide whether he wants to consume a bottle of whisky. It is quite another when every person is taxed simply because he happens to be a body. The head tax was done away with centuries ago and should not be acceptable. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he continues to find the poll tax acceptable and would still vote for it, he is at least being honest enough to say so, but other Conservative Members have put their heads down and said, "We never believed that it was a decent tax in the first place."

The matter has yet to be resolved. The Government are in difficulties because local authorities have enormous debts. In England, those debts are only now beginning to accumulate, but in Scotland they are all too familiar. We must give local government some respite and enable it to deal with this growing and extremely difficult problem. It is no good arguing that, year after year, the Government have dished out money to local authorities. Nobody will believe that that is the case. Housing revenue, for example, has virtually disappeared and, in Scotland, the result has been that we have thousands more homeless people than we have ever had. Many young people were turfed out of their houses by their parents, who said, "We are not going to pay your poll tax for you. You are not earning, so out you go." Some 24 per cent. of homeless people wandering the streets of London come from Scottish backgrounds and Scottish homes—a fact which we find totally unacceptable.

I found it obnoxious to listen to the Secretary of State for the Environment yesterday referring to the wonderful uplift that has been given to London. I accept that it is nice to see the House of Commons in its new coat. However, perhaps we should have spent the money that we have spent on this building providing clothes for those hapless souls who sleep in cardboard boxes. Perhaps we should have some form of taxation so that we can clothe all our people adequately.

There is no point in trying to defend this immoral tax. Elderly people in Scotland, England and Wales will die in their thousands because they do not have the money to heat their homes. We should not rely on the instant cold weather payments that are triggered after seven days of below freezing temperatures. Had local authorities not been in so much debt as a result of the non-collected poll tax, they might have been able to concentrate on services and ensure that homes are adequately insulated. If they were adequately insulated, the cold weather might not have such drastic effects and cause the deaths of elderly and frail people.

Ministers are reluctant to feel ashamed about the application of the poll tax. They must consider the fact that the tax was applied in Scotland one year in advance and that was against the constitution. We should consider the plight of Scottish authorities and try to solve their problems, because those problems will be mirrored in English authorities in the next few years. The problem will not go away. It is growing and we should consider all the effects as outlined in the new clause.

Mr. Bowis: We were all moved when my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) told us about his life under socialism in Scotland, with no hot and cold running water, having to deal with his own sewage—or whatever it was that he did —begging for a crust of bread at the door of his little rural cottage and being forced by his nanny to eat his rice pudding. He was trying to pour some oil on the Opposition's troubled waters in Scotland. In so doing, his learned advice came down slightly in favour of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) rather than the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas). I want to redress that balance slightly, because I believe that the hon. Member for Garscadden has an honourable record in terms of his policy on the issue. I believe that he is wrong, but he is sincere and consistent.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): I think that my hon. Friend is referring to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who is the prospective Scottish National party candiate for Glasgow, Garscadden. I can understand his confusion.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right.

In his erstwhile guise, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West and I debated the community charge at Cambridge university in the days when we all believed that the community charge was the greatest thing since neeps

[Mr. Bowis]

and tatties. I must tell Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), who raised the matter earlier, that many of us believe that the community charge is a good system. My borough of Wandsworth has shown that the system could have worked.

Wandsworth has a zero charge this year, and we have just announced a zero charge for the coming year. Before Opposition Members point it out, that is on the basis of Government grant that is one third less than in neighbouring inner-London Labour boroughs which are charging £400, £500 or £600. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West is right to question the sincerity of some Labour party representatives who have challenged him today.

6.15 pm

I am with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West when he stands up for the people who cannot pay. However, he should recall that we have a rebate system designed to look after those who cannot pay. That system works only if we have a system of local government in which responsible local authorities set responsible levels of community charge. That has always been the case. If local authorities do not set such levels of community charge, the benefit and rebate system is inadequate to look after the people about whom the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West is concerned.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West also referred to other members of the public who refused to pay the tax when they were capable of paying it. Among those people were Labour Members, Labour councillors and Labour party officials who campaigned around the country for non-payment. They could pay, but they would not.

The hon. Member for Garscadden referred to the guilt by association of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West in respect of his meetings with Militant representatives. However, if I can believe my own ears, it seems, from the expulsions from the Labour party as a result of Militant connections, that everyone in the Labour party who has appeared on a platform with Militant representatives is at risk.

Guilt by association works two ways. It may work with regard to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West being on a platform with a Militant spokesman. However, it also works with the Labour party failing to discipline its own members who campaigned against payment of the tax. It is their surcharge that people throughout England, Scotland and Wales are having to pay.

Mrs. Ray Michie: As the hon. Gentleman knows, my party has never been in favour of a "can pay, won't pay" campaign. However, he should be careful about whom he is accusing of not paying when they could pay. There are Conservative councillors who have not paid, but who could pay.

Mr. Bowis: I was referring to hon. Members. I know of no Conservative Member who has not paid. If there is one, the hon. Lady should name him or her now. If Conservative councillors have refused to pay, I condemn them as utterly as I condemn the Labour councillors who have not paid.

As the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) has raised her party's head above the parapet, she should be careful about the cost that she is seeking to impose on the people of this country. Her leader estimated during the Ribble Valley by-election that the average local income tax would be £600.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I hope that the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) will not be offended when I say that life in Bargeddie and Bellshill must be very different from life in Battersea. I can find no support for the Government's proposals, although I can see much logic in new clause 1 and much support for the principles that it enshrines.

New clause 1(2)(c) refers to

"the levels of services provided by local authorities".

Given that we have a very confused system of local government finance, with central Government's contribution, a much smaller amount raised from local revenue and enormous difficulties because of the previous form of taxation that the Government attempted to introduce and the new one that they introduce in this Bill, local authorities far too often, in department after department, instead of dealing with the big issues of education, leisure and recreation and the quality of life in their districts, have to devote a great deal of time to collection problems and cannot give priority to essential services.

I greatly regret the unacceptable problems that have been imposed on social work departments in Scotland, especially when poverty is on the increase, when the national health service is under attack, and when local authorities are expected to deal with community care problems to which they simply do not have the resources to enable them to respond. To its credit, in recent weeks, the *Glasgow Evening Times* has been exposing the scandal of mentally ill and mentally handicapped people being sent to prison. Every social work department in Scotland wants to address those problems but they cannot do so because resources are not available.

I welcome new clause 1, with its reference to genuine consultation not only with COSLA but with organisations such as citizens advice bureaux. If we have genuine consultation, such scandals and the failure to respond to people's needs will be addressed. Local authorities can see poverty before their very eyes. With genuine consultation, they will be able to cope. If we involve the consumer in the widest possible sense and restore the democratic role of local government in Scotland to its rightful place, we will do a great service to democracy. For that reason, I am delighted to support new clause 1.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): This has been an interesting debate, but it has had little to do with the council tax.

Mr. Maxton: Why is not the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland replying?

Mr. Bennett: I am replying to the debate because this is a United Kingdom Parliament and, as the new clauses are about England, Scotland and Wales, a Welsh Office Minister is perfectly entitled to reply.

It has been an interesting debate, but there has been little talk by Opposition Members about the council tax. The debate has been about the community charge. It has been a negative debate on the part of the Opposition. They have looked backward rather than forward. I have no hesitation in advising the House to reject the amendment and the new clauses.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) spent most of his time having a debate with the Scottish National party about who was responsible for what in Scotland in terms of advising people not to pay the community charge. I shall refer to that matter in a minute. I shall deal with the two or three points of substance that arose in respect of the parts of the Bill that we are discussing.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) argued that, in Scotland, England and Wales next year, the Liberal party would like to see the abolition of all local taxation and the imposition of a national income tax for one year only. I find that very strange, because Liberal Democrat Members spent the whole time in Committee arguing that local councils should raise more of their own resources from local taxpayers rather than from national taxpayers. Seeing that there might be a little bit of an electoral advantage with a general election coming, the Liberal party is prepared to stand principle upon its head and argue the exactly opposite case on the Floor of the House.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute spoke also about the cost of implementation of the new council tax. The Government have accepted the estimates made by the CSL Group Ltd. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales provided an extra £6 million over the total for aggregate external finance for 1992-93, which was announced in July, to meet the estimated revenue costs of local authorities of bringing in the new council tax. The same has been done in England, where my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the Secretary of State for the Environment, has put aside £86 million. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has provided a further £10 million to enhance allocations in 1992-93. I do not think that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute can argue that local authorities have not received generous extra financial support in the coming financial year for their implementation of the council tax.

The hon. Lady spoke also about the local income tax. We had a long debate in Standing Committee on that point. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) will speak on that matter in a later debate when we discuss Liberal amendments on the local income tax.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) spoke about Labour's amendments. She said that the Labour party had not had an opportunity in Standing Committee to debate its point of view in full. It is worth pointing out just what happened in Standing Committee. On clause 6, for instance, we had seven and a half hours of debate. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) admitted that he spoke only because the Labour Whip asked him to speak in order to prolong the debate. We had another seven and a half hours of debate on clause 11. On clause 22, we had a two-hour debate, in which the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) spoke at great length. On clause 32, we had three and three quarter hours of debate, and on clause 53 we had a four-hour debate.

In Committee, Labour Members did not allocate time between the amendments that they wanted to debate. They time-wasted and they spoke at great length. If Labour Members have any cause for complaint, they should look at their own behaviour in Standing Committee. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) spent 12 minutes saying good morning to the Committee and telling us that it was his wife's birthday and that he had not been able to buy her a present. That was the level of debate time and again. We all felt sinking hearts when the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said, "I shall speak briefly," because we knew that that meant that a 40-minute speech was on its way.

I do not believe for a minute that the hon. Member for Maryhill can complain that the Labour party did not get its views across in Committee. Labour Members had nearly 90 hours to do so. If they failed to get their points across, it was because of their own disorganisation.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who I understand is to stand at the next election as the SNP candidate for Glasgow, Garscadden, spoke at great length, but not one of his words was on the SNP amendment to new clause 27. It seemed strange that the hon. Gentleman did not have the confidence in his own amendment to speak to it at all.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) spoke in conciliatory and dulcet tones—unlike mine tonight—about this complicated legislation. Any local government finance legislation is bound to be complicated. Someone once said—I think that it was Palmerston—on the Schleswig-Holstein question, that there were three people who understood Schleswig-Holstein: one was dead, one had gone mad, and he had forgotten. That is very true of local government finance as well. Although we have had to bring in a complicated piece of legislation, when we look at the rebate system, the discounts and the banding that we have put forward, it will be seen to be fair legislation which attempts to help all those who will be faced with local council tax.

Mr. Maxton: I wonder into which of those three categories the Minister puts himself in terms of the council tax. Is he dead, has he forgotten, or has he gone mad?

Mr. Bennett: That is a very witty intervention.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) spoke at great length on the community charge, but he did not address the council tax. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) spoke about the Labour party wasting Scottish local authorities' time in asking them to work out alternatives to the legislation. I agree that it would be better if local authorities ignored the Labour party's political posturing on the matter and got on with the job in hand, which is to prepare for the implementation of the council tax on 1 April 1993.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Bennett: I am sorry, I cannot give way. I have sat here since four minutes past four, waiting to reply. There is agreement between the Front Benches that there will be short replies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) made some interesting points. However, I wish to conclude my remarks by referring to the speech of the hon. Member for Garscadden.

The hon. Member for Garscadden became involved in a family squabble with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West. It was a real family squabble between two sorts of pink socialists, arguing about who was right over the community charge. I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Garscadden expressing his great moral

[Mr. Bennett]

outrage about the SNP, waiting to hear him condemn those Labour Members who had said that they would not pay the community charge, but I heard not a word of condemnation from the hon. Gentleman about his colleagues.

6.30 pm

The hon. Members for Maryhill and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) did not say, when they launched their Committee of 100 campaign in Scotland, that they would not pay the community charge themselves. Although they have spoken today about local government finance, they did not admit that they encouraged people not to pay the community charge. I wonder why there is so much hand-wringing among Opposition Members about that matter——

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): This is terrible.

Mr. Bennett: What is terrible is the fact that Labour Members, who want to be law makers and to pass legislation in this House, break the law themselves. We should place that important fact on the record. I am appalled that Labour Members have said today that their constituents are suffering when they argued in public that people should not pay the community charge——

Mr. McKelvey: That is not true.

Mr. Bennett: If the hon. Gentleman believes that that is not true, I would welcome an intervention from him.

Mr. McKelvey: I thought that I had already explained the position, but perhaps the Minister was not present. I can show clearly and publicly—it is on the front page of my local newspaper—that I said that I was taking a political stance, but I did not suggest that others did what I did because I knew that I would have to pay the surcharge and that others might not be able to do so. I regret the fact that those who brought people into the non-payment campaign are now simply washing their hands of the other people who are lumbered with the debt.

Mr. Bennett: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that he is taking a moral stance by saying that he will not pay his tax when other people will have to pay a surcharge to make up for the income that was lost because he would not pay, I can only say that that is a strange form of morality.

It is clear from our debate during the past two and a half hours that Labour Members do not want to discuss the council tax. They would rather go back to discussing the community charge. We are committed to abolishing the community charge and shall do so. The Bill will be passed. I ask the House to reject the new clause.

Mr. Gould: We have had a good and useful debate, but it was clearly not much enjoyed by Conservative Members. There are a number of signs of that. First, the Secretary of State for the Environment graced us with his presence for 10 minutes during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). The right hon. Gentleman then reached the limits of his patience, thus doubling the amount of time that he spent in Standing Committee. However, it was on the basis of that 10 minutes' observation that he apparently found it possible to criticise the Labour party for filibustering. His remarks on that subject were as ill-founded and unconvincing as those of the Under-Secretary of State for Wales a moment ago.

The second sign that the Conservative party has not relished the debate was the presence on the Treasury Bench of that Under-Secretary. I mean no disrespect to him—that is, no more disrespect than is normally his due—when I say that the fact that he was asked to reply to the debate was intended by the Government to signify that they did not much like the debate or attach much importance to it. That view is confirmed by the fact that not a single Conservative Back-Bencher was present at the beginning of the debate.

I am not surprised that Conservative Members wanted to slink away from the debate. They have guilty consciences—not just about the disastrous consequences of the poll tax, but also about their shameful record during that whole episode, when they allowed themselves to be dragooned through the Division Lobbies in support of the legislation and then, when the whistle was blown and they were told that they had to reverse direction, they all slunk off in that reverse direction.

The new clause and the report that it seeks to introduce are not only important but essential. We seek first to establish what went wrong, because what went wrong did enormous damage to local government, to individual and family budgets, to respect for the law and to civil rights. The poll tax was undoubtedly the worst mistake made by any Government in modern times.

The second purpose of the report is to establish who was responsible for making that mistake. Of course, Conservative Members now want to distance themselves from the whole catastrophe and to say that it was all the fault of their former leader, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), but half the present Cabinet were deeply implicated in the introduction of the poll tax. The Chairman of the Tory party, the current Secretary of State for Health, the current Home Secretary and even the Prime Minister himself were the guilty men. No wonder they do not want to be brought to the dock and made to face the charges.

Thirdly, and perhaps most constructively, we need a report to learn the lessons and to ensure that the mistakes are not repeated. The first of those lessons is that the poll tax was unacceptable because it was unfair. We no longer have to say that, because the Government's own excuse for abandoning the poll tax is that people could not be persuaded that it was fair. However, the same principle of unfairness is enshrined in the new council tax. The best-off will not pay their fair share. The scale of liability is to be compressed or dampened, so others will have to pick up the bill.

Another lesson is that the poll tax turned out to be too complicated and too costly, although its great virtue was supposed to be its simplicity. It was hugely complicated and expensive because it took enormous time and resources to trace all the people who moved. During the year, about 40 per cent. of those on one register moved off it and on to another when they changed address. In some parts of London, 60 per cent. of the register had to be changed during the year. The council tax is similarly complex. It will have all the problems of the poll tax, coupled with the new problem of being a totally untried property tax.

Another lesson is that the poll tax was utterly uncollectable. Again, it is not only the Opposition who say

that. The Prime Minister himself has described the poll tax as "virtually uncollectable". That is why local authorities have had to issue 7·5 million summonses. No one should point the finger at individual local authorities as though all that was their fault, because it is a problem that faces the whole of local government. Local government is £1·5 billion short of the amount that it would have collected if the poll tax had been as collectable as the rates. The same mistakes are being repeated with the council tax.

As I have said, another problem with the poll tax was the damage that it did to civil rights. About 1 million votes have gone missing. We must assume that 1 million people decided to trade in their vote to escape paying the poll tax. However, we are told yet again that local authorities will be encouraged to turn to the electoral register to establish liability for the new tax. What an incentive, yet again, for people to trade in their vote to escape their tax liability. That is not the right thing to do, and nobody would advise people to do it, but the Government have not learnt the lesson: that that is what people did under the poll tax and that that is what they will do under the council tax also.

The poll tax was a nightmare for local government. It was supposed to improve accountability. Indeed, in its dying days, accountability was said to be its one remaining saving grace. But we now have universal capping, which is again being enshrined in the council tax legislation. That is another lesson that has not been learnt, and a mistake that will be repeated.

Finally, and perhaps in the long term the most harmful, there is the damage that the poll tax has done to the acceptability of the concept of one's legal obligation to pay local government taxation. Bad lessons have been learnt by so many people who have found it possible not to pay the poll tax. If we are not careful, those lessons will be carried over to the new council tax and to all other tax-paying obligations.

This has certainly been an uncomfortable debate for the Conservative party, and that discomfort has been more than justified. If they had any sense of shame, the Government would have shown it this evening and expressed remorse. Indeed, if the Conservative party in Parliament had been local councillors in local government, they would have been surcharged, bankrupted and driven from office. We cannot bankrupt them or surcharge them, but we shall drive them from office, and that is what the British people will want.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 350.

Division No. 26] **[6.39 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*

Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian

Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

ABILITY TO PAY

'.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to ensure that the council tax relates to the ability to pay of those liable to the tax.

(2) As a result of the duty established under subsection 1, the Secretary of State shall undertake a study of the circumstances in which people occupy and acquire their dwellings and how this relates to the level of the liability under the council tax.

(3) Pursuant to the study undertaken as a result of subsection 2, the Secretary of State shall take whatever measures are necessary including introducing new or regional valuation bands or ensuring that the tax is directly related to persons' income.'.—*[Mr. Wallace.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 4—*Ability to pay (Scotland)*—

'. (1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to ensure that the council tax relates to the ability to pay of those liable to the tax.

(2) As a result of the duty established under subsection 1, the Secretary of State shall undertake a study of the circumstances in which people occupy and acquire their dwellings and how this relates to the level of their liability under the council tax.

(3) Pursuant to the study undertaken as a result of subsection 2, the Secretary of State shall take whatever measures are necessary including introducing new or regional valuation bands or ensuring that the tax is directly related to persons' income.'.

Mr. Wallace: New clause 2 goes to the crux of the council tax. The test that one should apply to that tax will be crucial and—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is too much sedentary noise.

Mr. Wallace: I am glad to note that this new clause is attracting so much attention from those on the Government Front Bench.

The test of whether the amount charged to an individual is related to that person's ability to pay should be applied to any tax. I cannot honestly say that paying taxes is something that one would put down as a recreation in "Who's Who" or something that one did with a spring in one's step. However, in a civilised, democratic society it is recognised that paying taxes is one of the responsibilities that one must bear as a citizen. That obligation is bearable and tolerable only if the tax which one is asked to pay at central or local government level is seen to be fair.

There was never any question of fairness in the community charge—the poll tax. It was never suggested that that tax should relate to one's ability to pay. At the outset, when the poll tax started on its parliamentary procedure in 1986—when we legislated for Scotland—a virtue was made of the fact that almost everyone would pay the same, bar those who would qualify for a rebate, and even they had to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax.

The fact that everyone had to pay was justified on the ground of promoting accountability. However, by the time the poll tax reached its dying embers, even the pretence that it made local authorities more accountable was dispensed with, especially as just a small proportion of the revenue was raised by the local authorities themselves. In the Shetland part of my constituency, the poll tax for this year is 93p. It is difficult to be accountable to the electorate for 93p.

The poll tax was unfair in principle, and it was perceived as such. Those who benefited from that tax were also unhappy, because they thought they should make a fair contribution. Ultimately, those factors have led to the demise of the poll tax. However, we do not believe that the council tax offers much more fairness, if fairness is measured by how that tax relates to a person's ability to pay. We believe that property taxes, by their very nature, tend to be unfair.

Although, at first sight, there may be a rough and ready correlation between the size of a property and a person's ability to pay, there can be no direct correlation between the size and cost of a property and the income of those who occupy it.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): The academic understanding—it is not a party political figure—is that there is an 80 per cent. correlation between the size of a property and a person's ability to pay. That correlation was also accepted under the old rating system. The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that, in some cases, there may not be such a correlation, but he is overstating his case.

Mr. Wallace: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but I did say that it was a rough and ready correlation. I shall cite examples of people in different circumstances who would find that the value of the property they own, or perhaps rent, does not necessarily relate to their income.

Some people may inherit a property. Given the expansion in home ownership in the 1980s, and even allowing for the tragic repossessions of the early 1990s, I suspect that that will be an increasing phenomenon. Some of those properties may not be particularly large, but they may be of great value in certain areas. Such a property may be a family's only means of acquiring affordable property in their home area.

People may buy or rent a property and live in it for most of their lives. If that property is situated in an area where the value of property rises sharply, as happened in the south-east and in the north-east of Scotland, a family may find themselves in a high capital value property that does not match their income.

It must also be remembered that some people rent their homes, often in high capital value, inner-city areas of London or Edinburgh. The very fact that they have rented

[Mr. Wallace]

may show that they cannot afford to buy, but their council tax will be dictated by the capital value of the landlord's property. When the poll tax was introduced, many people whose rents had incorporated an element of their rates suddenly found that they then had to pay the poll tax in addition. Much injustice arose because of that, and I wonder what will happen as a result of this further change in local taxation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) has often mentioned, both in Committee and in the Chamber, people in tied housing. Those in agricultural areas in particular may occupy valuable properties despite the fact that their incomes are relatively low. Manses and vicarages in many areas can be of considerable value, yet the clergy are not, by any stretch of the imagination, among the better-paid members of our community.

7 pm

When Mr. Speaker retires at the next general election, I wonder how many of those who may wish to take his job will be reluctant to take the Chair—I do not mean the traditional symbolic reluctance—knowing that they will occupy the most expensive tied house in the country. Mr. Speaker's income is not too bad, however, and that may be an extreme example.

Last week, I received a telephone call from a constituent whose husband is in employment but not earning a significant wage. The lady concerned is confined to her house, is in receipt of a disability allowance and is currently applying for a mobility allowance. Under the present system, because of her husband's income, she does not qualify for a rebate. Even with a poil tax of £2, she pointed out that the system was basically unfair.

I accept that, to the Government's credit, an amendment has been made so that houses that have been converted for disabled people will be put in a lower band, but if they are already in the lowest band, those concerned will receive precious little, if any, relief. Because of their disabilities, those people will be unable to earn a worthwhile income, yet they will not qualify for the same discount as people living alone.

Property prices fluctuate, and people living side by side in properties that are almost identical from the outside may have very different incomes. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) hit the nail on the head in 1990, when he said:

> "What isn't right is the disparity between someone living alone living next to three or four earners".

That applies particularly to people who live in London and the south-east. A widow in a family home acquired 40 years ago may live next door to a two-income couple. The houses will be valued at the same amount by the local estate agent but the widow could almost certainly not afford that house on the open market and, when she and her husband were just starting out in the housing market, they could not have afforded to buy it as their first option.

In many areas, property is priced out of reach of traditional occupiers. They may have to work or stay in the area for family reasons, but the council tax may price them out of their family homes. What may be true in London and the south-east is equally true in areas such as Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Cambridge.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does not my hon. Friend's comment reinforce the fact that, in the current crisis, people may be forced out of their homes in a market that will not bear extra property? They will not be able to sell the property at any price, so they risk losing their home and being unable to pay the tax.

Mr. Wallace: My hon. Friend strikes a note that is all too true in so many cases. People are caught no matter which way they try to go.

We shall have an opportunity to explore the matter further in the next debate on valuation bands, and tomorrow we shall have an opportunity to discuss changes in discounts. However, any changes can improve fairness only at the margins. It is also likely that any such changes, while improving fairness, will nevertheless increase the administrative costs of the tax. Our new clause will oblige the Secretary of State regularly to face up to the issue of ability to pay and, ultimately, to work toward a system in which the tax is directly related to a person's income.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I am having some difficulty in following the argument. If the hon. Gentleman is arguing for a local income tax, which is perfectly fair, he should have tabled a new clause on that. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends may have tried to do that in Committee, but they could have tabled a new clause for discussion now. This new clause says that there will be a property tax called the council tax and that the income of the person or persons living within a property will somehow be taken into account. The Government and the Labour party considered that option, but it becomes so complicated that it is impossible to operate. Is the hon. Gentleman arguing for a local income tax or a property tax based on income?

Mr. Wallace: If the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) had read the list of new clauses and amendments——

Mr. Maxton: I have.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman says that he has, but he obviously has not. Had he done so, he would have seen that amendments Nos. 1 and 2 tabled by me and my hon. Friends argue for a local income tax. The amendments were not selected—I do not wish to criticise Mr. Speaker—but it is important to put the record straight. The new clause seeks to push the council tax in the direction of a local income tax. The hon. Member for Cathcart suggests that a property-based tax, specifically the council tax—there is not much difference between Government and Labour proposals—is incapable of being transformed into a fair tax that relates to people's ability to pay. People will judge the Labour party's proposals and the council tax on the basis of that admission.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman seeks to argue that, whatever is done to help people's ability to pay under a council tax, it would not be as fair as a local income tax. Indeed, he sought to table an amendment on that basis. Was the amendment on local income tax based on——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot discuss an amendment which is not before the House and which Mr. Speaker deliberately did not select. Let us return to the new clause before us.

Mr. Wallace: I am sure that the hon.. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is sufficiently ingenious to put his question under another guise, and I await his doing so with interest.

We want the Government to write into the Bill measures that will oblige them to move towards a tax that "is directly related to persons' income."

That would be tantamount to a system of local income tax. I make no apology for that. It was the policy of the Liberal party and the SDP before the Liberal Democrats were established. The Liberal party has espoused such a policy since its submission to the Layfield inquiry in 1976. As a first step, we would require the Inland Revenue to produce a computer tape of one fifth of all taxpayers in each Inland Revenue area. The Secretary of State may be able to do that in a worthwhile fashion if he were trying to follow the duties imposed on him by the new clause.

Information relating to postal codes and the taxable income of a sample of taxpayers could be recorded and sent to local authorities. That would get rid of one red herring—the idea that town hall snoopers would be able to find out everyone's income. The system would be anonymous. Each February and March, shortly before the local elections, authorities would be required to set local income tax rates to meet their commitments.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: I think that the hon. Gentleman should be allowed to have another go.

Mr. Hughes: My question relates specifically to what the hon. Gentleman has just said. Is it based on the work done for his party by Philip Truscott, or on the significantly understated figures that his party has been trying to use in an attempt to portray its policies in a rosier light?

Mr. Wallace: I expected a Conservative Member to ask that question. As hon. Members will have read in *The Times*, Mr. Truscott has initiated actions against my party, which are now the subject of legal proceedings in the High Court and which will be vigorously defended. It would not be proper for me to say more about the matter, which relates to copyright.

What I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that the press release that accompanied the publication of our figures set out fully and unequivocally the premises on which they were calculated. The figures for Wales, which were issued separately, were somewhat different from those calculated by Mr. Truscott—for the very good reason that we would wish to use the same proportion of revenue generated by local taxation as the Government. Mr. Truscott did not do that, as was spelled out in the press release.

We believe that the additional amount of some £300 million could be more than covered by the savings that would result from the change from poll tax to local income tax. The Labour party's estimate is £1·8 million. The Conservatives were wildly wrong when they said, before the introduction of the poll tax, that it would amount to £200 per person: people have found that out to their cost. I will not accept any criticism of our estimates from Conservative Members; that is sheer humbug.

Each payer of local income tax would be sent details of what he would be required to pay over the coming year. Once authorities had set their rates, the average would be calculated, the standard rate would be deducted and, at the end of the year, an adjustment would be made. If a local authority had spent responsibly and was able to provide a rebate, that would be brought home to taxpayers. If it had overspent and would require more money, that too would be brought home to them. As we all know, the end of the tax year falls in April, a few weeks before the local elections. Surely the system that we suggest would drive home to voters the accountability of their elected councillors.

Mr. Bowis: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that 85 per cent. of the cost of local government comes from central taxation, which is based on ability to pay? There is a 25 per cent. discount for single-person households to allow for the lower incomes received by such households, and a sliding scale of rebate—from zero to 100 per cent.—for those on low incomes. Surely the only people who could benefit from the hon. Gentleman's proposals are those who could afford an accountant to help them to dodge the system.

Mr. Wallace: I do not accept that. We shall debate the discount system tomorrow; the amendment that we have tabled would increase the amount from 25 per cent. We shall also debate the banding system. Although that will help to make the council tax fairer, we do not believe that it will entirely relate what is paid to the ability to pay.

Let us make no bones about it: the poll tax had its winners and losers, but on a very unfair basis. The local income tax is bound to have its losers—not least as a result of the poll tax that preceded it—but it is underpinned by fairness. It relates what is paid to the ability to pay. As I have said, no one likes paying tax, but a semblance of fairness makes it much more acceptable.

An equalisation system would have to be built in, so that low-income areas would not be faced with vast bills while wealthy areas received small ones. In previous debates, I have sometimes thought that Conservative Members were trying to apply equalisation grants arranged under the poll tax system to a local income tax system, without making any of the necessary adjustments. Every system of local government finance—be it council tax, the tax proposed by Labour, the poll tax, the old rating system or our proposed local income tax—has the appropriate equalisation arrangements built into it.

7.15 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brando-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Let us assume that the Liberal Democrats can come up with a good equalisation scheme. Where will that leave the accountability that we all seek to preserve, to ensure that local democracy can function properly? If 85 per cent. comes from central funds, local government will be blown out of the water.

Mr. Wallace: Every system involves an equalisation scheme. I do not recall its being suggested, when the poll tax was introduced, that such a scheme would undermine a system that the Government hoped would lead to greater accountability.

Mr. Maxton: I think that we should clear up the question of the 85 per cent. from central funds. It is true that 85 per cent. is controlled by central Government, but that is a very different matter. Non-domestic rates are paid locally, although control and distribution takes place at the centre.

Mr. Wallace: That is an important point. We also want to allow local authorities more control over local business rates. We have made no secret of that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) said in Committee, we want the balance to shift: we want national taxation levels to fall as local authorities become more responsible for raising revenue in their areas. The equalisation grant would then become proportionately smaller, which would lead to far more local accountability.

Conservative Members may ask what we would do about capping. We believe that the most effective local income tax cap would be a fair voting system. It is the electorate who cap authorities in a democratic society. Even according to the figures that the Government recently published for Scotland, local income tax rates would be relatively low. Because the Government have been afraid to grasp that, the poll tax lingers on. When the new system is introduced, local authorities will be rigorously capped simply because the Government will not introduce a fair voting system.

We believe that the only criterion for a tax should be whether it is related to ability to pay. The rates failed on that ground, and were therefore abolished; the poll tax never even pretended to be fair, and it had to go as well. Unless the new clause is accepted, the council tax will fail for the same reason.

Mr. Douglas: Generally, I support new clause 2, but I want particularly to refer to new clause 4, which deals with Scotland.

I do not want to offend the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), but the Scottish National party has no problems about copyright in its proposals for a local income tax—they are all our own work—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) seems to find this funny.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): You have to laugh.

Mr. Douglas: Life must be hard on the Labour Front Bench these days——

Mr. Maxton: My hon. Friend might be a Minister soon.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman should not count his chickens.

My fellow party members and I met Scottish Office Ministers and the Secretary of State for the Environment to talk about local taxation, which must not only approximate to the sum to be collected: it must be exactly equivalent to what should be raised either from the poll tax or from the council tax. I hope that I have the agreement of the House at least to that.

In Scottish terms, we are talking of about £800 million. Adam Smith, whose views should hold some sway over the Conservative party, held that taxes should be related to ability to pay. Hon. Members think not in terms of random samples of the public but about themselves—how do they pay their taxes? I know no one who pays taxes out of capital, with the possible exception of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). He might have to sell some of his capital assets to pay his taxes, but most people would not. The touchstone of ability to pay is that people pay tax out of income.

We understand that in Scotland it would cost about 4p in the pound to collect £800 million—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) keeps shaking his head so hard in disagreement, he will fall off the Bench, but if he wants to intervene I should be happy to allow him to do so.

Mr. Maxton: To judge from questions that I have asked the Government, even with the £140 reduction, the highest figure for Scotland would be about 7·5p.

Mr. Douglas: Perhaps there is something to be said for standard tests in arithmetic. I have done my best to calculate, based on the £800 million figure. We calculate what can be raised for 1p and multiply that by three or four to arrive at the relevant total. The hon. Member for Cathcart accepts the Government's figures, apparently having none of his own. I do not claim absolute accuracy for mine, but I am willing to allow an independent authority to examine them. No matter how we raise the money, we are aiming at the same global sum. The arguments are about how to raise it while relating the tax to ability to pay and keeping it cheap to collect.

I have already said that the tax will raise £800 million, and it will cost £80 million to collect. Of course it will not be possible to collect 100 per cent. of that money, but the collection costs will stay the same. If that is not crazy, I do not know what is.

I do not seek to disparage the Liberal Democrats' proposals, but we suggest that once a year, on 1 January, people should declare their residence so that local authorities could relate that to their tax-collecting base. National insurance numbers could also be given at the same time. Local authorities could then plug the information directly into Centre One, Scotland's computer system. That would involve no additional overheads, and no need to go into benefits or to examine discounts. This may be an underestimate, but I believe that it could be done in about three months——

Mr. Maxton *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman is at it again; it must be Christmas. Perhaps it will take four months, or even six.

Conservative Members may ask about accountability. Nationally speaking, the standard rate of tax governs accountability. The Government have made great play of reducing that standard rate and if they form another Government it is likely that they will try to bring the rate down to 20 per cent. Indeed, if we reach the next Budget, there will be great pressure on the Chancellor to reduce the standard rate by 1p—a great signal of accountability.

Mr. Barry Porter: The element of choice.

Mr. Douglas: Perhaps; at any rate, it is a sign of national accountability. If, say, an authority in Fife wanted to raise the local income tax from 3p in the pound, the national average, to 6p or 7p, what a signal for accountability that would be! The Government should recognise this. The only reason why we cannot have a local income tax is that the Government, aided and abetted by the Treasury, are afraid to give up direct control of fiscal policy. They are all Keynesians now.

Mr. Bowis: I realise that the hon. Gentleman does not speak for the Liberal party, but he is supporting a Liberal new clause. One of the main arguments advanced on ability to pay was the return to the rate equalisation system. Rate equalisation means that those in high rateable value areas subsidise those in low rateable value areas. Someone, irrespective of income, who lives in a

higher value property has to pay more for the property because of the higher bands, and now it is proposed that he pay a surcharge for rate equalisation. How would that help ability to pay?

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman is trying to make me defend an argument that I am not using. In Scotland, we would look for some refinement of the grant-aided expenditure reviews carried out as between local authorities and the Scottish Office. It is not perfect but it is used by the Government in Scotland as a level playing field for services. They are prostituting that by using it for capping purposes. The Minister does not understand that and that is why a Scottish Office Minister should be present. The Government are taking the techniques that have been honourably agreed between local authorities and the Scottish Office for grant-aided expenditure purposes and are using them to create a level playing field so that all authorities provide equal standards of service.

7.30 pm

We do not suggest a one-off immediate reform of what is in place. If Labour comes to office and the hon. Member for Cathcart is a Minister—God help Scotland if he is—what will happen in June or July 1992? Labour intends to return to the rating system. How people will greet that! It will take two to three years for Labour to introduce its fair rating system with safeguards for those who cannot pay. That is a noble concept, but why should we have to go through all the paraphernalia of bureaucracy? That is not needed in Scotland, and it is certainly not needed to collect the equivalent of 93p in the pound for Shetland.

The Scottish average is 14 per cent. and other regions such as Lothian would have to collect more than that. Smaller regions—and the island councils examplify this—have a higher average, and if they want to collect an equivalent amount of revenue they could levy a much lower rate of income tax. I know that I am not carrying the whole House with me on this argument, but I am sure that the Minister understands it. I do not want to wrong-foot any civil servant, but we have offered to have discussions with the Scottish Office at civil service level and put our experts with theirs to clarify the amount that a 1p local tax would raise in Scotland. The hon. Member for Cathcart was right to say that there are differences over figures.

There are no Labour Back Benchers in the House, but I am not trying to score political points from that. Unless local authorities are to be asked to collect a much higher proportion—20 to 25 per cent.—from the domestic sector, we are going through a farcical procedure. The Conservative proposal for a local community tax or the Labour proposal for so-called fair rates would impose considerable burdens. Time does not permit me to go into the ramifications of the unfairness of the Government's proposals which strain at trying to allow for ability to pay in their discount system of 25 or 50 per cent. That has no real relationship to ability to pay, but tries to give that impression. Many issues will be raised in the coming election, but there is an overwhelming case for discussing the suitability for Scotland of a local income tax related to ability to pay. Such a tax would be fair and cost effective and would make all local authorities, irrespective of their size, accountable.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I rise with some trepidation in a debate on local government. I cannot pretend to be an aficionado of local government finance and perhaps it is a little significant that there are almost more officials in the officials' Box than there are Members in the Chamber. It is an arcane and difficult subject and we have to deal with it in an incredibly short time. Therefore, I shall merely seek to state what the position could be for my constituents in north-west London when they pay their council tax bills in the spring of 1993.

The new clauses tabled by the Liberal Democrats are typically vague. They speak of matching the system to an ability to pay, but exactly how that is to be achieved is in no sense spelled out. Although the Liberal Democrats prefer a local income tax, I doubt whether my constituents would. They are taxed enough already.

When considering the ability to pay, the Government have assumed that the people of London and the south-east are rich and can easily afford to pay the levels of council tax that will be set. I wish to disabuse them of that simplistic notion. They should bear it in mind that unemployment has risen in the south-east and in London relatively faster than in any other part of the country. The available statistics show a very real squeeze on living standards for my constituents in outer London.

On Second Reading, several of my plain-speaking hon. Friends dealt with those matters. Most notable were my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who is in his place. In an interesting letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities wrote abut council tax, London and national banding. Those are issues of great importance when considering ability to pay. The letter is dated 11 December and with my hon. Friend's agreement I shall quote from it. It states:

> "In the Second Reading debate, you drew particular attention to the size of mortgage repayments in London. It is true that on average, people in London are borrowing three-quarters as much again to purchase houses as people in the North, . . . This fact, however, should be looked at in the context of the relative incomes of purchasers."

That is fine if they are still in employment. The letter continues:

> "House buyers in London are borrowing an average of 2·36 times their gross income, while those in the Northern region borrow 2·08 times their income. Borrowing as a multiple of income is only 13 per cent. higher in London than the North, in contrast with the almost 75 per cent. differential in size of mortgage."

It must be remembered, however, that the figures are being taken for London as a whole. They include low-value property in places such as Stepney and Bethnal Green and Bow, and in many others. In outer London, however, property values are immeasurably higher. The treasurer of the borough in my constituency has calculated that two thirds of households will be paying more under the new system because they will move into band E or above—in other words, properties with a value of over £88,000.

In my constituency, we were extremely glad to have the poll tax. It was a system which brought great accountability. It undoubtedly helped to enable the Conservative party to regain control of the borough council in the spring of 1990. My party won four seats from the Liberal party and one from Labour, and thereby achieved a clean sweep of all the wards in the constituency. There was no evidence in my neck of the woods—Ruislip-Northwood—that the poll tax was unpopular. There were some anomalies and some things to be put

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

right, but the tax itself were not unpopular. It certainly matched the ability of people to pay in a way that the new system does not.

The figures in the massive family expenditure survey produced by the Central Statistical Office, which was published on 6 December, show that the fares and travel costs of a London family are £12·18 a week, compared with £6·19 for the midlands and £4 for the north. For places in outer London, such as Ruislip-Northwood, travelling or commuting costs are infinitely higher than the average figure.

The figures incorporate housing costs in London. Most of my constituents are owner-occupiers, and the London outgoings of £61·28 are nearly twice those of the people of Northern Ireland, on £33 a week. They are significantly higher than the national average of £48·02. Only 18 per cent. of Londoners have finished paying their mortgage compared with nearly a third of householders in Wales. In Scotland, the figure is 15 per cent. When the part of the United Kingdom that I represent is compared with Wales, which has a preferential banding, again it is worse off.

I do not commend the Liberal new clauses, and I certainly could not vote for them. I wish, however, clearly to put it on the record that much as I wish my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his ministerial team well —I hope that the new council tax does away with many of the unfairnesses, injustices and anomalies of the old poll tax—I do not believe that for Ruislip-Northwood it will match ability to pay as well as the old poll tax did. I speak only for my constituency, of course.

7.45 pm

Mr. Barry Porter: As I so often do, I start by saying that I had no intention of speaking in this debate. I cannot compete with my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on the percentages and anomalies that he presented to us.

I know that the old rating system was unfair. I remember that when I first bought a house in 1965 the rates were about £1 a week. They were jolly unfair, but I did not care because the weekly outgoing was not very much. This debate is essentially about how much is to be paid at the end of the day, not about anomalies and unfairnesses. Arguments that are based on whether we should have rates, income tax or the new council tax are irrelevant, because the relevant consideration is how much an individual pays at the end of the day, and that must depend on what the local authority spends.

I remember a Labour finance chairman of the local authority of which I was a member who was not dissimilar to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in appearance, attitude and politics. He would have had a fit if he had had to put tuppence on the old rate. In fact, he did not have to do so. I can recall that if at that time the Government of the day, whether Tory, Labour or, in odd dreams, even Liberal, had suggested some restriction on local expenditure, we would have accepted that. We have gone wrong in the past few years because local authorities have not accepted that advice. They have not accepted that there should be a limit to local authority expenditure, with the result that capping has had to be introduced. It would have to be introduced again if we had an Administration of a different colour, which is highly unlikely. It is the refusal of local authorities to accept that there should be restrictions on local authorities that is the problem, not methods, fairness or amounts.

It has been said already that people in Wandsworth did not concern themselves over much with the community charge because it did not cost them anything. I lived happily in Westminster and I did not care much about the charge because it cost me very little. People in the Wirral cared a great deal because their authority spent a great deal on many things that many of us considered to be entirely unnecessary. The people in the Wirral paid about £500 and I paid about £30. That is a jolly good thing!

The new council charge is an attempt to be fair, and I think that it will probably work. It is only a variation of what the Labour party is saying about rates. I think that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is entirely right to have a system of banding. I hope that he will be able to ensure that correct valuations are made in the appropriate time, and I am told that he will be able to do so. I believe him, as I have always believed him. In the end, however, everything will depend on what local authorities spend, and on what, and whether they are prepared to be reasonable. If authorities are prepared to be reasonable, the people will be reasonable with them.

I suggest that the House should reject this silly new clause.

Mr. Maxton: I shall not take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter). I have known him for a considerable time, having been at university with him, but I was surprised to hear you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, call him as Barrington.

I cannot ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for the new clause——

Mrs. Ray Michie: That is a surprise!

Mr. Maxton: It may be a surprise, but I cannot invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to support the new clause because of what it contains. It suggests that there should be a council tax—in other words, a property tax—with, presumably, discounts, a banding system and, somehow, an ability-to-pay mechanism. Such a system would create an administrative nightmare that would go beyond the poll tax and, to be honest, the council tax. Therefore, I cannot ask my hon. Friends to support the new clause.

Liberal Members suggest that the new clause is a first step to local income tax. I cannot, therefore, ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support that.

Mr. Bellotti: It appears that the hon. Gentleman is supported by only one other member of his party. I am wondering whether any more Labour Members will appear in the Chamber.

Mr. Maxton: Only one of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends was present during the previous debate for most of the time. I do not see why my right hon. and hon. Friends should enter the Chamber to listen to Liberal debates any more than Liberal Members should come to listen to Labour debates.

I am not prepared to ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support local income tax. I shall briefly explain my reasons for taking that approach. First, the Scottish National party and the Liberal party have suggested that such a system is practicable. There may come a time when it is practicable to introduce local income tax, but we have not yet reached it. If we are to have local income tax, the

Inland Revenue—both the SNP and the Liberals have admitted that it will have to collect the tax—will have to know in which local authority every taxpayer resides. That means that whether the tax is collected each week or month through salary or over one year on one basis throughout Scotland, and then allocating moneys to local authorities, a local authority will need to know where individual taxpayers live. The simple fact is that the Inland Revenue does not know where every individual lives because that is not part of its tax records.

Mr. Douglas: I was going to use a harsh word and say that the hon. Gentleman displays his ignorance, but let me put it more euphemistically. He displays his total lack of knowledge of what the Inland Revenue knows. It knows where taxpayers live and has their national insurance numbers. I admit that there is a difficulty in relating that information closely to local authority areas.

I explained the Scottish National party's proposals, and I am sorry for taking up time now. Under our proposals, one would be asked to disclose where one lived, which would be for the whole year, and one's national insurance number, and that information could be fed to the Inland Revenue in Scotland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order—briefly.

Mr. Douglas: You are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If that point defeats the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), there is not much that I can do.

Mr. Maxton: It does not defeat me. The Inland Revenue does not know where people live; that information is not part of its computer system. As the Inland Revenue computerises, that will be part of its information, and the system could be changed, but it will take a considerable period to reach that stage. The simple, harsh reality that the people who propose a local income tax are not prepared to accept is that, at this time, such a system is not practical. They do not want any form of council tax or fair rates, so they would have to have 100 per cent. Government funding. That is what the Scottish National party suggested for Scotland for 12 months, with all that that means for control over local government expenditure, leaving financing entirely to central Government. My party is not prepared to accept that.

In principle, I see nothing wrong with taxing the use of property. The proposal is for a tax not on property but on the use of a property. Other services are taxed, and there is no reason why property should be exempt. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said that the only taxation principle is one based on ability to pay. I disagree. That is one criterion by which one judges a tax, but by no means the only one.

One criterion by which one judges a tax is its spread across people. One has to find a variety of ways of raising money, locally and centrally, and there is no reason why property should not be included in the basket of taxes that pay for services locally and nationally. That is one of the great weaknesses of the poll tax. There are tax benefits on the ownership and use of property but no tax on that ownership and use—we give mortgage tax relief, we do not have capital gains tax on the sale of properties, and we do not tax use. In principle, that is wrong.

A tax should be visible to the people paying it and to the body to which it is paid, whether it is a central Government or a local government tax. Local income tax would be collected not by a local authority but by the Inland Revenue. It would become part of the overall tax bill. The Liberal Democrats suggest a hare-brained scheme whereby everybody pays the same poundage on a local income tax and the money is redistributed. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said that the poll tax in part of his constituency was 93p in the pound. Presumably, that means that the Liberal Democrats would have a local income tax of 0·00001 per cent., or something of that nature. But people will not be pleased if they have to pay it all to get back a lump sum.

Mr. Wallace: There will be interest.

Mr. Maxton: That is interesting: there will be interest; that is fine. What about my constituents in Glasgow who pay, say, 4p in the pound but find that they will have to pay 7p or 8p in the pound and make up that difference by writing a cheque for a lump sum payment? Will they have to pay interest on that as well, to make up for the other interest?

The Liberal Democrats' scheme is hare brained and will not work. A local income tax collected in that way would not provide accountability. More particularly, if it were collected as one would hope—so that each local authority had its own rate and the money were collected on a monthly basis with the money owed to the Inland Revenue, which would be a fair way of doing it—it would not have visibility.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South had a small exchange with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), whom I shall not call the Member for Nowhere, as the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) described him. We were told that the Treasury objected to control over any level of income tax being taken from it—far from it. In my view, a local income tax gives considerably greater power to the Inland Revenue and central Government, in two ways. First, an authority that collects the tax can say, "We will not collect that amount for you." Secondly, the figures which we have on the rate of local income tax do not take account of rebates.

At present, everyone is liable to pay the poll tax. Under the council tax, everyone will be liable to pay the council tax. Under our fair rates system, everyone who is an owner or occupier will be obliged to pay and will be rebated—under the law, central Government will refund money to those people. Under a local income tax, those who are not liable to tax pay nothing, so the rebate system does not operate. The tax burden is placed on those who pay. If it is not, there is a reliance on central Government making up the difference, paying more to local authorities and, therefore, giving more power to them.

The simple fact is that a local income tax system is unworkable. It gives central Government greater power over local authorities. In principle, it is not visible and it is not workable. I therefore ask my right hon. and hon. Friends not to support it.

Mr. Portillo: Much though it pains me, I agreed with much of the critique of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) on local income tax. But I shall begin with the speech of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who quickly passed over the ability to pay and how it related to council tax. I remind him that, under the council tax, we propose that rebates of

[Mr. Portillo]

up to 100 per cent. should be available for those on low incomes—so, of course, we take account of the ability of the poorest in society to pay.

We propose a tax that will need to raise only 15 per cent. of local authority spending in England, 12 per cent. in Scotland and 8 per cent. in Wales. The balance of those items has to come from national taxation. The national taxation which provides those funds is based largely on the ability to pay, on profitability and on other factors. I remind the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland that we are limiting the incidence of the tax so that those in the highest-value properties will never have to pay more than three times as much as those in the lowest-value properties in any one area and that we are taking account of the number of people in each household—something of which I know that, within the limits of the scheme, he approves.

Happy was my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) who started his speech by saying that he was not an aficionado of local government finance—a very fortunate position in which to find himself. My hon. Friend and some of his colleagues were afraid that we would return to the sorts of bills that our constituents faced under the rating system. That would be intolerable. We recognise that the rating system had to go because of its manifest unfairness and because some people faced enormous bills because they happened to live in high-value properties and did not have the income to go with it.

That is why the council tax sets out on a different basis. First, it sets out to collect less money than the rates did from local taxpayers. Secondly, it has a limitation in that those in the most valuable properties shall never pay more than three times as much as those in the least valuable properties. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland mentioned Mr. Speaker and the Speaker's house. How wise we are, therefore, to have the top band at £320,000 and how wise we are in general to set the bands in such a way that we shall not ask people to pay disproportionately higher bills. I repeat that if people are on low incomes they will come within the rebate system which is payable up to 100 per cent.

If I may say so, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood was slightly confused about what he called the preferential bands in Wales. The existence of different bands in Wales means that people there reach the top band of payment earlier than people in England; or, to put it another way, there are fewer people in the lower bands in Wales, so I am not sure that those who have to pay will see the scheme in the same light as my hon. Friend.

8 pm

Mr. Wilkinson: Before my hon. Friend moves on, may I say that what exercises us is not so much the differentiation between the highest and the lowest but the fact that nearly all our constituents are in the top three or four bands. That is the problem. In my constituency, the humblest council house—if one can use that expression—would be valued at, at least, £88,000 which would put it into band E.

Mr. Portillo: I understand my hon. Friend's point, although what he said during his speech proved why the solution to that problem—if it is a problem—is not to introduce a regional banding system. He said that there was a tremendous variety of prices in London, which is true. There is also a tremendous variety within each region and if one substituted a regional banding system, one would be saying that there should be lower rates of tax in the areas with the highest property values, which might well also be the areas of highest incomes and of the greatest wealth, and that there should be higher rates of tax in the lower property value areas. That would be very difficult for my hon. Friend or for anyone else to explain.

My objections to a local income tax are largely the same as those of the hon. Member for Cathcart. I believe that there would be immense disquiet if we were, in effect, to appoint a Chancellor of the Exchequer in every town hall. The control of the level of income tax and of fiscal policy should rest with central Government, not local government.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that we should have a variety and a spread of taxes. In general, the taxation system should lie so thinly and be so well spread that it does not distort economic activity more than is absolutely necessary. That means that we must have different types of taxes, each at as low a level as it is possible to achieve. Therefore, I do not accept that all taxes should be based on income. Value added tax, for example, is based not on income but on what people spend. Some taxes will be based on income, some on profit, some on property and some on what one spends. Such a variety of taxation is appropriate and is found in most countries.

The naivety with which the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party tabled the new clause is pretty alarming. Hon. Members on the Standing Committee witnessed an hilarious debate lasting two hours in which the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) attempted to explain how a local income tax would work. On the question of equalisation—with which we have also dealt today—even he said with what I thought was stunning naivety:

> "The equalisation process is not something that we see central Government undertaking. It would be undertaken by local authorities in concert."

The idea that local authorities would decide between themselves who would subsidise other local authorities is breathtaking. The hon. Member for Eastbourne went on:

> "We have published details—they are publicly available—of the actual rates that would have been in place in every constituency this year had a local income tax been introduced."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 19 November 1991; c. 89-91.]

However, Mr. Philip Truscott—the researcher from Surrey university who has been alluded to already in this debate—said that the party had significantly understated the likely level of local income tax bills and that he wanted the party to withdraw the figures. He said that if the system were introduced, bills would have to be significantly higher than those suggested by the Liberal Democrats.

The Opposition have significantly understated the bureaucracy that would be required. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) again mentioned the Inland Revenue. I repeat that at present the Inland Revenue does not hold the home addresses of the vast majority of taxpayers. That database would have to be increased and that would involve substantial bureaucracy. As I understand it, the Liberal Democrats are asking employers to keep track of where employees live day by day and, by contrast, the hon. Gentleman is proposing

that there should be an annual register for local income tax. Under his proposal we do not get away even from the need for a register of every taxpayer.

Mr. Douglas: Is the Minister saying that Centre One in Scotland does not know the names and addresses and national insurance number of income tax payers? I want this on the record. Is he suggesting that his present proposals do not require a register or a list?

Mr. Portillo: Certainly, the council tax does not require a register, and I reiterate that the Inland Revenue holds only a limited number of home addresses and to extend that database would take some years.

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I sense that the House wants to come to a conclusion.

The reason why the Liberal Democrats hanker after a local income tax—they have put it on record before and have done so again this evening—is that they wish to increase the proportion of taxation that is raised locally. The only way in which they can see that happening is to introduce a local income tax and to hand over tremendous power to Chancellors of the Exchequer in town halls. We do not propose to increase the proportion of taxation which is raised locally because we believe that the proportion that is currently raised locally—it is now about 15 per cent. in England, 12 per cent. in Scotland and 8 per cent. in Wales—is appropriate. For that reason, the council tax is the appropriate instrument for raising the sum of money that needs to be raised from local tax payers.

Mr. Wallace: I know that the House wishes to move on, so I shall reply briefly to what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, in concert with the Minister. It is not always a reliable rule of thumb, but we can usually assume that we are right when the two Front Benches agree and we are faced with a genuine alliance of British politics between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

The attempt of the hon. Member for Cathcart to argue against a local income tax was uninformed when he suggested that the Inland Revenue could not compile a list. Any senior Inland Revenue official would say that if the political will was there, it could be done and that it could be done efficiently and quickly, certainly within six months to a year. The hon. Gentleman then suggested that the Inland Revenue would perhaps not carry out the task. I do not know whether he was suggesting that there was incipient anarchy or whether he had merely lost his place in his notes. He also suggested that it was not visible, but then proceeded to complain about its high visibility in terms of either a rebate or a requirement to pay.

To put to rest the Minister's concerns, I can tell him that many countries operate an end-of-the-year tax return system with a form to be filled in. That would also be the case for any system of tax benefits or tax credits that we wished to implement. Indeed, it might be very much in people's interests to fill in that form, because it could remove much of the burden on small businesses.

I dealt in an intervention with the Minister's point about the figures mentioned by Mr. Philip Truscott and I am sorry that the Minister could not depart sufficiently from his speech to take that correction into account. Even according to Government figures, the rate of local income tax in my constituency would be 0·1 per cent. in Orkney and nothing at all in Shetland. Therefore, the figures are even less according to the Government than according to Mr. Truscott. Members of both Front Benches—especially the Government Front Bench—appear to be afraid of the genuine exercise of local democracy. Given a proper and fair proportional system of voting in local authority elections, there is no need to fear the will of the people. In a democracy, local control over a vast number of areas is desirable. It is worth remembering to trust the people. The Government are never really prepared to do that.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 21, Noes 306.

Division No. 27] **[8.09 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Douglas, Dick
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Salmond, Alex
Stephen, Nicol
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alex Carlile and
Mr. David Bellotti.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter

Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 9

VALUATION BANDS

'.—(1) Before specifying substituted valuation bands pursuant to section 5, and before making a local government finance report under section 78A of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Secretary of State shall consider the effects in each region of England and in Wales of the amounts of council tax liability brought about by:

(a) valuation bands in England;

(b) valuation bands in Wales; and

(c) the distribution of revenue support grant.

(2) In this section "region" shall have the meaning of the standard economic region, except that Greater London and the rest of the South East shall be treated as separate regions.'. —*[Mr. Blunkett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: new clause 15—*Discontinuation of valuation bands*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order discontinue the system of valuation bands established under this Act.

(2) For the system of valuation bands there may by order be substituted lists which show for each dwelling its valuation.

(3) The liability to council tax in respect of each dwelling shall be in direct proportion to the dwelling's value.

(4) No order under this section shall be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before and approved by resolution of the House of Commons.'.

Amendment No. 111, in clause 5, page 3, line 23, after 'England' insert 'apart from Greater London'.

Amendment No. 86, in page 3, line 24, leave out from 'following' to line 40 and insert—

'TABLES—

Greater London

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £52,000	A
Values exceeding £52,000 but not exceeding £68,000	B
Values exceeding £68,000 but not exceeding £88,000	C
Values exceeding £88,000 but not exceeding £120,000	D
Values exceeding £120,000 but not exceeding £160,000	E
Values exceeding £160,000 but not exceeding £210,000	F
Values exceeding £210,000 but not exceeding £420,000	G
Values exceeding £420,000	H

South East Region Excluding London

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £46,000	A
Values exceeding £46,000 but not exceeding £60,000	B
Values exceeding £60,000 but not exceeding £78,000	C
Values exceeding £78,000 but not exceeding £104,000	D
Values exceeding £104,000 but not exceeding £140,000	E
Values exceeding £140,000 but not exceeding £180,000	F
Values exceeding £180,000 but not exceeding £360,000	G
Values exceeding £360,000	H

South West Region

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £40,000	A
Values exceeding £40,000 but not exceeding £52,000	B
Values exceeding £52,000 but not exceeding £68,000	C
Values exceeding £68,000 but not exceeding £88,000	D
Values exceeding £88,000 but not exceeding £120,000	E
Values exceeding £120,000 but not exceeding £160,000	F
Values exceeding £160,000 but not exceeding £320,000	G
Values exceeding £320,000	H

East Anglia, East Midlands and West Midlands

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £34,000	A
Values exceeding £34,000 but not exceeding £46,000	B
Values exceeding £46,000 but not exceeding £60,000	C
Values exceeding £60,000 but not exceeding £78,000	D
Values exceeding £78,000 but not exceeding £104,000	E
Values exceeding £104,000 but not exceeding £140,000	F
Values exceeding £140,000 but not exceeding £280,000	G
Values exceeding £280,000	H

Yorkshire and Humberside and North West Region

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £30,000	A
Values exceeding £30,000 but not exceeding £40,000	B
Values exceeding £40,000 but not exceeding £52,000	C
Values exceeding £52,000 but not exceeding £68,000	D
Values exceeding £68,000 but not exceeding £88,000	E
Values exceeding £88,000 but not exceeding £120,000	F
Values exceeding £120,000 but not exceeding £240,000	G
Values exceeding £240,000	H

Northern Region

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £27,000	A
Values exceeding £27,000 but not exceeding £35,000	B
Values exceeding £35,000 but not exceeding £45,000	C
Values exceeding £45,000 but not exceeding £58,000	D
Values exceeding £58,000 but not exceeding £80,000	E
Values exceeding £80,000 but not exceeding £106,000	F
Values exceeding £106,000 but not exceeding £212,000	G
Values exceeding £212,000	H

Amendment No. 3, in clause 5, page 3, leave out lines 39 to 40 and insert '240,000

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values exceeding £240,000 but not exceeding £320,000	H
Values exceeding £320,000 but not exceeding £480,000	I
Values exceeding £480,000 but not exceeding £640,000	J
Values exceeding £640,000 but not exceeding £800,000	K
Values exceeding £800,000	L'.

Amendment No. 112, page 3, line 40, at end insert—

'—(3) The valuation bands for dwellings in Greater London are set out in the following Table—

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £52,000	A
Values exceeding £52,000, but not exceeding £68,000	B
Values exceeding £68,000, but not exceeding £88,000	C
Values exceeding £88,000, but not exceeding £120,000	D
Values exceeding £120,000, but not exceeding £160,000	E
Values exceeding £160,000, but not exceeding £210,000	F
Values exceeding £210,000, but not exceeding £420,000	G
Values exceeding £420,000	H'.

Amendment No. 16, page 4, line 1, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) The valuation bands for dwellings in Wales shall be as specified in the following Table—

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values not exceeding £15,000	A
Values exceeding £15,000 but not exceeding £30,000	B
Values exceeding £30,000—£37,000	C
Values exceeding £37,000—£45,000	D
Values exceeding £45,000—£55,000	E
Values exceeding £55,000—£70,000	F
Values exceeding £70,000—£90,000	G
Values exceeding £90,000—£120,000	H
Values exceeding £120,000—£150,000	I
Values exceeding £150,000—£180,000	J
Values exceeding £180,000—£210,000	K
Values exceeding £210,000—£240,000	L
Values exceeding £240,000—£300,000	M
Values exceeding £300,000	N.'.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

Amendment No. 4, in page 4, leave out lines 17 and 18 and insert '£150,000

Range of values	*Valuation band*
Values exceeding £150,000 but not exceeding £200,000	G
Values exceeding £200,000 but not exceeding £275,000	H
Values exceeding £275,000 but not exceeding £350,000	I
Values exceeding £350,000 but not exceeding £425,000	J
Values exceeding £425,000 but not exceeding £500,000	K
Values exceeding £500,000	*L*'.

Amendment No. 5, in page 4, line 24, at endinsert—

'(4A) The Secretary of State shall establish an additional band to those set out in subsection 2 above that shall be for dwellings provided and occupied solely in respect of a person's employment.'.

Amendment No. 32, in page 4, line 24, at end insert—

'(4A) The Secretary of State may by Order, as regards financial years beginning on or after such date as is specified in the Order, make provision in respect of the Council of the Isles of Scilly—

(a) substituting another proportion for that which is for the time being effective for the purposes of subsection (1) above;

(b) substituting other valuation bands for those which are for the time being effective for the purposes of subsection (2) above.'.

Amendment No. 33, in page 4, line 25, after '(4)', insert 'or (4a)'.

Amendment No. 93, in clause 74, page 49, leave out lines 5 to 8 and insert—

'shall be based upon the value given to that dwelling in the valuation roll.'.

Amendment No. 94, in page 49, line 11, at beginning insert

'Values not exceeding £15,000 AA'.

Amendment No. 10, in page 49, line 11, leave out 'Values not exceeding £27,000' and insert

'Values not exceeding £20,000 AA
Values exceeding £20,000 but not exceeding £27,000'.

Amendment No. 95, in page 49, line 22, at end insert—

'Values exceeding £212,000 but not exceeding £260,000 I
Values exceeding £260,000 but not exceeding £320,000 J
Values exceeding £320,000 but not exceeding £400,000 K
Values exceeding £400,000 but not exceeding £500,000 L
Values exceeding £500,000 M.'.

Amendment No. 11, in page 49, leave out lines 23 and 24 and insert '£180,000

'Values exceeding £180,000 but not exceeding £250,000 H
Values exceeding £250,000 but not exceeding £400,000 I
Values exceeding £400,000 but not exceeding £500,000 J
Values exceeding £500,000 K'.

Amendment No. 96, in page 49, line 23, leave out '£212,000' and insert '£150,000'.

Amendment No. 97, in page 49, line 24, leave out '£212,000' and insert

'£150,000 but not exceeding £212,000'.

Amendment No. 12, in page 49, line 30, at end insert—

'(3A) The Secretary of State shall establish an additional band to those set out in subsection 2 above that shall be for dwellings provided and occupied solely in respect of a person's employment.'.

Mr. Blunkett: I had intended to appeal tonight to the massed ranks of Conservative Members representing seats in London and the south-east, who I thought would be here to protect their constituents' interests and to press for a change in the banding structure, Unfortunately, however, there are fewer than a dozen of them here.

Hon. Members: What about yours?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) to make comments and tell stories about Conservative Members when there is only one—Scottish—Labour Back Bencher present—and certainly none of those whose constituencies will be affected?

Mrs. Fyfe: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should point out that there are two Scottish Back Benchers present—the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and myself.

Mr. Blunkett: When all the jollity is over, the fact remains that the Labour party is committed to a fair system of taxation that would ensure the protection of those in high-price areas who happen to be on low incomes, and that, come 10 o'clock, Conservative Members will vote for a system that does not do that. That is why I had intended to appeal to Conservative Members representing constituencies in London and the south-east who it might be thought would have wanted to debate the issue.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I note with interest the hon. Gentleman's concern for the charge payers of Barnet. Does he accept that, under Labour's local government reform proposals, my constituents would end up paying more than they would under the proposed council tax? Is that the sort of concern that the hon. Gentleman shows for my constituents?

Mr. Blunkett: I should certainly be concerned if, under the proposed banding system, 46 per cent. of my constituents fell into the top band whereas only 6 per cent. fell into the bottom three bands, which is the case in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Such a situation is designed to make people in the area rightly feel that, having rid themselves of the poll tax, under which everyone was taxed the same amount, they are now to have a system under which nearly everyone is taxed the same amount. On those grounds, I should expect the hon. Gentleman vigorously to promote, and vote for, amendment No. 112.

The Government's proposed system of valuation bands is likely to lead to greater unfairness, unworkability and unsustainability than the system that the Government are removing—and that is saying something. The proposed valuation system will lead to confusion and administrative difficulty. It is a Mickey-Mouse valuation system which taxes families whilst protecting individuals living alone, and which is based on the false premise that if one can make something cheap and make it look simple, it will be better. We do not believe that that is the case. We believe in fairness and equity and we want people to understand clearly the basis on which they are taxed. That is the principle that should be applied to any form of property tax, and it requires that people should have the right to

immediate access to information about the valuation of their property rather than having to appeal to find out the amount that they are to be charged.

We believe that a valuation system whereby an average of £1·58 is paid out for the valuation of a property—with some people finding that the valuation of their property is costing less than the price of a KitKat—is a system open to considerable ridicule. We also believe that a system that does not take into account the circumstances of a property is likely to lead to the kind of upheaval that we witnessed under the poll tax.

The fact that there are so few hon. Members in the Chamber tonight indicates that Conservative Members have learnt few lessons. They showed the same indifference to the difficulties and dangers and to the warnings that we gave when the poll tax was introduced. I exempt those representatives of the media who are present tonight when I say that the media—particularly the broadcast media—show the same indifference to the council tax as they did to the poll tax. That does not mean that, in its anomalies, difficulties and silliness, the council tax is not as dangerous as the poll tax; it clearly is. That is why we are intent on developing the debate tonight and on exposing some of those anomalies.

If individual valuations do not take place and if properties are not treated fairly, we are bound to get the kind of anomalies that we exposed in Committee. Houses in the same street will be valued in the same way because they happen to be the same type of property, even though their environment and circumstances are completely different. One might expect a family living in a property located next to a discotheque to pay less in tax, because the value of occupation is less, than one living in a property of the same type in the same street overlooking the local park. With valuers undertaking valuations from their desks or by driving down the street, there is no way in which the valuation process can be undertaken fairly.

There is no fairness in a system that fails to take into account the substantial differences that exist within properties—in terms of value of occupation or, for example, improvements, such as rear extensions. Such factors are very important in ensuring that people pay according to their means—in so far as that is possible with any property tax. The cost of the dwelling and the value of occupation of the dwelling relate to ability to pay, which is a firm and fair basis for levying a local tax.

Under the Government's proposals—and the Minister of State boasted about this on the radio this morning—valuers will not have access to the properties.

Under the valuation process that has just begun, valuers will be prevented from entering properties to undertake the valuation. They are discouraged from getting close to the property. Indeed, it is welcome if they do not actually see the property. If there is any doubt about whether there is an unfairness in looking only at the front of a property as the valuer passes in his car, the Minister told us in Standing Committee that valuers will be able to take aerial photographs. The Minister this morning claimed that he did not say that, but he did say it. He did not say, as he claimed this morning, that valuers will be able to use old mythical aerial photographs of houses which may no longer exist or may have been altered since the photograph was taken.

The Minister said that, if there was any doubt, the old rating valuation list would be used. That is a real giveaway because that is what we proposed to ensure that we could have got rid of the poll tax by April 1992. However, the Government rejected that and refused to accept our interim solution while a thorough individual revaluation of property took place.

8.30 pm

In parliamentary language, there has been a degree of duplicity. The valuers are not supposed to take a detailed look at the property. However, they are supposed to use old photographs or information on the rating list. Presumably, if that information is not available, they will take to a hot air balloon. They will not get much of a hot air balloon for an average of £1·58 a property, although there might be plenty of hot air from the Conservative Benches. If the council tax is ever implemented, the balloon will go up.

The more we delve into the proposal, the less credible and more questionable it appears. Over the past few days, Ministers have boasted that they have saved £100 million because they had intended to spend £120 million on the valuation process. It will cost only £21 million because the guidelines were such that valuers were told that they had to undertake the process as cheaply, simply and as quickly as possible using as little information as possible. That is why we are not spending money that should be spent to save some people from being taxed unfairly.

People will find that their properties will be placed in bands, but they will not be aware of the subtle differences in the valuation process. In areas such as London and the south-east, those differences might mean that a person with a property valued at £161,000 instead of £159,000 could be in the top valuation band together with someone with a house valued at £319,000. One cannot imagine a less fair system. In order to get the information to challenge that valuation and be put back into band G, and therefore save considerable sums of money, someone would have to appeal. However, that person will not be allowed to appeal until January 1993.

The Government's proposal for the banding valuation process is likely to lead to a disastrous situation in which thousands of appeals will be made within three months of the system being brought into operation. There will be great disgruntlement and disagreement. Local authorities will be seeing the back of the poll tax and experiencing collection problems. They will also be trying to implement the new tax and having to deal with people who are aggrieved and concerned about the bands in which they have been placed.

In addition, there is the inherent unfairness of the compression of the bands and the way in which in many areas—and I have already referred to London and the south-east—people will find that there are not really eight bands but only two, three or four bands for their area. In some areas nearly all properties fall into three rather than eight bands. Together with the discount system to which my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) will refer tomorrow, people will face a property poll tax, not a new system. The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) referred to Barnet, which is a classic example of an area in which nearly half the properties fall within the top band.

Mr. Portillo: I know that the hon. Gentleman would not want to mislead the people of Barnet. Will he confirm that, as he does not believe in compression, someone in a £200,000 property in Barnet would be asked under

[Mr. Portillo]

Labour's system to pay five times as much as someone in a £40,000 house? Under our system, we believe that it should be limited to two and a half times because we recognise that some people in higher valued properties may not have the income to allow them to pay those high rates of tax.

Mr. Blunkett: That shows that the Minister is allowing his antagonism to the old rating system to—and I am one of the people who can say this in the Chamber—blind himself to the reality of a normal individual valuation process.

A valuation process should be linked to the amount that people will be expected to pay to the valuation placed on their property, not in bands or ratios to each other, but in relation to the worth of occupying that property. The spread of properties across a high-value district in England would ensure that people paid what was fair in terms of the differences between the prices of the properties. Some of us agree that there is a need for the relationship between districts and regions to be brought into line with each other.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend the Minister is right.

Mr. Blunkett: As the hon. Member for Hendon, South is suggesting that the Minister is right, someone in Barnet in a £200,000 house would not pay five times as much as someone in a £40,000 house under our proposed valuation process. The Minister knows that that is the case.

Mr. Marshall: In answer to my hon. Friend the Minister, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that the ratio would not be five times as much. He has obviously calculated the figure. What is it?

Mr. Blunkett: It is a graduated rateable value. One cannot simply pluck figures out of the air. Our system involves carrying out a proper valuation of properties that would ascertain the resources base in the area. That base determines the pence in the pound that can be levied under a property tax system. That is fairly basic local government finance. It is not clever or something which must be invented at the Dispatch Box—we all know about it—and had the old rating system been updated, modernised and made fairer we would not be debating this nonsense now because we would never have had the poll tax. My colleagues and I know that not before too long we will be able to implement a much fairer system.

I have been diverted from the compression of bands and the property poll tax that goes with it. That involves the unfairness inherent in pushing together people with very different incomes and types of property into sequence with each other so that they end up paying much the same. Westminster is a good example of that because the maximum that anyone can pay is three times the amount of the lowest band.

The figures that have been predicted in Westminster are very low. People in properties worth £1 million will pay only £273 while people in the lowest band with properties under £40,000—I imagine that that would be a rabbit-hutch in Westminster, if people were lucky enough to have one—would pay £91 a year. If the person in the £1 million house happened to be living alone, he or she would receive a 25 per cent. discount. That person would not pay much more than £2 a week extra in comparison with someone on the lowest income scraping to make ends meet. Nobody can truly defend a system that is as unfair as that, nor can a system be defended which ends up with regional disparities which have been recognised in the case of Scotland and Wales but not in the case of English regions.

Although in London only 1 per cent. of households find themselves in band A—the bottom band—16 per cent. of Londoners find themselves in the lowest income bracket. Of course, in the north, the reverse is true—46 per cent. find themselves in band A. That is grossly unfair on people who live in a high property price area such as London. That is why some of us expected that hon. Members who represent London and south-eastern constituencies would have taken much more interest in what is going on tonight.

The compression of bands is unacceptable and unfair. The 3:1 ratio to protect the rich at the expense of the rest of us is unacceptable and unfair. The process of valuation itself is cheap and nasty, and unacceptable and unfair. The whole predication of a tax which fails to recognise the ability to pay as a key principle, and fails to understand the importance of individual valuation for ensuring that people know, understand and accept the basis on which they are to be taxed locally is flawed and unacceptable. We need to return to a system that allows for sensitivity and for an equal share of the local tax burden to be carried by those who can afford it.

At the beginning of the year, we understood that the Government appreciated the need—if they were to have a banding process, which we do not agree with—to have a wide spread of bands. On 22 February—I make no apology for repeating this, because it clearly has not got through to the media or to Conservative Members—the Government issued rating circular No. 53. They gave valuers five working days to come up with the spread of properties if 14 bands were to be used—14 bands which ensured that there were six bands at the top, that is, six additional bands to the seven bands that they told the public they were going to use—which would increase the spread to £500,000-plus, instead of the £160,000 that they were then proposing to use. They had an additional band at the bottom to protect the very poorest. In Committee, we dealt with the issue of people in many parts of the country who have very low-rated property, those who live in very small terraced houses, or those who live in caravans.

That system at least had the merit of some sort of fairness, but, unfortunately, fairness smacked of socialism. The idea of 14 bands was rejected, presumably on the same principles as the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) rejected progressivity when debating the poll tax. It is no wonder that the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, who adheres to the principles of the poll tax, was keen to get rid of the 14 bands. The 14 bands went, even though they brought greater fairness and would have protected in some measure the people in the areas that I have described, as well as some people in some northern constituencies where the banding system again clusters in an unacceptable way.

Band A residents in Wigan will be paying £339 a year, which is more than the top band in Westminster. *[Interruption.]* I hear a sedentary intervention, the text of which, unfortunately for me, I missed. It was from the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). I think that she mentioned 15p cemeteries as an example of

a valuation system done on the cheap. That is certainly less than the price of a KitKat and less than the price of a Mars bar, I should have thought. But that is par for the course. "If it is public, value it and sell it cheap," has been the attitude of Conservative Members on every occasion when they have privatised everything that had been built up over the years.

So there we have people in Wigan—or, as the Minister reminds me, there we have it. That is a favourite phrase. We had it noted and published in *The Daily Telegraph* —one of the few points from the Committee that reached *The Daily Telegraph*, or, with the honourable exception of *The Scotsman* and the *Financial Times*, many other newspapers.

8.45 pm

The system is clearly at fault in the way that I have described. I mentioned circular No. 53. It would be remiss of me not to mention what happened after that. We then had rating circular No. 58, which was issued towards the end of April and which, having rejected 14 bands, did an exercise on nine bands. Nine bands were at least an improvement on seven bands, but, when we revealed that a nine-band system was being valued, the Secretary of State immediately denied it. In fact, Downing street took the trouble to deny that it existed. It was then found that it did exist, so it was admitted that it was actually happening, but, because it was an embarrassment, it was withdrawn.

Fourteen bands embarrassed the Government because they were fair, we had nine bands because we were only a week from the local elections, and they were embarrassed that they had told an untruth and been found out, and we then went back to seven bands. Seven bands were immovable, in the words of the Secretary of State. If only memories were as long as the banding system that the Government had originally proposed, we would not be in quite this state. Seven bands were immovable. The Government then invented eight bands. However, during Question Time one Wednesday afternoon, the Secretary of State admitted that it was only a psychological measure and would not make that much difference anyway.

So there we have it—again. Fourteen, nine, seven and eight—we have been through it all, but we have not had any acknowledgement that the banding system itself is at fault and simply will not work and that the whole system is a mess. It does not matter how many hon. Members are present, the reality will be outside the House. The reality would be—if they ever had the chance—for the Government to implement the system. The reality will be that local government finance, instead of being a bore on the sidelines and much less exciting than some other things that go on, such as Esther Rantzen's quarter of a million or the important issues that pass for news, will be recognised as a critical issue that will affect people and British politics in the same way as the poll tax did.

Local finance is a minefield, and all of us must tread carefully through it, but some of us have ensured that we have a map and that we shall use it. We advise very strongly that Conservative Members think carefully before they vote for their proposals and reject our new clause.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I am delighted that you are in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I want to address my remarks to a part of the country which you know well—the Isles of Scilly. If I may say so—and I thank you for it—you are one of our regular holidaymakers to the islands. I have tabled amendment No. 32, which is an attempt to recognise a unique feature of the island—second homes—and the possible effect that they will have on the council tax and the amount borne by the Isles of Scilly. There are 933 domestic properties on the islands, 300 of which—nearly one third—are second homes. In addition, 183 homes receive the one-person discount. That means that no fewer than 450 of the 933 homes—almost half—will be left to pay the standard rate. That means an extra burden on those who pay the standard rate.

However, the position is even worse than that. As a result of the prevalence of second homes on the islands, there is a completely artificial market in property prices. I am told that the cheapest property that one could buy is a one-bedroom flat costing £100,000. The difficulty posed by those high property prices is compounded by the fact that the islands have a low level of income. That presents particular problems for the islanders and makes the island unique for council tax purposes.

I have argued that case with my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I took it up with him in correspondence as soon as I was approached by the Council of the Isles of Scilly. My hon. Friend responded in a long letter on 18 October in which he looked sympathetically at the matter, clearly recognising the problems facing the islands. However, he said that, rather than deal with the problem through legislation, he thought that the right way to tackle it was through the grants system. The concluding paragraph of his letter states:

> "The Department is, as you know, always willing to consider the individual circumstances of different areas; and the Island's Standard Spending Assessment does contain a number of adjustments to reflect factors where we recognise that special provision is needed. I do not believe, however, that we would be justified in making special provisions in the council tax legislation for the Scilly Isles."

With respect to my hon. Friend, I must disagree with him on that point.

I heartily acknowledge that the Government have been generous—that is the right word—to the islands in making special grant provisions to take account of their unique position. That is reflected to some extent in the present community charge rates for the islands. The community charge is £105 whereas the charge for the neighbouring district councils on the Cornish mainland are £225 for Penwith and £247 for Kerrier. On the whole, therefore, the islanders have done very well in terms of grant, and extremely well with European grants.

However, the difficulty with grants is that there is no guarantee that they will be maintained in the future. If there were a different Administration, heaven forbid—I do not think that this will happen, but let us suppose that it did—that Administration might not be so sympathetic to the islands or recognise the problems that are faced by island communities. A new Administration's approach to grants might be somewhat different from that of this Administration. It is important, therefore, that the islands' position is recognised in the legislation.

Despite the assurances that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has already given me, I hope that he will look sympathetically at the amendments that I have tabled. I accept that the new clause that I tabled and the amendment that has not been selected are probably defective, but I look to my hon. Friend to recognise the problems of the islands and for assurances that he will

[Mr. David Harris]

return to the issue in another place and will not rule out at this stage the possibility of including some special provision for the islands in the Bill.

It is worth pointing out that the islands have a remarkable record on community charge collection. I think that I am right in saying that about 99 per cent. of the money has been collected. That is an extremely good record and shows that the islanders are law-abiding people. Although there was a problem because some people thought it unfair that the outer islands should pay exactly the same as the main inhabited island, St. Mary's, people nevertheless paid their community charge in remarkable numbers.

For that reason, as well as for all the others that I have outlined, I hope that the Government will look again at this issue. Perhaps at the very least one of the Ministers would like to come to the Isles of Scilly——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Harris: I see that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is volunteering. As he told me earlier that his late father was a former Bishop of Truro, who probably confirmed half the population of the islands, my hon. Friend might well be the appropriate Minister for such a visit.

I ask my colleagues on the Treasury Bench to acknowledge that, in this respect as in so many others, the Isles of Scilly are a unique case and should be dealt with accordingly in the Bill.

Mr. Bellotti: Banding is at the heart of the Government's attempts in the council tax proposals to modernise what is really a property-based tax. In all attempts, they have failed. It is interesting that the Government have introduced different bands for Scotland and Wales. In Committee, we invited the Minister to explain why different bands were thought necessary for Scotland and Wales. Unfortunately, very little was forthcoming on that subject, but the answer that one would have expected to that question would have given the reasons why banding should be regionally varied throughout England. They are exactly the same reasons. The Government have failed in their attempt to make the property tax fair, because they have failed to examine the case for some form of regional banding for England.

As has already been stated, the number of bands is not sufficient to meet individual cases in some regions. In London and the south-east, for example, many local authority property values enable the local authorities to use only the top two or three bands. It would be extremely helpful in such cases if the bands could be extended to a higher level. In other regions, property values are extremely low and the reverse applies. In those areas, it would be extremely helpful to have more bands at the lower end so that those with a property that should be valued at a price below the lowest band would pay less.

I thought that the arguments that were advanced in Committee were fairly persuasive, but the Government did not change their proposals. They failed to make any response on the issue of regional banding. We encouraged Conservative Back Benchers in Committee to speak up, but it seemed that the hon. Members who had been chosen or who had volunteered to serve in Standing Committee were singularly unable to do so. I hope that, during the debate tonight, some Conservative Back-Bench Members will comment on that. Indeed, one Conservative Member put a similar point in the previous debate on behalf of his local authority.

The consequence of not creating more bands, with people in properties in the bottom bands paying less and people in properties in the bands at the top end paying more, is that the council tax hinges on the average-priced property. It hits the very people who may be less able to pay. The gearing of the tax means that a millionaire in an extremely expensive property will pay only three times what a person in the same local authority area will pay who occupies perhaps a one-bedroomed flat of low value.

One must ask whether a millionaire has the ability to pay more than three times the bill of two people in a household on a fairly low income but who nevertheless pay some tax. The answer must surely be that the millionaire could well afford to pay more than three times what a standard couple on a fairly low income pay. That demonstrates why we need more property bands.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The hon. Gentleman and I both have constituencies in the south-east. Does he think that all people with properties worth more than £320,000 are millionaires? Do not those few people who earn a great deal of money pay a disproportionately larger amount through the tax system? Only a small amount will be collected through the council tax.

9 pm

Mr. Bellotti: We gave the hon. Gentleman the opportunity in a Division earlier this evening to show that people who live in high-priced property do not necessarily have such high incomes. He did not support that principle then. I agree with him if his point is that property can be expensive but that the person who occupies it might not have a high income on which to pay tax.

I and my hon. Friends have tabled amendment No. 86, which sets out a different approach to regional banding in England. We have not yet heard an answer to our proposals. As the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) said a moment ago, London and the south-east would be hit hard by the Government's proposals in the Bill.

In Committee we heard from one of the Ministers the argument that regional banding in England might create difficulties between one region and another. I failed to understand the logic of that argument, and it was probably the only argument we heard. Such difficulties will exist around the boundary between England and Wales, where there will be a tremendous variation between properties which are just a couple of miles apart. As a result of the Government's proposal to have a different banding system in Wales, people on the Welsh side of the border will pay a low council tax, and people on the English side will pay a high council tax.

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is my hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents will be able to look out of their window and see properties within a short distance on the other side of the river or just up the road in Scotland which are on a different and more favourable banding system?

Mr. Bellotti: I am grateful for another example from a different part of the country of large variations between

properties. I suspect that there are many such examples. I hope that other hon. Members will shortly contribute their experiences and understanding.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman will not know my constituency, because it is a long time since Liberals were seen there, but he might know some of the outer ring of London constituencies. If he would go on a journey through the royal borough of Kingston upon Thames, down the road through Surbiton towards Thames Ditton, he would find a road where there are houses next door to each other of the same size, occupied by the same sort of people on the same sort of income. Under his scheme, one would be in the London region and the other would be in the south-east region. The hon. Gentleman proposes a different band for those two houses. Can he explain the justice in that?

Mr. Bellotti: That is exactly the same as the problem that will arise under the Government proposals on the boundaries between England and Wales and between England and Scotland. Once one starts on the road of a property-based tax, one always hits such problems.

We are attempting to make an unfair system marginally fairer at every opportunity. There is no doubt that our amendment would more than marginally help a large number of people. Indeed, it would be seen to be fairer. I am sure that as people come to understand how the council tax will affect them, they will be annoyed when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-on-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, they look out of their window and see a household at a huge advantage to them. The dilemma is real. There is no doubt that more bands would mean a fairer system. The Government should accept that when they set out their proposals for Scotland and Wales.

Amendments Nos. 5 and 12 are designed to help those who occupy tied or similar property through their work. If we assigned such people to a separate band, it would bring them the relief they need. That band could apply to ministers of religion, who often occupy by virtue of their job houses which they would be unable to afford to purchase on their own disposable income. A school caretaker may enjoy the benefit of a large house in the corner of his school grounds. Given the value of such a property and the relative size of a caretaker's income, it is clear that he would be unable to purchase such a house out of choice. That argument could apply to a number of other people—for example, police officers. A separate band for such people would bring enormous benefit.

The banding proposals have been supported by many people outside the House and by some hon. Members of all parties. I hope that the Government will appreciate that the council tax, which they believe to be fair, could be made much fairer if they conceded the regional banding proposals. I look forward to hearing the reasons for the Government's eventual decision on the proposals.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) was right to say that the idea of regional banding has attracted support from hon. Members of different parties. However, when one studies the detail of what is proposed, the scheme starts to fall to pieces. The speech by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on behalf of the Labour party was very similar to someone jumping on a bandwagon and discovering that it had cracked wheels.

The idea of a regional band for London and the south-east, or for London alone, is misconceived. I do not believe that it would work, because it would change the nature of the proposed tax, which is a property tax with a personal element. It is important to keep in mind precisely what we seek to establish.

Mr. Ian Taylor: What my hon. Friend says causes me some concern, in addition to my hesitation about the merits of regional banding. I hope that my hon. Friend would not propose that there should be any regional banding to favour London. As my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) has pointed out, my constituency abuts on London, and such a proposal would cause great dismay to my constituents, who already believe that London has too good a deal.

Mr. Hughes: I am not sure that I can agree with the last sentiment that my hon. Friend expressed. We have been offered a pot-pourri of amendments—some favour London, some favour London and the south-east and others suggest carving up the country into all sorts of different regions.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend and I are, in political terms, territorially contiguous. Does he at least recognise that there is a particular difficulty for outer London and the south-east where property values are high and where disposable incomes may not be commensurately great? Is it not the case that all the constructive criticism of the Bill has, by and large, come from right hon. and hon. Friends who represent outer London and the south-east? It is no accident that that is so.

Mr. Hughes: It is no accident that that is so, but my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who is a respected neighbour, is wrong.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hughes: I wish to make some progress, because there are many points that I wish to raise. If we are to have a property tax, it must be logical, and the logic is clear.

Mr. Couchman: I had not intended to intrude on my hon. Friend's speech, but does he consider that a schoolteacher, whose salary is fixed through national wage agreements by the independent pay review body for teachers and who lives in my hon. Friend's or my constituency in the south-east, is better able to afford the council tax on a higher band than a teacher who lives in Darlington or elsewhere in the north?

Mr. Hughes: I do not share my hon. Friend's contention that one should support national wage bargaining. I support bargaining for London. My hon. Friend's point is interesting, but the argument for it does not lead one to support any of the amendments that have been selected. Regional banding could not be agreed to simply on the basis of national wage bargaining. That suggestion would distort a property tax with a personal element, because the aim of the amendment is that people living in an £80,000 house in the north should pay more than those living in an £80,000 home in the south.

I do not understand the fairness of that. People should pay according to the value of their property, and it is therefore reasonable that there should be one national

[Mr. Hughes]

band. If there were significant differences between regions, there might be an argument, but we all know that that simply is not the case. There is no typical region.

There were two Yorkshire Members present when I began my speech, and there are now three. The number is growing by the minute. Property values in Yorkshire alter according to the part of the county. A single regional band could not be applied to Yorkshire, with council tax prices set against a regional band for, say, London and the south-east. A few weeks ago, several of us went to Langbaurgh, for obvious reasons. Those of us who visited the lovely market town of Guisborough know that the values of property there are very similar to those in my constituency of Harrow. How could Yorkshire be placed in a different regional banding structure from the one that applies in my constituency?

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government have agreed on a separate system for Wales and Scotland and that, within Wales and Scotland, there are considerable disparities in property prices? How, then, can Yorkshire be any different?

Mr. Hughes: I am part Welsh and part Scot, and I had understood that the argument was that Wales and Scotland are nations and therefore entitled to a different national system.

Mr. Ian Taylor: They have a different system of finance.

Mr. Hughes: As my hon. Friend rightly interjects, they have a different finance system. An argument must be made for that—it is not a reason to mess up the rest of the country.

Mrs. Fyfe: As the hon. Gentleman agrees that Scotland is a different nation, why does he not accept that it should have its own system if it prefers, and allow it to have a fair rates system?

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Lady is simply trying to cause arguments within my family, she will not succeed. I am sure that she knows what I mean.

Although only a few miles separate Richmond from Leeds and Beverley from Hull, prices differ enormously. Prices in north Yorkshire in general are very similar to those in outer London, but those in Leeds and Hull are not. Regional banding would distort the system, and produce many illogicalities and unfairnesses.

9.15 pm

I can make some revealing comparisons between my constituency and the neighbouring borough. Conservative Members may be in danger of creating an issue where none exists. My postbag, and trips around the constituency, suggest to me that—in general—people are relieved that the community charge is going, and consider the council tax fair, reasonable and decent.

The last rates bill received in Harrow, in 1989-90, by a couple living in a 1960s-built, three-bedroomed semi averaged £549. This year's community charge bill for two people is £506: according to the indicative figures, this year's council tax bill will be £441. I do not consider that a ground for complaint.

The last rates bill for a similar house in Brent, the neighbouring borough, was £1,550. This year's two community charges come to £656, while this year's council tax bill will amount to £517. Again, I see no room for complaint.

Mr. Blunkett: We had all this jiggery-pokery in Committee. I do not want the comparative figures to be distorted. The hon. Gentleman has not taken into account the £280 that a couple will have received this year because of the so-called flat-rate £140 poll tax reduction. Surely any comparison between past and present must take into account the £4.25 billion that was added to value-added tax.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, for two reasons. I always wondered what made the big difference between the last rates bill for Brent and the present arrangements; now I understand that it was the £140 reduction. Personally, I had thought that it was the bunch of madmen from the Labour party who ran the borough in the old days.

The hon Gentleman has described my figures as jiggery-pokery. That is all very well, but why does he not come clean and give us Labour's figures? I have challenged the prospective Labour candidate in Harrow, West to do so, but he has not bothered to reply.

Mr. Maxton: The next Labour Member for Harrow, West.

Mr. Hughes: That will come as a terrible shock to him.

Labour will not come clean with its figures, so it is bound to describe ours as jiggery-pokery. Labour is simply trying to hide the awfulness that lurks behind its so-called fair rates system

All the concern felt in local authorities in London and the south-east—which I well understand—really relates to grant. Two so-called alternative schemes have been suggested. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that hon. Members whose constituencies are some distance from London are not interested in London's problems; they can continue to talk among themselves.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman's constituency is not near London, but yes.

Mr. Enright: It most certainly is not. If the hon. Gentleman, from a London constituency, would pay some attention to the problems that we face in Hemsworth, such as those with RECHAR, which is helping to keep rates in his area down, he would be doing us a service.

Mr. Hughes: I referred to Yorkshire six minutes ago —it has taken the hon. Gentleman that long to work up a head of steam. The problem of RECHAR is that his political friends are stopping the money coming to this country. I refer to Bruce Millan, for instance.

It has been suggested that a London equalisation scheme could be brought back. It could not be; it was predicated on the business rate. The London discount scheme would just be regional banding in another guise. We need to look at needs multipliers and area cost adjustments, particularly for outer London—they are not very generous this year. We want them improved for the coming year and certainly by the first year of the council tax.

We must always remember what people will have to pay. Judged by that, the council tax will be seen as a fair system.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has been arguing against a regional band for London, thereby costing his constituents about £66 a year, based on average house prices in London.

I had to cut short my attendance at the Hairdressing Council dinner to speak in this debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "A fringe benefit?"] I can only say that the parting was such sweet sorrow.

I am in favour of a regional band for London, based on average house prices. The application of the Government's national bands will mean a loss of grant for London of about £300 million a year, which works out in terms of people's bills at about £60 per adult per year and £100 in some constituencies. Such a loss of grant for local authorities will mean either a higher council tax in London or more cuts in services. The assumption behind the Government's imposition on London of a national band is that Londoners can afford to pay more, which is not true. That assumption does not take into account Londoners' real disposable income. They have high mortgage costs, high rents, high transport costs and high bills of many varieties. House prices are about 45 per cent. higher than the national average, and that should be taken into account.

Londoners will be disadvantaged by the national band. It has been estimated that about 15·7 per cent. of them will be in the top two bands, compared with only 5·6 per cent. elsewhere. In the top three bands the contrast is even more stark: an estimated 55·1 per cent. are in this category in London and only 23·1 per cent. elsewhere. That means that Londoners will face higher council tax bills. The relationship between the council tax and people's ability to pay it was always shaky, and the imposition of a national band on London will make it even weaker. The very idea is absurd.

The end result will be that Londoners and London local authorities will pay millions more each year. That will hit Conservative and Labour areas in London. If the Government go ahead with the legislation, Conservative Members in London and the south-east will find that it will be difficult to reverse after the general election no matter which party is in power. Now is the time to put the case for a special banding system for London. London's case is being ignored by the Government. Its special factors should be recognised and it should have a regional banding system more reflective of its house prices.

Mr. Wilkinson: We have been privileged in the debate to hear some widely contrasting contributions. It is clear that the timetable is quite inadequate to deal with such important matters. I did not support the timetable motion and believe that my decision was right. It is quite preposterous that in 35 minutes we shall reach the end of this debate on banding, a matter of considerable interest to my constituents and, I suspect, to many other constituents in London and the south-east.

The speech by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was trenchant and honest, as one would expect from the hon. Gentleman. It was also clear and to the point, the simple point being that property values are so high in London and the south-east that in all equity there must be some special weighting to account for them. They are by no means compensated for by a disproportionately high level of real disposable income.

People in outer London have high commuting costs. Many of them have inordinately high mortgages around their necks and they are finding it extremely difficult to service them in this unusually long period of high interest rates. Instead of taking a Gadarene rush at this important matter of the reform of local government finance, the Government should have taken more time. They could have published a White Paper or set up a commission of inquiry. They should have taken account of all representations and consulted adequately. That would have enabled us to announce in our manifesto that when we were returned to office at the election we would take the most sensible course of action.

I am not expert enough to say which of the banding systems best fits the bill. Valuations should be individually conducted and a proper length of time should be taken over each one. If that were done, there would be far fewer appeals. There should be a weighting system to account for variations in house prices in different parts of the country and within different districts of the same region. The Department of the Environment purports to have knowledge enough at its fingertips to enable a standard spending assessment to be made that takes account of all sorts of individual circumstances in each local authority area. It is not beyond the wit of man to introduce a weighting system to deal with local variations.

In all logic we have already sold the pass by having separate bands for Scotland and Wales, and I am most worried about the current matter. Not only do we have inadequate time to deal with important issues, but there is a real risk that unless the other place does its job properly the measures will reach the statute book fundamentally flawed in terms of banding and the special problem of high property values in London and the south-east.

Unless my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench can produce a new formula to deal with this problem, I shall have to support the new clauses and I shall vote against the Government. I shall consider my position tomorrow on Third Reading in the light of what transpires when the House divides this evening.

9.30 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: There are some who think that there is no fun to be found in local government finance, but they can be proved wrong by this debate. I was at one stage tempted to forgo my chance to contribute to it because of the fascinating speeches of Members representing inner and outer London constituencies as they struggled to find some fairness, justice or logic in the banding system.

There are to be different banding systems for Scotland, Wales and England to take account of the fact that they are separate nations. That is all well and good, but if separate nationhood is to be recognised when it comes to banding, the wishes of the separate nations should be heeded when it comes to the taxation that they want. The proposed tax will take no account of regional variations. It is clear that London is out of kilter with much of the rest of England, if not the whole of it.

No hon. Member can pretend to be ignorant of London prices. After all, we all have to live in London in some form of property. My very ordinary London flat costs about half as much again as my flat in Glasgow, which is an

[Mrs. Fyfe]

infinitely superior building in which to live in every respect. Everybody knows that London prices are out of line with prices in the rest of the country.

The same could be said for many a flat in many English provincial cities. I am making a comparison not between Scotland and London but between London and most of the rest of the country. As I have said, London prices are out of line with those that prevail elsewhere. The answer does not lie in saying that London has some advantages that other parts of the country do not enjoy. Surely we should treat the entire country fairly when introducing a local taxation system. That fairness would ensure the awarding of Government grant on the basis of genuine calculated need and not on political prejudice against some local authorities while favouring others. If the Government were concerned to arrive at a proper system, they would accept that fairness was the answer.

In Committee, the Government rejected our fair rates proposals. Our response was, "What about having more bands to take account of the difficulties that arise because of the differences in property prices in London compared with other parts of the country?" That approach was also rejected, because it was getting too close to a rating system, but it would have had some logic, a factor that is entirely outwith the system with which we are now confronted.

In Committee, we asked how properties could be properly valued in the haphazard way that the Government proposed. We were told that properties would be valued a street at a time in England and Wales by estate agents. The Minister of State told us that aerial photography was the answer. He was talking about photographs that happen to be in the file, as it were. He did not propose that new photographs should be taken. I am not sure whether a distinction can be made between the two. The Minister seems to think that one can and that it is important, and I hope that he will explain his position this evening. Perhaps the explanation is that he does not want to have to face the electorate if it thinks that there is a spy in the sky taking photographs of people's properties. He knows that the public are likely to be more tolerant of existing photographs than the taking of new ones and the involvement of estate agents, for example.

It is clear that aerial photographs would be useful if they showed, for example, that a property had been extended at the back, but we have still to hear how such photographs would tell anyone how a property had been divided internally. There has been no explanation. As we pointed out, behind the frontage of a street of typical Victorian terraces, there may be properties of widely differing sizes, yet estate agencies may value them alike because they look alike.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that there may be environmental differences even within the same street—one house may be opposite a gas works and another opposite a park. The Minister smiled then, but will he reply to that point? Any member of the public might say to him, "If you had to choose between two properties in one street which were described in an estate agent's window, one of which faced the gas works and the other the park, and both were the same price, which would you choose?" He would not have to think long. It is obvious that what we are saying is common sense which everyone understands.

There are bound to be many appeals. The Government have denied that and said that that is not likely, given the number of bands and the wide differences between them. People who have worked for years in assessors' departments know better than that. They expect a large number of appeals to be made.

The banding system in Scotland is not adequate to meet property needs. Band H covers properties of £212,000 and upwards. Anyone can glance at the posh Sunday newspapers in Scotland and see the flattering photographs of the properties which get the biggest advertisements. Many are valued at about £150,000. Few people with properties in band H will pay three times as much as people with properties in the lowest band. This system is a tiny improvement on the poll tax. As the Secretary of State pointed out, the poll tax is unjust because a duke pays as much as a dustman. Now, that duke is to pay three times as much, but I do not think that many people will be impressed by that footling improvement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Not having sat through the hours that the Committee spent upstairs, I am slightly timorous about raising this subject on the Floor of the House but, having listened to speeches by some members of the Committee, I am glad that I did not sit through those hours.

When the council tax was proposed, many of my constituents and I were worried about the impact on the south-east. Yet the more I examine the subject, the more I feel that it would be a mistake to introduce a regional banding system and that it would certainly not address my constituents' concerns. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is on the Treasury Bench, because I was one of those who pressed him in the early days to introduce a higher band. I am pleased that that has happened, and feel that, to a great extent, that has met some of my constituents' concerns. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that people in the top band were "compressed"—I am happy with that word—in relation to lower bands. The limitation on the multiple which they will pay is sensible.

The point that I made in an intervention is equally important. Through the income and direct tax system, the people who earn the most will contribute more to the funding of local government than they have in the past. The amount raised locally through the council tax will be a relatively low percentage, and will certainly be lower than the percentage paid under the rates. That is important in an area such as mine.

We have had a continual problem in constituencies in the south-east in persuading my hon. Friend the Minister how to treat higher regional costs in relation to standard spending assessments. He has always been willing to meet delegations, but the problems will continue, despite the introduction of the new tax. Nevertheless, I am satisfied with the way in which the county of Surrey has come out in the calculations for the forthcoming year, and I am sure that that will continue under the council tax. I am delighted that in areas such as mine the system of rebates for those on low incomes will continue.

It is important to bear in mind that the differences between various parts of the country are often not as great as those within a particular constituency and we should consider that issue in our deliberations on the council tax. The ability to treat local variations is very important, especially in the current process of valuations, and I hope

that the amenity and other values of various local residences will be taken into account. Again, that is more in the interests of my constituents than the imposition of a regional system.

A regional banding system would contain enormous anomalies. I represent a constituency outside London and I am glad that no part of it was under the old Greater London council. If the royal borough of Kingston will take its dirty hands off houses in Long Ditton which it is now trying to claim under the Boundary Commission, no part of my constituency will ever be within boundaries of the old or any new GLC.

As the Minister rightly said in a statement on 20 November, there is no doubt that

"in Kingston-Upon-Thames a couple in a four bedroomed house would pay £88 less than their equivalents in next door Elmbridge",

part of which is in my constituency. That would be the effect of the proposals put forward by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. Such a difference is not acceptable. They are not the issues that we should discuss when considering the way in which the council tax will be implemented.

It is important that a house worth, say, £200,000 should have the same bill throughout the country for a given level of services. I am not interested in the situation in Wales or Scotland as they have their own systems of delegated government and their own systems of finance. *[Interruption.]* I would not presume to speak on behalf of any Members of Parliament from Scotland. Therefore, I am not sure that I would wish them to presume to speak on my behalf.

As a Member of Parliament for a constituency in the south-east, I believe that the main problems that I identified in the council tax and the way in which it would be implemented have been met by my colleagues on the Front Bench. The problems were of immense concern to my constituents. I have gradually been able to convince them that the issues that I have raised this evening—such as the new band of £320,000—were the correct ones to be resolved.

When the council tax comes to be implemented, I beg my colleagues on the Front Bench to remember that we do not want any last-minute changes, such as extra help for London. Many of my constituents believe that Londoners get a good deal in many ways, as I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). That may not necessarily be appreciated by hon. Members whose constituencies are in London, but it is certainly appreciated by hon. Members whose constituencies border on London.

The key issue for any Government is to ensure that local councils do not overspend and the key issue for any local Member of Parliament is to ensure that the efficiency with which councils deliver services is of the highest quality. I believe that we can achieve that through Conservative councils across the south-east and I oppose the system of regional banding.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has failed to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but let it stand on the record that he has pursued privately with Ministers the interests of his constituents most assiduously.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) has pursued his constituents' interests by urging Ministers to visit the Isles of Scilly, which I had the pleasure of doing recently. He believes that the problems of the Isles of Scilly, which have high property prices due to people coming in from outside, are unique. I am not sure that they are unique, but we are aware of them.

I can tell my hon. Friend that, where a number of properties are owned by people from outside the islands and if those properties are second homes, the fact that only half of the tax will be payable by those taxpayers will be taken into account in the assessment of the tax base of the authority. That will, of course, be reflected in the amount of grant that the Isles of Scilly can receive. I hope that that will be some consolation to him.

I say to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) that ministers of religion and the Churches in general have made representations. Some of the Churches have suggested that they should be able to pay the council taxes of ministers of religion en bloc and then divide that by equal amounts among the ministers of religion so that people would not pay more for living in an especially large vicarage. We shall be interested in pursuing that point with them.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who is meant to be the finance spokesman for his party, showed a 100 per cent. misunderstanding of the system when he said that his constituents would look across to Scotland and see there a more favourable banding system. The system in Scotland is less favourable in that people will reach the higher band at a lower value of property, because there are more people in the lowest bands. The important point is that the amount that is contributed from local government finance in Scotland is less, and the amount contributed from local taxation in Wales is less again. Different bandings in those different places are therefore appropriate.

9.45 pm

A £50,000 house in Scotland would be in band D, but it would be in band B in England. However, the house in Scotland would pay £270, and the one in England would pay £311 because of the difference in the amount that is raised locally.

My hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Esher (Mr. Taylor) were right to point out the difficulties of a regional banding system. How right they were to point out that it is not only in the south-east that there are expensive properties, and that there are often variations within regions which are as striking and as dramatic as the variations between them.

If we gave discounts in London, that would be unfair. It would mean that in every band there would be lower bills for a standard level of service. It would mean, for example, that in the lowest band, in London, there would be lower bills for a standard level of service than there were anywhere else. It would mean that we would sweep to one side the fact that the variations within London are as dramatic as the variations between London and other places.

Within one borough, between Mayfair and Paddington, for example, the difference in property prices is enormous. From the east of London to the west, the difference is enormous. I ask, for example, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) whether it would be fair to give all Londoners a discount on that basis and for the people of London, uniquely, to pay less for their services in the lowest band while no one else had that benefit.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Portillo: No.

I argued in a letter to my hon. Friends that there are higher disposable incomes in London. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood, who spoke in a previous debate, was kind enough to put part of that letter on the record.

There used to be a rateable value discount in London, and I know that some of my hon. Friends hanker to go back to that. In the proposed council tax, we have put in place the idea that the amounts of tax that are paid should be compressed. We propose that only three times as much should be payable by those who live in the most valuable properties as by those in the least valuable properties in any area. The effect of the compression of ratios is expecially helpful to all the places, whether London or the Isles of Scilly, where property prices are unusually high.

I sometimes think that my hon. Friends have not fully recognised the effect of that compression of the tax rates, although clearly my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, when he began to compare the council tax bills that are in prospect with the very much higher rates bills that used to be paid by his constituents and, even more, by the constituents of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), he was firmly on to the point that the council tax achieves what is necessary—that is, higher bills for people who live in higher-valued properties, but not bills that are disproportionate or excessive, such as we had under the rating system and such as those to which the Labour party wishes us to return.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I am afraid that we are under a time limit.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was less than straightforward with us this evening. He told us that he was committed to a system of fairness. As far as I am aware, the Labour party is not committed to a system of regional banding. The Labour party is certainly committed to the principle of unlimited tax bills in respect of the more expensive properties, and longs for a return to the sort of envy tax that we had under the rating system, whereby people in more expensive properties—whether they are widows or people living on their own and irrespective of whether or not they have high incomes—are made to pay in relation to the value of their properties.

Not only does the Labour party propose an unlimited tax; it proposes an additional tier of government at regional level, and says that that regional tier of government should be able to raise income tax. God help us if we ever have the Labour party imposing regional income tax and unlimited bills on higher valued properties and—what is more—if we have no capping on local authorities, so that any authority is free to set whatever level of taxation it chooses.

The hon Member for Brightside was very cross about the valuation exercise that we propose to conduct. He was cross that we intended to save £100 million on the valuation process because he loves public spending; anything that is good value for money is a disappointment to him. Just as he loves public spending, so he hates the private sector. Therefore, the idea that valuers should be chosen from the private sector to conduct the valuation and so save the taxpayer money is anathema to him, and has excited him more than somewhat.

The hon. Gentleman caricatured the valuation process as broad-brush. It will not be broad-brush. It will take account of local factors and of the difference between properties that overlook the park and properties next to the disco. By using private sector valuers who have local knowledge, we shall make it possible for such factors to be taken into account, to achieve value for money and to conduct the process quickly. That means that, for the Conservatives, the introduction of a new system of taxation in 1993 is a reality, whereas for the Labour party it is cloud cuckoo land, and Labour Members know that perfectly well.

The hon. Member for Brightside was less than straightforward with the people of Barnet. I can tell him that they will not be consoled by his promise that they would not all be in the same band if they knew the truth, which is that he would sting them for vast sums of the sort that were dragged out of people under the rating system —the sums which brought the rates system down and which at one stage led his party and himself to denounce the rating system as unfair. We stuck to the belief that that system was unfair whereas the Opposition have jettisoned it.

Let there be no doubt about it: the system that the Labour party proposes is massively unfair. The hon. Member for Brightside can only say that, for a property worth five times as much, the Bill would not be five times as high, just as he told us before that the number of Labour Members advocating non-payment was not 30. He cannot tell us how many times it was, and he cannot tell us how many times greater the bill would be in Barnet. He is the "not 30, not five" shadow spokesman. He cannot produce more precise figures than that.

The tax that we propose is partly a property tax and partly a personal tax, and we believe that the property element should be a tax on the enjoyment of property, which can only be related to the actual value of property. We propose a fair system, with discounts to single people, students and student nurses and rebates for people on low incomes. We propose a comprehensible system and one that recognises that, while there should be a relationship to the value of the property, there should also be a compressing of the tax bands so that we ask more of people in higher-valued properties, but do not subject them to the excessive bills to which the Labour party would have us return. For all those reasons, I ask my hon. Friends to reject the new clause.

Mr. Murphy: Not so long ago, the Minister spoke with equal passion about the merits of the poll tax. Even he has now accepted that the poll tax in Britain and Wales was an abject and complete failure because it was unfair and was unrelated to people's ability to pay. Worse still, from the Government's point of view, it was perceived by the majority of the people as being unfair and that, essentially, was its downfall.

Earlier this evening, the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said that the question of valuation bands was not an issue. What is an issue, of course, is the unfairness of any local government tax. The tax that the Government introduced three years ago was above all unfair and unrelated to people's ability to pay. With its banding and valuation lists, the council tax is equally

unfair. I am afraid that the credibility of local government will be put at risk because of the constant changes in local government finances that have occurred over the past few months and years.

The eight bands that the Government have proposed for Wales are disproportionate. The highest band pays only three times more than the lowest band—although one property may be worth £240,000 compared with £30,000. We are proposing a 14-band system for Wales that reflects the ability to pay and is more closely linked to people's income. More importantly, it also follows the changeability of the housing market in England and Wales. The only fair answer to the question of valuation is that each property should be individually valued. That is the fairest way.

In Britain, all the professional bodies, including the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Institute of Rating and Valuation, have all said that the valuation and banding system proposed by the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities is wrong. All the local authorities in Wales have said that the bands are unfair and unjust. That view was echoed by the Assembly of Welsh Counties and the Council of Welsh Districts. They specifically wanted a band lower than the £30,000 band and more bands between £90,000 and £120,000 and above £240,000.

What logic and fairness is there in the present system which doubles from £120,000 to £240,000 in respect of the commencement point of the top band in Wales while only increasing the range of payment by one fifth between the bottom and the top bands? There is nothing logical or fair in that ludicrous system.

The councils in Wales asked the Government to undertake a study of the relationship between capital values in Wales and household gross and disposable incomes. That study could easily have been carried out with the assistance—if they had agreed—of the Building Societies Association, the Inland Revenue and the valuation office. They could have compared purchase prices, incomes, deposits and capital values. However, the Government decided to ignore the wishes and fears of the local authorities in Wales and elsewhere.

The Welsh Office refused to carry out the studies purely for electoral and dogmatic reasons. The Government still maintain the view that they held when the poll tax was introduced. The council tax is no different. Under both taxes, the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer.

There are no practical problems with the introduction of 14 bands in Wales. There would be no increase in the workload of local authorities and there would be no delay in introducing a new system. The system would be fairer and there would be fewer appeals.

The poll tax failed essentially because of its unfairness. It also failed because of the cost to people of this country. In Wales alone, £100 million was squandered on the poll tax to set it up, to maintain it, and to sweeten it. That was a disgraceful squandering and waste of public money. The Government might as well have dumped £100 million in the Bristol channel for what good it did to the people of Wales. The Prime Minister said that the poll tax was bad because of its uncollectability. The same can be said of the council tax.

As the Government prefer to listen to their party managers rather than to local authorities, they are failing to listen with regard to the council tax. As a consequence, they will fail to win the general election. I urge the House to support new clause 9 and the consequent amendments.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 233, Noes 329.

Division No. 28] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.

McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin

Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No.101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

BROADCASTING

That the draft Broadcasting (Programme Contractors' Additional Payments) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

HOUSING (SCOTLAND)

That the Clackmannan District Council (Vesting of Central Regional Council Land) (Scotland) Order 1991, dated 19th November 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

EDUCATION

That the draft Education Support Grants (Amendment) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 12th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

LEGAL PROFESSION

That the draft Registered Foreign Lawyers Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 18th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Pensioners

10.14 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I wish to present the following petition:

The Humble Petition of members of Senior Citizens Clubs and residents of Aged Persons dwellings in Halifax and Sowerby Bridge in West Yorkshire showeth that they support Age Concern's Campaign for a better deal for Pensioners which asks for the Christmas Allowance to be increased to £50 and for free bus passes and TV licences for all old age pensioners.

It is time to listen to the elderly of this country. With all the talk about citizenship, I hope that we can at least listen to our elderly citizens.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House takes notice of this Campaign and urges the Government to take action as soon as possible.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Cambuslang and Rutherglen

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): In 1975 the royal borough of Rutherglen and the district council of Cambuslang lost their local independence when they were incorporated into the city of Glasgow district council. We have not adapted to that change and in the past couple of months we have had public meetings in the constituency which have been attended by more than 3,000 people. The petition before the House was signed, in the space of three weeks, by more than 12,000 people. Therefore, there is an obvious demand in our area for a more localised council which is not part of the giant set-up of Glasgow district council.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Scotland to bring forward proposals for the establishment of a Local Council covering the communities of Cambuslang and Rutherglen.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Poultry Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The reason for this debate is to seek action for a major sector of agriculture.

Poultry is the most popular meat in Britain, selling one and a half times more than beef and as much as pork and lamb combined. Last year, the poultry sector had a combined production value of £1,766 million. It employs about 50,000 people, mostly based in rural areas. It uses 30 per cent. of the total United Kingdom feed wheat harvest and therefore directly affects other sectors of agriculture.

The poultry industry receives no direct subsidies or income support under the common agricultural policy. It is highly competitive within Europe, but, unfortunately, it is now suffering job losses and is threatened by cut-price imports from the third world. Of the poultrymeat now available in the United Kingdom, 18 per cent. is imported at a price that is between 5p and 6p in the pound below that obtained through British production.

The problem is being exacerbated by European legislation on poultrymeat inspection charges, which has been implemented in five out of the 12 European Community countries. The United Kingdom is alone in failing to provide financial assistance to reduce the charges to its industry.

Local authorities have been burdened with the responsibility for the regulations, for the collection of the charges for the inspections as well as for all aspects of food health. I submit that that system is not good for the local authorities or for the poultry industry. It has meant that the United Kingdom's cost burden on production is 4p per pound compared with our French competitors. I am told that the Food Safety Act 1990 has added another 1/2p in the pound to United Kingdom costs compared to those of the French industry.

Government policy has created significant on-costs to the poultry industry, thereby widening the trade gap, encouraging lower priced imports and inhibiting the export competitiveness of British companies. Any loss in home production will be immediately replaced by imports, and 18 per cent. of United Kingdom poultry consumed already comes mainly from France, Denmark and Holland. There are ominous signs of import penetration of meat from eastern Europe, Brazil and Thailand at dramatically lower production costs.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Has my hon. Friend seen the letter from Mr. Stephen, the group director of Grampian Country Foods Ltd., one of the fastest growing and most enterprising poultry companies? Mr. Stephen argues that the imports from Thailand and Brazil are entering at about 60 per cent. of the production costs in the United Kingdom because those countries have been able to take advantage of access to exports of subsidised European Community grain.

Mr. Welsh: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Those enterprising companies are now faced with unfair competition. They believe that, given a level playing field, they have the quality to take on any competitors and win.

No information is available about the British Government's action to ensure that imported food products conform to United Kingdom safety standards.

Because of the extra burdens placed on the United Kingdom industry, as imports grow the Government's problem in maintaining safety standards will increase. The Government have rightly laid down those standards for our industry, but they are not on a level playing field.

The Government's present policy gives us the worst of both worlds, especially in the context of a net £6 billion trade deficit in food and drink products. On the Government's insistence, the poultry industry has taken on board all aspects of food quality, hygiene and safety as required under the Food Safety Act 1990, as well as poultry inspection costs. They did so while recognising that those huge on-costs would rapidly lead to an uncompetitive position. Such a position has existed for the past 12 months, and unless a level playing field is created to allow that non-subsidised, professional part of the food sector more freedom to compete, there will be major redundancies and reduced job opportunities, and rural communities will be destroyed. The net result will be an inevitable increase in imported poultry.

Is it the Government's desired policy to oversee the demise of the poultry industry? If not, will the Parliamentary Secretary explain what the Government intend to do about it? Animal welfare standards must be encouraged Communitywide. Severe welfare standards or those that are not replicated raise United Kingdom costs of production and lead to lost export markets, while home market competitors use methods and practices that have rightly been banned here.

My sympathies rest with the animal welfare organisations, which also have a duty to ensure that reforms here do not handicap our industry, or encourage or reward bad practice elsewhere. What progress are the Government making with other Governments? Will they ensure that Europewide improvements are instituted at a pace that will not handicap our industry while it adjusts to improved animal welfare standards? Will the Parliamentary Secretary assure me that there will be a level playing field?

The egg sector, too, is important, with an annual production valued at some £500 million. The egg sector has been particularly damaged by outside interference. The Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary association agreements have caused poultry levy reductions of up to 60 per cent. over a three-year period. Linked with large amounts of American inward investment, that will put enormous pressure on the United Kingdom poultry industry, which must result in severe cost-cutting exercises. It must mean redundancies, and knock-on losses for cereal producers—quite apart from the obvious problems that loom in regard to the GATT negotiations.

Do the Government wish some 20 per cent. of all the eggs that are sold in this country to come from Poland or Hungary in three years' time? How will such imports be dealt with under the salmonella and welfare regulations? What tests will they undergo, and what security will British consumers be given?

Despite higher feed costs, in most years the United Kingdom industry can compete effectively with its European competitors. It usually supplies 98 per cent. of the home market—or did, until that outburst from the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), about which the less said the better: in 1990, the figure fell to 93 per cent., and the industry is only now managing to fight the imports.

I question the basis of the Government's present policy. Let me refer the Minister to the evidence submitted by the public health laboratory service to the Select Committee on Agriculture on 11 January 1989. Paragraph 17.3 refers specifically to the eradication of salmonella pullorum as the basis for similar flock destruction to eliminate salmonella enteritidis—PT4. Sir Donald Acheson, the Department of Health's chief medical officer, said that the solution lay less in end use in kitchen and cooking processes than in

"control of the infection at source".

If we combine those statements, it seems that the policy of flock slaughter is the Government's answer. As a result, an enormous burden of testing and inspection has been placed on the industry. The Minister's own departmental evidence to the Committee stated that salmonella enteritidis was ubiquitous. According to paragraph 18,

> "Salmonella organisms are present in many areas of the environment and are persistent. There is no technically sound method which is certain to eliminate them from laying houses. Even after very thorough cleansing and disinfection, salmonella may recur. Because of this, a policy of slaughtering flocks with the aim of eradicating salmonella would not have a realistic prospect of success. There would be a serious risk that even after an infected flock had been slaughtered out and the premises disinfected, subsequent flocks in the same building could become infected from the environment."

That evidence, given to the Minister by his own Department, was ignored in the policy that the Government subsequently produced.

That MAFF/Department of Health view, so clearly stated on 11 January 1989, leaves us wondering what has changed since then—apart from the fact that more than £4 million has been paid out in slaughter compensation for more than 2·5 million birds that have been slaughtered. The Minister ignored the advice of his own Department, and that led to a slaughter policy that is wrongly founded and bound to fail.

Why did the PHLS use the example of a host-specific organism such as pullorum as the model to eradicate enteritidis, which is well documented as a non-host-specific and ubiquitous organism? Given that it is a specific phage type, on what evidence of phage-typing was it established that type 4 was specific to poultry? It is well documented that the phage type does not appear to affect the host specificity of other salmonella strains.

For example, pullorum has several phage types, all specific to poultry. Typhi has many types specific to humans. There is no evidence that enteritidis phage type 4 is confined to poultry in the same way that pullorum is. It is perfectly logical to conclude that type 4 is widespread not only in other avian species but in other animals and in the general environment. If salmonella E affects humans, why does it not also affect poultry? After all, we are discussing living organisms with their own defence mechanisms.

While more cases than hitherto of salmonella E in humans have been traced to foods containing eggs, usually uncooked or partly cooked, the great majority of these cases have involved food prepared outside the home and frequently associated with poor hygiene and/or handling practices.

The incidence of naturally infected eggs is low. A 1989 survey of 300 flocks in Canada led Agriculture Canada to conclude that less than one egg in a million would be thus infected. The natural defences possessed by the egg militate strongly against widespread infection or multiplication of the organism in the intact egg. The risk to consumers of being infected with salmonella E as a result

[Mr. Welsh]

of eating eggs at home is almost zero. That was never the impression produced by the massive public fuss following the statement by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South.

The risk is somewhat increased outside the home, but it remains extremely low compared with many other risks to which consumers expose themselves daily. Given the scientific knowledge available, the eradication of any salmonella species, especially one as ubiquitous as this, is not feasible in the short term. Even if it were posssible, there is no assurance that such a reduction among laying hens would be reflected in lower numbers of outbreaks in the human population.

Having disturbed the balance of natural immunity, the Swedes, who attempted such a programme, now apparently find that the level of salmonella in their population is higher than ever, and much higher than this country's.

The eradication policy was based on a generalisation and a previous example that was invalid—it did not compare like with like.

Will the Government abandon their slaughter and inspection policy and look again at a proper scientific investigation into these forms of salmonella? Now that the fuss has died down, in the calm and quiet that prevails, will they look again at the problem with a proper scientific investigation to find out the truth? It is crucial to get to the truth of the matter, because the egg industry may have been cruelly and unfairly misused on insufficient and hurried evidence.

I have tried to highlight the dangers of an uneven playing field for this important industry. I have questioned the Government's policy on salmonella and eggs. I have questioned its damaging effect on poultrymeat and especially the effects of inspection charges. Both factors have been exacerbated by the fact that the Food Safety Act applies only to the United Kingdom.

These aspects add major costs throughout the industry. That will lead to loss of market share and to imports that are not subject to similar impositions and safety provisions. The Government created this problem; what do they intend to do to provide solutions? The industry and I look forward to the Minister's detailed answers.

10.33 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) has made a series of points about the poultry industry. I shall arrange for my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) to answer the points to do with public health if I cannot cover them this evening, and I shall attempt to deal with the points relating specifically to the industry.

During the salmonella crisis, consumer confidence completely collapsed. There followed a catastrophic decline in sales. The Government were not able to work out a response at their leisure. We had a crisis that had to be dealt with and that is why the Government took immediate and far-reaching action. Failure to do so would have meant that the industry would have died in the water. It is significant that there has been a great recovery in confidence in the industry because of the measures that we have taken. It is a credit to the industry that it co-operated in the implementation of those measures and that so many producers recognised the need for urgency.

I recall the Select Committee to which the hon. Gentleman refers because I was a member of it. The evidence to the Committee and the Committee's report endorsed in broad measure the steps that were taken by the Government to deal with the crisis.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Why did not the Government feel confident enough to respond immediately to the crisis? Given all the information that was available to the Government, they should surely have been able to obviate the whole problem, which arose because of careless remarks by a junior Minister.

Mr. Curry: The Government cannot respond at 10 minutes' notice to a collapse that spread across the industry and affected consumer confidence throughout the country. Most of the reproaches against the Government are that we responded too quickly with measures that were too far reaching. Most of the pressures from the industry were directed at trying to unwind some of the measures. As I shall shortly explain, in so far as the Government think it prudent to do so, we have pursued that policy.

The hon. Member for Angus, East has raised some important issues. I accept the dilemma about animal welfare. We have a choice. We can say that we will do nothing until there is a Community-wide agreement. The result of that is that measures, which I am sure every hon. Member considers to be important, would not be taken. For example, if we had said that we would not outlaw veal crates until they were outlawed throughout the Community, they would still not be outlawed. If we had not taken measures on the tethering system for pigs until a ban was agreed in the Community, pigs would still be tethered.

There comes a point at which we must ask whether these issues matter sufficiently to us to ask our industry to see to them, knowing that measures will not be taken elsewhere however hard we try to bring them about. The answer to whether we do our utmost to ensure that Community harmonisation produces the standards that we observe in the United Kingdom is yes. However, the hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot guarantee the outcome because matters are decided by majority vote. An animal welfare issue arose at a recent Council meeting and for the first time the United Kingdom voted against the package because the measures did not go far enough. I am unable to guarantee that we can deliver in such circumstances, but the dilemma is real, as the hon. Gentleman realises.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend. Does he accept that, while we are educating the rest of Europe, our producers will be going bankrupt?

Mr. Curry: Much depends on the circumstances. I do not accept that our producers necessarily go bankrupt. In some areas of activity our producers have a good marketing campaign as a result of our measures. I know from talking to supermarket groups that pork from animals reared in what I might call pig-friendly conditions is taking a growing share of the market. I appreciate that one can argue about the definition of free-range because the term is covered by a series of Community definitions,

but free-range chickens are selling in increasing numbers. One should not always regard such matters in a negative way, because there is often a marketing advantage.

The hon. Member for Angus, East is a reasonable man. How do we deal with eastern Europe? It will not go away. The most logical way to help people there is to accept what they can produce. But we must strike a balance between what we can accept from that area and the impact of those imports on our industry. The hon. Gentleman represents a Scottish constituency and knows the difficulties that arose on Tayside in the soft fruit industry. In that example an association agreement has put down some firm signposts for a trade for which we had to rely on recent safeguard action by the Commission. None of us can ignore these dilemmas.

I shall try to deal with the salmonella issue. The Government are keeping under review the whole package of measures to control the problem of salmonella in eggs and poultry. We have introduced some changes which have sought to ease the burden on producers without compromising the protection of public health. In particular, we have recently agreed, with the support of the Department of Health, to allow eggs from infected flocks to go for pasteurisation in approved plants under strictly controlled conditions. While we are satisfied that the pasteurisation process, properly carried out, is effective in producing a safe product, it must be for the producer and the industry in this country to consider the use that they wish to make of such arrangements. We are exploring the possibility of exporting eggs from infected flocks for pasteurisation abroad.

It is important that the industry has its own decisions to take. The hon. Gentleman will know, for example, that we have banned the use of specified bovine offals in feed. The fact is, however, that the United Kingdom Agricultural Supply Trade Association, the feed compounders and the retail trade have introduced what is effectively a voluntary ban on the use of offals. That is not something that the Government impose. It is something that the trade has decided that the consumer would be reassured with and, therefore, it does not have a statutory backing. The trade decides at the end of the day that it needs to be able to reassure the consumer.

Subject to the possibility of greater interest in pasteurisation in future, I have to say that at present we see no viable alternative to slaughter for infected breeding and laying flocks. It has yet to be established that antibiotic or other treatment can be effective in restoring an infected flock to a state in which it can safely be allowed to return to production. As the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, the use of antibiotics brings its own problems of residues, for example. We are considering, with the Department of Health, what further work could realistically be done in this area.

For the longer term, research work is in hand on the possible development of a vaccine to protect poultry flocks against salmonella infection throughout their laying period. Much work remains to be done before we can expect adequately to evaluate the practical feasibility of such an approach.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the actions of other member states. Several states have taken measures in recent years to tackle the problem of salmonella—especially salmonella enteritidis—in poultry flocks. There are similarities and differences with our own approach. In France, for example, which has been cited frequently, controls have been operated through a voluntary scheme, which has been taken up by the vast majority of producers. Originally confined to breeders and hatcheries, the scheme has recently been extended to all levels of the laying flock. The individual producer undertakes to abide by specific codes of practice and to submit his flocks to regular tests. Should there be evidence of salmonella pullorum or salmonella enteritidis, he has to accept slaughter of the flocks concerned. In return, the state undertakes to contribute to the costs of the tests and to pay compensation.

In the Netherlands——

Mr. Andrew Welsh: There is a massive feeling in the industry that if salmonella enteritidis is ubiquitous, a host of inspectors will find it and slaughter. That is the point that I was trying to get across to the Minister. The fundamental premise on which the Government's policy is based is wrong. Pullorum was more specific. Enteritidis is ubiquitous. There is a strong feeling in the industry that if there is an extension to the whole of the Common Market, a host of inspectors will find and slaughter. I ask the Government fundamentally to examine the policy and to ensure that it is based on a proper scientific evidential basis.

Mr. Curry: Our scientific advice is that we are pursuing the right policy. As I have been explaining, our colleagues on the continent appear to be pursuing the same course. France has a slaughter policy, as have the Dutch.

Perhaps it will be helpful if I outline the proposals that are coming from the Commission, which in due course will be European-wide. The Commission has published a draft regulation for the control of salmonella and certain other zoonoses throughout the European Community. It has been drafted largely in response to pressure from the United Kingdom for salmonella controls to be introduced on a Community-wide basis. That is precisely because we recognise the validity of the demands that there should be a level playing field.

There are, however, three important differences from the United Kingdom measures, and in some respects the Commission would go further than us. First, the proposals provide for the control of salmonella in commercial laying flocks, as in the United Kingdom at present, but not coming into operation until July 1994. Secondly, the proposal requires the testing of broilers and breeding flocks for salmonella and heat treatment of infected flocks whereas the United Kingdom's testing and slaughter measures apply only at parent and grandparent broiler breeder levels. Thirdly, the proposal requires the testing of poultry compound feeding stuffs for salmonella, which is not the case in the United Kingdom, where certain high-risk feed ingredients are required to be tested, with codes of practice operating for the control of salmonella in feeding stuffs and raw materials.

Under the proposal, flocks which are found to be infected will be subject to movement restrictions and their eggs may be used only in the manufacture of pasteurised egg products.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Surely the one action that could be taken immediately is to alter the basis of meat inspection from local government to national Government. That happens throughout the European Community, including Northern Ireland. That measure

[Mr. Kenneth Hind]

would remove the 4p in the pound disadvantage that the British producer faces compared with producers in the rest of the EC.

Mr. Curry: As my hon. Friend knows, we conducted a review of the meat inspection system. That review has concluded and we are considering its proposals. I hope that, when we can make those proposals public, they will be well received by the industry. There is much work to do. The disparity in the charges of local authorities is of concern.

The Commission's proposals are now out for consultation with the industry and other interested bodies. We shall take careful account of what they say when we begin to negotiate in Brussels. An agreement on an EC-wide arrangement is an important priority for the United Kingdom. We hope that the Portuguese presidency will aim for discussions early next year, but I assure the House that it is amongst the top priorities for our presidency. In the meantime, for reasons which I explained, we do not consider that there is a viable alternative to the slaughter policy.

We cannot compromise on matters affecting food safety. I recognise the problems that the industry faces. We are in constant touch with it. We listen hard to its concerns and do our best to respond to them, in terms of the way in which we manage activities and in response to the wider European issue. The argument for the level playing field is powerful, and we shall do our best to achieve it, provided it is borne in mind that in matters of overwhelming importance the United Kingdom must retain the discretion to act in the interests of public safety and the industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 17 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Defence-related Jobs

1. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of jobs in the north-west region of England which are related to defence requirements.

7. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the impact upon jobs in the defence industry of his Department's plans for the future.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): Historical figures, broken down by region, for the number of jobs related to defence requirements are published in volume 2 of the 1991 "Statement on the Defence Estimates", a copy of which is in the Library.

The future level of employment in the defence industry is a matter for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned.

Mr. Lamond: That answer is in line with what we have had before, so it is not unexpected. If we are prepared to participate in a European bank for reconstruction and development to help countries in eastern Europe which are facing the same problems as Britain's defence industry workers, could we not at least set up a defence diversification agency to help the tens of thousands of workers in the north-west and throughout the United Kingdom who will be thrown on to the scrap heap?

Mr. Clark: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, which is shared by my Department, but I do not think that on reflection he would want the defence industry to be singled out for particular treatment from our other manufacturing industries. We are particularly concerned about the anxiety and deprivation that result when people lose their jobs as a result of the changing international climate. I am in constant touch with defence industry leaders through the National Defence Industries Council and the Defence Manufacturers Association, and my Department participates in the regional seminar staged by the DTI for small and medium-sized defence industries. An agency such as the hon. Gentleman suggests would do little more than we are already doing unless it were funded and empowered to make grants and loans which, as he will realise, is not a practical suggestion, because it would mean singling out a particular sector of British industry.

Mr. Bill Michie: Opposition Members will obviously be disappointed at the Minister's reply which is characterised by his usual laid-back approach to the matter. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that our competitors in Europe and elsewhere will ensure that whatever happens to future orders their defence industries will be compensated by alternative diversification? Once again, the Government seem not to give a damn what happens to our skills and to the jobs of the future. As always since the Government came into power, we are in the slow lane.

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman's question is completely misleading. Among our so-called competitors, the United States and west German defence industries are suffering much heavier job losses than we are. The job losses in United Kingdom defence industries as a result of the change of emphasis in British procurement are as nothing compared with those that would be suffered under the Labour party's defence policy—if so dignified a term can be used for something so confused, contradictory and misleading. Such job losses would be horrific and far more widespread.

Mr. Dover: My right hon. Friend will no doubt be aware of the importance of British Aerospace as a major employer in the defence industry in the north-west. Will he accept its deep gratitude for the way in which his officials are explaining his Department's needs so as to ensure that the right commercial decisions are made about the markets to go for in future?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend makes an important point about markets. It ill behoves Opposition Members constantly, for ideological reasons, to decry my Department's sponsorship of the sale of arms to friendly countries wishing to defend themselves within the terms of, for example, article 51 of the United Nations charter.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is not my hon. Friend delighted with the $450 million order—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is most unseemly.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: —that British Aerospace has just won for 20 RJ70s that is especially designed for the United States market and fills a niche that no one else could have filled?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that good example of the special skills and capabilities that the British defence industry still has, and which I do not doubt will serve it well in future in both domestic and export markets.

Mr. O'Neill: The Minister has repeatedly said that he does not want to single out the defence industry for special consideration. He surely recollects the precedents set in the steel and coal industries, in which the Community was involved in Europewide initiatives to limit the impact of the decline in demand for the products of the companies concerned. If the Minister is not prepared to shoulder the burden on behalf of the British taxpayer, is the time not right for him to work with the European Community in establishing a Europewide diversification initiative?

Mr. Clark: I have not heard of such an initiative, but if one were to be promulgated by the Community, we would consider it carefully.

Surplus Land

2. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on his policy regarding the disposal of land surplus to his Department's requirements.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): It is Government policy that the defence estate should be no larger than necessary for defence purposes. We continually seek opportunities for rationalisation and the release of land surplus to our requirements. To ensure that the best return is achieved for the taxpayer, it is our normal policy to offer property not needed by the services for sale on the open market.

Mr. Hunter: May I ask my hon. Friend urgently to investigate why his Department declines to release to Basingstoke and Deane borough council land in the village of Bramley that is earmarked for a playing field under our local plan? Is he aware of the concern and indignation that perceived unwarranted delay causes?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, of course. My hon. Friend will know that that is part of a parcel of land of about 45 acres in total. We are in negotiations with the local authority for planning permission, and we hope to obtain it for housing on some of that land. We are also talking to potential purchasers. I know of my hon. Friend's concern, and I will make sure that my officials are also made aware of it.

Mr. Viggers: Where the Ministry of Defence has occupied land for generations or even for centuries, will my hon. Friend ensure that in disposing of it the Ministry will work as closely as possible with local authorities to ensure that it is developed consistently in accordance with the wishes of local people?

Mr. Hamilton: I can certainly reassure my hon. Friend in that regard. To enhance the value of any land of which we are disposing, we often need planning permission, which we can obtain only with the help of local authorities. We therefore work very closely with them.

Dr. Godman: Will there be any disposal of surplus Ministry of Defence land in Scotland, or is it likely that, due to the redeployment of British forces from Germany, the Ministry will be looking to purchase land in Scotland?

Mr. Hamilton: It is difficult to say where we might want to purchase land. Where we have training areas, we are keen to enlarge them if possible. Many of the weapons systems that we use now are bigger than before and have longer ranges, and so on. Also, a degree of armour will return from Germany which will need space for use in training. We do not have a closed mind, but we should like to rationalise our training areas, enlarging some that we already have and disposing of smaller ones.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: When the Broughton moor site in my constituency is disposed of, will its environmental sensitivity be taken into account?

Mr. Hamilton: I sincerely hope that the hon. Gentleman would pay tribute to the Ministry of Defence for owning more sites of special scientific interest than anyone other than the national parks. We are extremely good stewards of the land that we have. As to Broughton moor, we shall do all that we can to take environmental considerations into account.

Dame Janet Foulkes: May I impress on my hon. Friend that in Plymouth we are tired of waiting what seems like years for land to be released? All that we ask is for sufficient land so that we may then help ourselves.

Mr. Hamilton: I am well aware of the anxiety of people in Plymouth to get on with the whole business of the release and development of Ministry of Defence land. We are doing what we can, but I take my hon. Friend's point that it has been an ongoing saga for some time now.

British Nuclear Deterrent

3. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the cost of refitting Polaris submarines in the current financial year.

4. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the British nuclear deterrent.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): HMS Renown, now nearing the completion of her refit, is the only Polaris submarine under refit during the current year. The cost of the work to date has been about £150 million.

Britain's credible and effective independent nuclear deterrent is the ultimate guarantee of our security. The strategic deterrent will continue to be provided by the Polaris force until Trident comes into service from the mid-1990s.

Mr. Cryer: Is not the Polaris fleet plagued with cracks to the nuclear reactor, and has not the game been given away by Mr. Reg Farmer, a former member of the Ministry of Defence safety of nuclear warships committee? Is it not time that the Secretary of State came clean and admitted to the House that the boats are dangerous, the cost of repair and renovation is beyond reasonable expenditure and the boats should be withdrawn? By taking that action, the right hon. Gentleman would be conforming with the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty for the first time.

Mr. King: That question shows the weakness of preparing a supplementary before hearing the answer to the main question. If the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully to my reply, he would have realised what rubbish his supplementary was.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the collapse of the Soviet Union and the distribution of its nuclear weapons around the country, it is extremely important for Britain to maintain its nuclear deterrent and to be ready for any eventuality?

Mr. King: Certainly I agree. At a time when the world's largest nuclear power is in the process of disintegration into separate republics, if not worse, and when 27,000 nuclear weapons exist there, the vast majority of which are capable of inflicting considerable damage on this and other countries, it would be lunacy for us to undermine our nuclear deterrent. It is the one nuclear shield that we have. Had the advice of some hon. Members been followed over the years, we might now be in a very exposed position.

Mr. Douglas: The Secretary of State must reflect a little on the answer that he has given about the Soviet Union. Does he accept that one of the reasons for the United

Kingdom's continued possession of a strategic deterrent was the fact that it would provide another centre of power, and thus create disequilibrium in the mind of a potential foe? If so, how does he justify the fear that there may be a number of fingers on the disintegrating Soviet strategic deterrent, when at the same time he seeks to justify the proliferation of nuclear strategic deterrents in the hands of France, the United Kingdom and the United States?

Mr. King: That is a fairly complicated question, which may confuse people and prevent them from seeing our present need clearly. It is vital that we preserve our own independent nuclear deterrent as protection against nuclear blackmail; it is equally important that we take every possible step—as we are doing—to ensure that the process of rapid political change, and the change of authority that has taken place in what was the Soviet Union, do not lead to a more dangerous situation in regard to the present control and authority over nuclear weapons. To try to wrap up that question in the way in which the hon. Gentleman has suggested, or to lose sight of either of those objectives, would be extremely unwise.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of that highly unsatisfactory and inadequate reply, I give notice of my intention to raise the matter on the Adjournment at the earliest opportunity.

Air-defence Frigates

5. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to replace type 42 destroyers with a new air-defence frigate.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): There will be a requirement to replace the type 42 destroyers from around the turn of the century. An 18-month period of exploration with France is under way to consider the prospects for collaboration on an anti-air warfare frigate to meet this requirement.

Sir John Farr: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Can he give us any timetable for the construction of the new vessels, and will he give an assurance that at least 50 per cent.—and preferably more—of the hull and interior construction work will come to United Kingdom shipyards?

Mr. Carlisle: We certainly welcome this collaboration and wish to bring it to a successful conclusion. The timetable that my hon. Friend asked about is as follows. After the exploratory period of 18 months, we hope to proceed by mid-1993 with full development, leading to a first order by the mid-1990s. We aim for an in-service date in the early years of the next century. As for equipment, part of the purpose of the exploratory work is to agree a memorandum of understanding to cover all procurement aspects.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Naval construction work of this type will obviously lead to work for subcontractors. In the past six months, two of my constituents have had their passes removed by Ministry of Defence navy police. Both are respectable men and one of them worked on the facility at Faslane for eight months. It is a great pity that passes are being taken away from hard-working people, who are not even given any right of appeal. Will the Minister comment on that?

Mr. Carlisle: If the hon. Gentleman will send me details, I will look into the matter. With regard to subcontractors, we are proud of the quality of work produced by them. Any shipbuilding orders feed through into other employment, apart from the main shipbuilders.

Mr. Boscawen: While my hon. Friend is considering replacement of the type 42 destroyers, will he bear in mind the urgent decision that he and his colleagues have to take very soon about the future of HMS Polar Circle as a replacement for HMS Endurance? Some of us have recently seen that vessel. We believe that she is a very fine ship and that she is needed by the Royal Navy and the Foreign Office. We therefore hope that a favourable decision will soon be reached regarding HMS Polar Circle.

Mr. Carlisle: As has been said in the House previously, my hon. Friend will know that we are committed to the work being done in the south Atlantic, which HMS Polar Circle will shortly be carrying out. I take this opportunity to say that not only that ship but our collaboration in relation to the French frigate and the type 23 frigate orders which will be given shortly show our commitment to naval orders. That is in stark contrast to what would happen if ever the Labour party came to power, with its plans to reduce our spending on equipment by many billions of pounds.

Mr. Boyes: What assurances can the Minister give that in attempting to develop a common requirement for a new air defence frigate we shall not end up with another fiasco of expensive and fruitless bickering between countries with different design requirements? The NFR90 project suffered difficulties of that kind and our involvement in it led to almost two years being wasted. Can the Minister tell us whether Britain's shipyards will be assured of a very early decision on a type 42 replacement, thus allowing for some continuity of work and ending the grave uncertainty in the shipyards so that men and management can get on with what they do best—building ships in British yards?

Mr. Carlisle: We have certainly learnt the lessons of the NFR90. One of those lessons was that we had to align the needs of the platform with those of the systems. We are already doing work on that with the French. That is part of the exploratory programme. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the project, but he must face the harsh reality that if we ever had a Labour Government there would be no money available to pursue this project, let alone order any more type 43 frigates.

Competitive Tendering

6. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to encourage competitive tendering for military research and development.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Equipment procurement including development is already subject to competitive tendering wherever practicable. As regards research, once a full trading relationship has been established between the

Ministry of Defence and the Defence Research Agency, we intend to implement a progressive extension of competition.

Dr. Clark: Does my hon. Friend accept that military research and development provides a significant technological spin-off for civilian use? Does he accept, therefore, that if more of the research sponsored by his Department were replaced by competitive tendering by universities, research associations or private companies, the benefits for non-military use could be greatly enhanced?

Mr. Carlisle: I respect the point made by my hon. Friend. It might be of interest to the House to hear that already about 40 per cent. of the research undertaken by the Defence Research Agency is subcontracted from the Ministry of Defence to universities and industry—indeed, almost the whole of the development work goes to industry. We certainly welcome collaboration with the civil sector and industry, a good example of which is our work on jet engine technology. We wish to develop that interaction.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to have a research and development policy and a future procurement policy? Unless there is a prospect of orders, research and development in the military sector is bound to suffer.

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend makes a good point. As he knows, the research effort in the Ministry of Defence is undergoing substantial change in terms of the Defence Research Agency. Our aim is to ensure that we become more efficient and enhance the effectiveness of our sharp end research.

Nuclear Weapons (Transport)

8. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the transport of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Safety and security are of paramount importance in our nuclear weapons transport methods and procedures. We do not move any nuclear weapons by road, and would not do so, unless it was safe to do so.

Mrs. Mahon: Why are such weapons transported at all? Have the Government not in effect acknowledged the findings of the Drell panel report on the safety of nuclear weapons by setting up their own review? Will the Minister assure us that he will stop the transportation of any nuclear weapons until the Drell panel findings are issued?

Mr. Hamilton: Certainly not. The hon. Lady, like many Opposition Members, probably does not realise that her party's policy on nuclear weapons has changed. Nuclear weapons must be kept up to date, and they must be serviced at intervals; if that is not done, they become ineffective. If there is a policy of having nuclear weapons, those weapons must be serviced at intervals to keep them running properly.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there have been no leakages of radioactive material in any of the convoys travelling to and from the establishment at Burghfield in my constituency?

Mr. Hamilton: I can certainly confirm that. As I said earlier, the safety of the carriage of radioactive material is paramount. Although there have been mechanical breakdowns, they have merely affected the vehicles carrying the material. There has never been any question of nuclear radiation seeping out.

Mr. McFall: I welcome the establishment of the Ministry of Defence working party under Professor Oxburgh in the light of the Drell report, even though the Government had to be dragged a little to achieve that. On the transport of nuclear weapons, which is covered in the Drell report and should therefore be part of the Oxburgh report, will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to give local authorities notice when nuclear weapons are to be transported through their localities?

Mr. Hamilton: When there is any question of those materials being transported, we deal with the local police. I believe that that is quite adequate. The local police are responsible for the safety of their areas. One problem is that some of the local authorities with which we have to deal are extremely left wing and anti-nuclear. They leak information about convoys to members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, resulting in convoys being disrupted and people's lives being put in danger.

Royal Naval Reserve

9. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the Royal Naval Reserve; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend said in his statement on 10 December, our aim is that the naval reserves should be

"streamlined but more closely integrated with the Royal Navy."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 733.]

Mr. Sayeed: My right hon. Friend will recognise that mine counter-measures is a hazardous undertaking—the penalty for getting it wrong is a very large bang and lots of little bits. As the best way to reduce that risk is regular training, can he explain the logic of mothballing two of the River class MCMVs belonging to the Royal Naval Reserve which undertakes mine counter-measures and of leaving two divisions, including the largest—London division—without a ship?

Mr. Hamilton: We have had to take into account the changes in the international situation when considering the RNR, including the lengthening warning time. In those circumstances, it was thought right to reduce some of the activities of the RNR and to make them more relevant to the future.

Sir Patrick Duffy: As the Minister reconsiders the regular-reserve mix of the Royal Navy, as he promised on 10 December, will he ensure that a proper study of task threats is completed and will he create a supplementary list of personnel whom it is planned to axe until that review of task threats is complete?

Mr. Hamilton: Clearly, the regular-reserve force mix study will have to take into account what we see as threats and how we intend to deal with them. We expect to make a statement on that in the new year.

Mr. Robert Banks: While welcoming my right hon. Friend's reply, may I ask him to accept that the best training for Royal Navy reservists is with the regular Navy and will he give that priority in the coming operations for the Royal Naval Reserve?

Mr. Hamilton: I hear what my hon. Friend says and we shall see whether more opportunities can be given to the RNR to train with the regular Navy.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Minister ensure that before the review is completed we shall be able to have adequate information so that we can determine the implications for the various areas and for particular bases which are under threat? Will he give an undertaking today to give us information on recruitment levels, retention levels and the position of one base as compared with another before such a report is produced?

Mr. Hamilton: The whole process of rationalising the RNR will be progressed in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence and with the RNR itself and it will make proposals.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that the air squadrons of the Royal Naval Reserve have been especially effective and exceptionally well recruited and that there have even been one or two Harrier pilots in the reserve? Could not that be an example for the flying service, the Royal Air Force?

Mr. Hamilton: The position of the Royal Air Force Reserve is, as I am sure my hon. Friend knows, that does not have the opportunity to fly aircraft. I do not believe that the Harrier pilots who found themselves in the Royal Naval Reserve will have the opportunity to fly either, but it is certainly useful to have them in the reserve should they be needed.

"Options for Change"

10. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has made of the costs of providing accommodation for those leaving the Army as a result of the reductions in the Army under "Options for Change".

Mr. Tom King: Considerable work has been done on arrangements, not only for accommodation but for the resettlement of those who will be leaving the service in the course of the rundown. We are considering a number of new proposals. I will keep the House informed.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Secretary of State accept that the current level of 14,000 service families who are resettled every year by the Ministry of Defence is certain to increase dramatically during the restructuring? Does the Ministry of Defence yet have an estimate of the number of personnel families who will not be able to make provision for their own housing? Is he aware that that situation will be compounded substantially by the fact that there are about 1,700 ex-service families currently inhabiting Ministry of Defence premises to which, strictly, they have no title? Is not it time that some urgent policy measures were introduced by the Ministry of Defence to deal with the major problem from 1992 onwards?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman has correctly established that there is a considerable turnover every year in any case. The rundown and the changes involved in "Options for Change" will add to that. Off the top of my head, I think that the figure is about 25 per cent. on top of what usually happens annually. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the changes will take place over a four-year period. However, we are actively involved and a number of steps are being taken. I have appointed to a new post—the director general of resettlement—Major-General Burden who has returned from the British Army on the Rhine. He has an excellent record in this field. A number of proposals are being worked on by housing associations, by voluntary housing bodies, by the Royal British Legion and by the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association, which are working with the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the Department of Employment on a whole range of opportunities. I think that the hon. Gentleman will get the feeling from that that a considerable effort is being made by many people to try to tackle the problem in the most effective way.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the Secretary of State ask Major-General Burden to come to west Norfolk to have a look at houses on two RAF bases, Sculthorpe and West Raynham, which may close in the future? Will he consider urgently the possibility of the married quarters at the bases being made available to Army personnel who are being made redundant?

Mr. King: I assure my hon. Friend that that matter is one aspect that we are considering. Some service housing is already available to service men on discount purchase, which gives them the opportunity to get on the home ownership ladder. There may be opportunities to rent out existing service property or surplus service property. We are trying to see how we can employ the whole of the defence estate, including married quarters, to help resolve the problem. We will do everything that we can in the area.

Dr. Reid: Is not the truth of the matter not only that the Secretary of State is doing nothing about the housing needs of the service men and women who will be made redundant, but that he does not even know the facts? That was confirmed in a written answer from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. He said:

"Information on the private housing arrangements or plans of those Army personnel who have applied for . . . redundancy is not held by the Ministry of Defence."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. *356*.]

Is not the Secretary of State aware of the deplorably low level of home ownership among other ranks in the armed forces and of the dearth of easily affordable council properties as a result of Government policies? Does the Secretary of State intend to thank those who have given service to Queen and country by making them not only jobless, but homeless?

Mr. King: I am afflicted today by people who prepare their supplementaries and do not bother to listen to the answers. After the answers that I have given, I do not know how anyone can say that nothing is happening on the matter. The hon. Gentleman should have the courtesy to recognise that a considerable amount is being done. There is a challenge to be faced and the hon. Gentleman would make a more constructive contribution if he played a part in helping instead of trying to score cheap party political points when there is a genuine problem to be tackled. For once in his life he should stand up and support service men who need help.

Jobs (South Dorset)

11. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of studies affecting his Department's employment in south Dorset.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My hon. Friend is already aware of the studies into the rationalisation of the Defence Research Agency, the relocation of the Procurement Executive and the review of the Army training base. My hon. Friend will also know that as part of "Defence for the 90s" we are reviewing the scope of naval support, although as I made clear in July, there will be a continuing naval presence at Portland.

Mr. Bruce: May I place it on record that I know that my hon. Friend is doing his best to ensure that south Dorset continues to have a large amount of Ministry of Defence employment? I urge him to look at one current study which concerns the possibility of moving the sea systems control first to temporary accommodation and then, in 1995-96, to permanent accommodation. Will he ensure that the sea systems control moves only when the permanent accommodation is available? Will he locate the naval support command, which would be ideally suited for Portland, in the premises that are then vacated?

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend is tireless in trying to protect defence jobs in south Dorset and to increase their numbers there. I am aware of the concern of the people of the Procurement Executive about the move to Bristol. I hear clearly what my hon. Friend said about seeking to avoid a double move. The uncertainty is unsatisfactory. We are carrying out a study now and we shall seek to resolve that uncertainty as soon as we can.

Trident

12. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is now the estimated total cost of acquiring and maintaining the Trident nuclear weapon system.

Mr. Tom King: The current estimated cost of acquiring the United Kingdom Trident system is £9,863 million. We expect the level of running costs of the Trident force to be well below 2 per cent. of the defence budget, not significantly different from those of Polaris.

Mr. Canavan: Are not we entitled to be told the whole truth, as revealed by Greenpeace, which is that the total lifetime cost of Trident will be more than £23 billion? About half that could be saved if Trident were cancelled now. Instead of extravagant spending on such an unnecessary weapons system, will the Secretary of State now make the peace dividend a reality by cancelling Trident and investing the money in areas such as education and the national health service?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman must be unaware that his party is now pledged to keep the nuclear deterrent, according to the speeches made by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). I have made it clear that the cost of running a Trident deterrent will be well below 2 per cent. of the defence budget. I regard that as an economical insurance and the ultimate safeguard against nuclear blackmail. I regard it at present as an important insurance.

Sir Antony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reasons why we are updating Trident are basically the same reasons as caused the Labour Government to update our nuclear deterrent by bringing in Chevaline, the difference being that we are doing it openly and they did it under wraps?

Mr. King: I agree absolutely. We are told continually that the Labour party is united on this issue. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) has shown how divided it remains on the nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: While accepting the need for the United Kingdom to have the protection of a strategic nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future, may I ask the Secretary of State whether, as a result of his recent conversations with his French counterpart and the agreement reached at Maastricht, consideration has been given to greater co-operation in strategic nuclear matters with France?

Mr. King: We are in close contact and, as is known, we are examining in the sub-strategic nuclear field how we could work more closely with the French Government on a wide range of defence matters.

Mr. Grylls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that most sensible people in Britain recognise that expenditure on our nuclear deterrent is about the best and safest investment that we can make, especially in view of the alarming situation in Russia and the break-up of the former Soviet Union? Will my right hon. Friend not stint in providing Britain with the best independent deterrent?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. *[Interruption.]* At a time when the largest nuclear power in the world is in the process of disintegration into separate republics, when that massive nuclear arsenal is under some central control of the remaining central authorities, and when our keen concern is to ensure that that security is real, it seems absolutely unthinkable that we should not have our own protection and the ultimate assurance of an independent deterrent. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are important questions. I ask the House to listen to them, please.

Tactical Air-to-Surface Missiles

14. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects TASM to be in service; and where they will be based.

Mr. Tom King: The WE177 free-fall bomb will be approaching the end of its service life around the turn of the century, but no decision has yet been taken on the system to replace it, or where it will be based.

Mr. Bennett: In their discussions on the replacement system, have the Government talked to the German Government about the possibility of basing a new nuclear missile system in Germany? If not, when do the Government intend to have such discussions? Would not it be far better to seek an effective non-proliferation treaty than to go for a new generation of nuclear weapons?

Mr. King: I have just returned from a NATO meeting last week at which we agreed the military strategy that will accompany the strategic concept now agreed, of which Germany is a prominent supporter. NATO will continue

to base effective and up-to-date sub-strategic nuclear forces in Europe. The alliance strategic concept, of which Germany is a strong supporter, makes that point clear.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the answer that he has just given is further reinforced by the fact that several third-world countries, including some middle eastern countries such as Iraq, Algeria and perhaps Libya, are currently acquiring nuclear weapons? For all those reasons, it is essential that we keep a sub-strategic nuclear system in western Europe.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Not only do we need a strategic deterrent, but there is a strong argument that a sub-strategic deterrent continues to be relevant at a time when there is a real risk of several new nations appearing which have some form of nuclear capability and when we risk the proliferation of not merely equipment but perhaps technology from some of the scientific bases in the former Soviet Union. My hon. Friend's point is very important.

Bullying

15. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by his Department to prevent bullying in the services; and how much money has been spent in dealing with this matter since June 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The services take a serious view of bullying and it has been made very clear that bullying and ill-treatment will not be tolerated. A range of measures to combat bullying has been introduced, including the banning of initiation ceremonies and, specifically in the Army, the implementation of a training package on personnel management.

Information on expenditure is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Minister aware that I welcome both advances which have been made, but it will be obvious to him from my correspondence with the Department that some bullying still goes on. The only way to deal with that is by the appointment of a military ombudsman, who can deal with the problems objectively and is seen to do so. Please may we have an ombudsman?

Mr. Hamilton: The right hon. Gentleman suggests that the existing disciplinary systems within the services are inadequate. I do not believe that to be so. They are objective and deal with such cases fairly. I do not think that anything would be gained by having an ombudsman to handle those problems.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Garrett: Last week the head teachers association of Cambridgeshire wrote to the county council to say that because of critical shortages of books, equipment and facilities and because of oversized classes, it would have serious difficulty providing the national curriculum. Under those circumstances, what advice does the Prime Minister give to his constituents—to buy private education, as he does?

The Prime Minister: In Cambridgeshire the education standard spending assessment for the current year is £225 million, 16·4 per cent. higher than last year. There has been another substantial increase for 1992-93, an increase which safeguards the position of all children in Cambridgeshire.

Q2. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the British Medical Association's somewhat belated conversion to the concept of fund-holding GPs? Does he agree with the BMA that that should now be extended to every GP who wants to hold a fund?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There is no doubt that GP fund-holding has been proving successful and has been extending quite dramatically. I welcome the fact that that is the case. We are currently considering how the benefits of fund holding can be extended and will make an announcement in the new year.

Mr. Kinnock: In the interests of establishing the causes of the present mortgage crisis, could the Prime Minister confirm that, as Minister of State for Social Security, he halved mortgage support for newly unemployed people and that, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he put the mortgage rate up to its highest in history?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman had done his homework—rather unusually—better than he has, he would know, first, that the change in the 16-week rule was introduced after lengthy consultations with building societies and, secondly, that at the time, they said that there was no reason for people to lose their homes because of that reduction; nor have they.

Mr. Kinnock: I think the answer that the Prime Minister was groping for was yes. Since he and his policies are uniquely responsible for the difficulties being experienced and the record repossessions and arrears, will he accept the obligation for introducing a proper mortgage rescue scheme, like the one recommended by the Labour party, instead of trying to shift the blame on to everyone else?

The Prime Minister: The alleged mortgage rescue scheme proposed by the Labour party is a farce and has been denounced as such and the right hon. Gentleman should know it. As for the real problem, we are in the midst of discussions with the Building Societies Association and others and in due course we shall make an announcement that will build on the assistance that we have already provided. We have been considering the problem for some time—*[Interruption.]*—unlike the right hon. Gentleman, who has only just discovered it.

Mr. Kinnock: What is a farce, a tragic farce, is the Government's record—a Government who came to power to provide a property-owning democracy and ended with a debt-ridden recession. Since, because of the right hon.

Gentleman's policies, the building societies stand to lose £1 billion because of mortgage repossessions and since local authorities are having to spend £500 million on bed-and-breakfast and temporary accommodation, does not the Prime Minister think that the rescue mortgage scheme that we have promoted would be the effective way to ensure not only the relief of misery for scores of thousands of families, but that at least he did the honourable thing by his victims?

The Prime Minister: The alleged mortgage rescue scheme about which the hon. Gentleman boasts was described this morning by an independent commentator as "a policy made in an Enid Blyton story book"
—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's policy is ludicrous. As for the levels of owner occupation, there are 3·5 million more owner-occupiers today than there were in 1979 and no doubt 3·5 million more than there would have been had the right hon. Gentleman been in government.

Sir Hugh Rossi: If one were looking for the reasons for the present situation, does my right hon. Friend agree that it has been the departure of the building societies and other lenders from the traditional concept of not lending more than 75 per cent. of actual valuation, nor, from the point of view of personal status—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be allowed to make his point.

Sir Hugh Rossi: —more than one quarter of monthly salary? If those criteria had been adhered to, many people would not be in their present position. Does my right hon. Friend agree—

Hon. Members: Too long.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is being rather long-winded.

Sir Hugh Rossi: Will my right hon. Friend consider legislation to ensure that those traditional criteria are adhered to in future to stop this cyclical problem arising every so many years?

The Prime Minister: It is a sad fact that many people over-extended their mortgage commitments and now face difficulties. The Government are playing their part to alleviate those difficulties and we expect the mortgage lenders—all the responsible ones—to play their part in that. The sensible ones know that it is in their interests to do so.

Mr. Ashdown: If the Prime Minister is really keen to assist families who now stand in danger of having their homes repossessed, will he recognise the anomaly that exists between those on low incomes who pay rent and receive housing benefit and those on low incomes who pay mortgages and do not?

The Prime Minister: I recognise that point very well. But the right hon. Gentleman should not pose, as he frequently does, as the friend of the home-owner—*[Interruption.]*—Oh, no. His policies are to put up taxes and abolish mortgage income tax relief. He should stop coming to the House pretending to support home-owners when his policies would discriminate against them.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend accept that only the very wealthy or the very foolish can afford to go to the libel courts for justice? If ordinary people are to have justice, perhaps a jury should find whether somebody is guilty of libel, but these £250,000 and £500,000 judgments are not justice but folly. Should not judges be able to decide what award is justified?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter on which I should be wise to seek the advice of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General and the Lord Chancellor. Even in the heat and battle of Prime Minister's questions, it is best to go away and reflect on some matters.

Leith

Q3. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to the port of Leith.

The Prime Minister: I am making a series of visits to all parts of the country and very much hope to visit the Edinburgh area again before too long.

Mr. Brown: That is welcome news. Leithers will give the Prime Minister a warm welcome, but they will put him in the hot seat because of mass unemployment, homelessness and general misery, which have been experienced not just in my constituency, but throughout Britain. Nevertheless, being constructive, members of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians have published a report entitled "Kick-start", which makes various proposals on how to get people back to work and revive the economy. Will the Prime Minister read that report and, more importantly, act on it? If not, the lessons are clear—there will not be a kick-start come the next election, but the Tories will be kicked out. That message is clear in my constituency and I am sure that it is clear in others.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman neglected to mention that during the course of this Parliament, unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 32 per cent. The Scottish Office has taken a number of initiatives on homelessness, as the hon. Gentleman knows. In the four Scottish cities, £3·5 million in extra capital allocations have been made available for homelessness and a further £4 million extra capital for additional homelessness projects was made available last November. From April 1991, deficits on all local authority hostels met by Government subsidies will be worth an extra £1 billion a year. So a great deal has been done by the Scottish Office. In future, the hon. Gentleman should acknowledge the dramatic reduction in unemployment in his constituency during this Parliament.

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December 1991.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that inward investment from America and Japan has brought highly paid, highly skilled and highly trained new jobs to areas like south Wales? Does he also agree that to brand such investment as "sweatshops" is a grave affront to the employees of those companies? The Labour party is telling those investors that they are not welcome here and encouraging them to go elsewhere.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is within the recollection of the House that, some Question Times ago, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) was boasting about the Japanese investment in his constituency. Perhaps he will tell us whether that is "sweatshop" investment. If it is not, will he denounce his right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who made the comment?

Q5. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Battle: Does the Prime Minister recall when, as Minister for Social Security, he cut mortgage support in half and said that there would be no reason to suppose that repossessions would increase? He said, "It will not happen". In view of that, does not he owe many thousands of families in Britain a personal apology?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should check his facts more carefully. The Building Societies Association assured the Government at the time that, when the rule was introduced, there would be no reason to expect people to lose their homes as a result and they have not done so. The simplest inquiry by the hon. Gentleman would have ascertained that fact.

Mr. Watts: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Councillor Mrs. Lydia Simmons, the Labour chairman of the housing committee in Slough, on her appointment as a member of the board of the NHS trust for Wexham Park hospital in my constituency? Does he agree that there is room for sensible people of all political persuasions to serve the community through NHS hospital trusts?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We need people of talent, whatever their political persuasions, in such public positions and I look forward to people of talent taking them up regularly.

Q7. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dunnachie: Will the Prime Minister promise the House that no senior citizen, sick or disabled person need die from hypothermia or any illnesses resulting from it because they do not have the money to heat their homes? Does the Prime Minister agree that the elderly, sick and disabled should automatically receive a heating allowance every winter instead of having to go cap in hand to the Government? Does not he understand that it is action, not words, that the elderly, sick and disabled of Britain require of him?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know that the House was advised in the summer of a new scheme to assist people during periods of very cold weather—well over 1 million payments are expected to be made for the recent cold spell. Those payments were not available under previous Governments.

Tees and Hartlepool Port

3.30 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the proposed sale of the Tees and Hartlepool port to a consortium that includes Humberside Holdings Ltd., with consequences for the local communities of Tees and Hartlepool, and the sale of British ports in general."

The matter is specific in that the Tees and Hartlepool board yesterday announced its recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport to sell the port to a consortium that includes Humberside Holdings Ltd. The board does not appear to have taken into account the fact that Humberside Holdings Ltd. saw two of its associated companies, Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. and John Sutcliffe Stevedores Ltd., go into liquidation with outstanding liabilities to dockers on the abolition of the dock labour scheme of £3,034,001 in the case of Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. and £3,598,314 in the case of John Sutcliffe Stevedores Ltd. Humberside Holdings Ltd. set up a third company, East Coast Port Services, to make it the largest stevedore group in Grimsby and Immingham, providing the same services as those companies that went into liquidation. John Sutcliffe Stevedores also left on its books, by way of non-preferential claims, £142,247 to 43 small firms.

The matter is important as not only is Humberside Holdings Ltd. not a fit and proper bidder for the port of Tees and Hartlepool, but the Government, during the passage of the Ports Act 1991, stated that preference would be given to worker-management buy-out schemes and gave assurances, both to the consortium of Tees and Hartlepool—consisting of managers and workers alike—and to the other trust ports throughout the land, that such schemes would be favoured. As a consequence, there are management-employee buy-outs on the table for the ports of Tilbury, Medway and Clyde, all of which are likely to be affected by the decision of the Secretary of State for Transport to ignore the bid of the local Tees and Hartlepool consortium.

The matter is urgent because the Secretary of State cannot even entertain the recommendation of the Tees and Hartlepool board because Parliament has not empowered him to do so. The requisite statutory instrument dealing with the clawback of funds from the sale of land owned by port authorities has not completed its passage through Parliament, so it cannot be right to announce what the Secretary of State is minded to do until the Ports Act 1991 is perfected. If that were to happen, what would have happened to the will of Parliament?

A full debate on the Floor of the House would give all Members who served on the Ports Bill, and other Members with constituency interests, a chance to give their views on what constitutes an abdication of Government responsibility, a reneging of promises given and undertakings entered into.

Therefore, I call for a debate because what we see in Humberside Holdings Ltd. is the ugly and unacceptable face of capitalism.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the proposed sale of the Tees and Hartlepool port to Humberside Holdings Ltd., with consequences for the local community of Tees and Hartlepool."

I have listened with concern to what the hon. Gentleman had to say on this matter, but, as he knows, I have to decide whether to give his application precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I must rule in this case that it does not meet the criteria of the order and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may remember that I raised this matter with you by way of a request for a private notice question on Tuesday—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter that we discuss in the Chamber. Had the hon. Gentleman raised it under Standing Order No. 20, that would have been different.

Mr. Devlin: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I asked the Leader of the House on Thursday for a statement on this subject. It is a matter of grave concern to the people of Teesside and there should be some opportunity for the Government to set out their views on it before the end of this Session.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) has raised the matter under Standing Order No. 20, and I have ruled. I have nothing to add. I hope that there will be other opportunities to raise this matter.

Points of Order

3.37 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which arises out of the debate on RECHAR which you so kindly allowed me to initiate last week and during which the Under-Secretary of State responsible for consumer affairs argued fiercely that the Government's stance was absolutely correct, that they would not change it, and that it was legally entirely clear.

We discovered this morning that at much the same time the Secretary of State for the Environment was drafting a letter that says: "I believe"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must tell the hon. Member, who has not been here long, that I cannot rule on whether what Ministers say is right or wrong. This is not a matter for me.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Just hear him out.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman leave the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) to me please —and that goes for his hon. Friends who are prompting him from either side, too? I am not responsible for answers given in the Chamber; I have no idea whether they are right or wrong. I am responsible for matters of order. Is this a matter of order?

Mr. Enright: I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker. I would not want to accuse either of the gentlemen in question of misleading the House, because that would be unparliamentary, but it is important for the House to know which of them is right. Will the Prime Minister act as referee and tell us which half of the Cabinet he supports so that my constituency can get its RECHAR funds before Christmas?

Mr. Speaker: As long as the hon. Gentleman does not ask me to referee.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: It was not a point of order.

Mr. Haynes: Mine is. You have a wonderful opportunity, Mr. Speaker, since the Secretary of State for the Environment does not come here very often—but he happens to be here now. Get him on his feet!

Mr. Speaker: I cannot get the right hon. Gentleman on his feet now, although I will in a minute on the Local Government Finance Bill.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that I am not given to raising bogus points of order—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"]—but I ask you—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is it?

Dame Peggy Fenner: I accept the principle that, if you call a Member to explain why he wants to apply under Standing Order No. 20 for an emergency debate on a subject, no one else may contribute; but if that Member mentions another's constituency and the concern felt by Medway port authority, one is still left with no way of contributing. It is therefore unfortunate that we have no way of replying when our constituencies are mentioned in these circumstances.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady should draw that to the attention of the Procedure Committee. I am bound by the rules, and the rule is that, on a Standing Order No. 20 application, only one three-minute speech may be made.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance about something that arose in the Consolidated Fund Bill debates on the Adjournment last Thursday when we debated the question of pensions. During that debate some Opposition Members wished to quote what Members of the upper House who are directors of Maxwell companies said in the other place. I seek your guidance as to what the rules are about quoting speakers in the other place. We are able to quote our own record, Shakespeare and everybody else, but it appears that we cannot quote the report of the upper House.

Mr. Speaker: There is a strict rule about this. Ministers in the other place may be quoted but not Back-Bench speeches made in the same Session. The relevant passage in "Erskine May" is at page 375.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to know why there was so much delay before I knew that my question 7 on defence was to be linked to question 1. Without a tip-off from some of my colleagues, I would not have come to the Chamber; I would not have known and I could have lost the question. Secondly, how did the House decide on the linkage between my question 7 and question 1, which is a regional matter? Thirdly, what does it mean when the Minister says that "With permission", he will link questions? Whose permission is it—mine, yours, Mr. Speaker, or that of the House?

Mr. Speaker: This question is frequently raised with me. I regret to tell the hon. Member that "With permission" does not mean with my permission. It is merely a form of words; it is a convention. However, it is the Minister's responsibility to let hon. Members whose questions are linked know about this. I am surprised that this was not done, and I think that the hon. Member should take it up with the Minister concerned.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to place on record that I advised my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) that I proposed to raise the matter. The ports concerned covered too wide an area for one specific question.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to draw attention to the fact that a number of questions that I put down yesterday about the Security Service were blocked, as is usual. In one of those questions I asked the Prime Minister to make a statement——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a plain case of cheating. The hon. Member, whose question was not accepted, cannot read it out in the Chamber now.

Mr. Flynn: May I make the point to you, Mr. Speaker, that in this morning's papers this very matter was the

[Mr. Flynn]

subject of a press release. If there is a new period of glasnost with MI5 or MI6, can it be extended to hon. Members and not limited to the press?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance? You will probably be aware that the new head of MI5 has for the first time been identified. Questions have previously been refused by the Table Office because of the blocking system regarding the Security Service. Would it be possible for that to be reviewed in the light of the fact that the head of MI5 has been named? There is a spirit of glasnost, but only a bit, and many of us believe that the Security Service should be accountable to Parliament. In the absence of that, would it be possible for the Table Office to accept questions such as those to which my hon. Friend has referred, which until today have been blocked? I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will give this matter careful consideration.

Mr. Speaker: That has already been done. In the light of the new circumstances, the Table Office allows questions on certain matters.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) about the linkage of his question with question 1. It used to be the practice that, if an hon. Member was not present when the question with which his has been linked was answered, his question would be answered separately by the Minister when it was reached. That practice should still apply.

Mr. Speaker: Those are all matters that the Procedure Committee could well consider. I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman. So-called reforms frequently lead to other problems.

Armed Forces (Liability for Injury)

3.45 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that, in an action for liability in tort in a case involving the armed forces, a plaintiff need not in all cases show negligence on the part of the Crown.

My Bill would reverse the onus of proof of negligence for compensation for those armed services personnel who have sustained severe injuries in the course of their duties. It would ensure that, where obvious and serious injury was sustained by members of the armed forces in the course of their duties, compensation which would equate to that in civilian life would be paid by the Ministry of Defence as a matter of course unless the MOD could prove negligence on the part of the service people involved. That reverses the present onus of proof whereby injured service personnel must prove negligence on behalf of the mighty MOD, a Ministry which can and all too easily and often does withhold on the grounds of secrecy documents that are vital to proving a case of negligence.

Ours is a warrior nation. Because of that the men and women of our armed forces hold a special place in our hearts, at least in times of war. Sadly, in times of peace we are sometimes apt, as in Kipling's famous poem "Tommy", to take them for granted.

Because we truly are a warrior nation, probably all British people, including all hon. Members, yearly, on the vigil of Remembrance Sunday, echo those time-honoured words, "We will remember them". It is true, Mr. Speaker, we will remember them. But what about those who are not killed, or at least not quite? I speak of those who suffer horrific wounds but are saved from death by the miracles of modern science, good luck and their own outstanding mental fortitude. Many of them live on but are severely disabled. Do we truly remember them? The honest answer is yes; officially we do remember them, but not nearly well enough.

I believe that, regardless of political party, the British people feel that the Government should care more—much more—for our injured service men and, with regard to our armed forces, should be seen to be the very model of a good employer.

In 1987, my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) introduced the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Bill. It was a most progressive and well-intentioned Bill, supported by the MOD. In Committee, the then Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), for whom I have the highest personal regard, set out the Government's three principles for settling these cases. He said:

"we wish to settle out of court . . . in the interests of the plaintiffs . . . we are not seeking to set up legal barriers by employing a raft of lawyers to deter genuine plaintiffs . . . we shall proceed diligently and quickly to reach settlements. We shall not seek to protract cases.—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 18 March 1987; c. 21-22.]

The Under-Secretary of State also mentioned another most interesting fact. He said that the civil service estimate of the financial cost of the Bill would be about £13 million per year after 10 years. Mr. Speaker, it is now some five years since that Act came into force and the total cost of claims is put at only £1 million a year. Yet the still-deformed bodies of some of our injured service men

are living proof of the injustice of under-compensation. As to under-compensation, those figures speak for themselves and confirm that is so.

I turn now to the case of the three injured Grenadier Guardsmen. I do so because theirs is a well known case, but sadly its settlement was a very rare exception.

In the summer of 1989, those Grenadiers were ordered to prepare a trench on the Batus live firing range in Canada. In digging, one of them struck a buried, unexploded anti-tank shell that had been fired some years before and lay concealed in the ground. The shell exploded, blowing the legs off all three Grenadiers. Their bodies were injured so badly that, despite prompt casevac, it took the best in medical science two years to nurse them back to sufficient health even to be invalided out of the armed forces.

A board of inquiry was convened, but while it concluded that none of the Grenadiers was to blame, the board was not even required to investigate why the blind shell was in the area used for trench digging, or whether or not all safety briefings had been effectively observed. Despite that, the House was told that no blame was attributable to anyone.

Eighteen months later, when the first Grenadier was invalided out of the Army, the Government appeared to dig in their heels at the very thought of paying compensation anywhere near that equating to the levels applicable in civilian life.

Those three men were cut down by devastating injuries in the prime of their youth. After their two-year ordeal, they were mentally drained, and were depressed by their immobility. Furthermore, they had no real personal wealth, yet the mighty Ministry of Defence challenged those mutilated Grenadiers to prove legal negligence. Worse still, the same Ministry withheld the the board of inquiry's full findings, which were vital to the guardsmen's case. The Ministry provided only an abridged version that left out the crucial damning details.

Where was the spirit of the Government's assurances to the Committee on 18 March 1987? They were ignored, and the Government fought those injured men to the last trench. We all know that pressure was brought in part by the House, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister personally intervened, and a just settlement was agreed. Those Grenadiers were lucky, but many, many more ex-service men in similar states of severe disablement have yet to receive anything like proper compensation. Something must be done fast to correct that great injustice.

My Bill sets out to do something at least for those most badly injured, by reversing the present unjust burden of proof. It would not open the floodgates to minor injury claims, for it would extend only to the most severe and obvious injuries, such as loss of limbs. My Bill is modest, and would come well within the Government's present budget of £13 million a year in respect of the 1987 Act. I commend it to the House—and if right hon. and hon. Members accept my Bill today, I beg the Government not to kill it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Browne, Sir Bernard Braine, Mr. Jack Ashley, Sir Russell Johnston, Mr. John Hannam, Mr. Ray Powell, Mr. Ivan Lawrence, Mr. Merlyn Rees, Sir Marcus Fox, Sir Patrick Duffy, Mr. Michael Colvin and Mr. Churchill.

Armed Forces (Liability for Injury) Bill

Mr. John Brown accordingly presented a Bill to provide that, in an action for liability in tort in a case involving the armed forces, a plaintiff need not in all cases show negligence on the part of the Crown: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1992, and to be printed. [Bill 45.]

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it about the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne)?

Mr. Winnick: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have raised this matter before on a number of occasions, as you may be aware—for instance, in Adjournment debates and during Question Time. One of the people mentioned by the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) is a constituent of mine.

I am very pleased that the Government finally relented and that an agreement was reached. There are no differences between Conservative and Opposition Back Benchers on this important issue. I note, however, that, although an Opposition spokesman on defence is present, no defence Ministers are. That is very unfortunate. Do not Ministers consider the issue to be important?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard by the Ministers who are present.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 1

COUNCIL TAX IN RESPECT OF DWELLINGS

3.55 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move amendment No. 62, in page 1, line 10, after 'beginning', insert

'in 1992, the Secretary of State shall by order provide that 100 per cent. of liability for personal community charge shall be eligible for community charge benefit and in the year beginning in '.

If there is one single step that we could take to relieve the suffering and misery of millions and, at the same time, remove chaos and costs from the administration of the last year of the poll tax, it is surely the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution. If we lived in a sensible world in which democracy worked effectively, that is what would happen, for hon. Members on both sides of the House have repeatedly pressed for the abolition of that contribution. Successive Conservative Members did so on 13 and 26 March.

I welcome the fact that the principle that no one should make a 20 per cent. minimum contribution to the Government's alternative to the poll tax has already been conceded, as has the principle that there should be no clawback from the amount allegedly put into benefits to compensate for that contribution; an announcement to that effect was made at a Government press conference.

Although we welcome those measures wholeheartedly, we wish to ask a simple question. The principle has been conceded; no clawback will take place after April 1993. Why can that not happen immediately? In Committee, the Minister of State said that the new tax would be a different tax. The poll tax was a people tax, he said—a personal tax—and it was therefore impossible to abolish the minimum contribution before the introduction of a property tax.

That is a trifle strange, because the 20 per cent. contribution was introduced under the old rating system. The Government have conceded that they were meddling with the previous principle of allowing those on nil or very low incomes to pay nothing when they introduced a 20 per cent. property tax contribution. They seem to think, however, that the principle that the poll tax must engender a universal contribution of at least 20 per cent. cannot be removed between now and April 1993.

The truth is that a dispute is in progress within the Government, and even within the Department of the Environment. The Secretary of State believes, and has made it clear——

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): Here we go.

Mr. Blunkett: We do not have to go far: we always find disagreement in the Conservative ranks. The Secretary of State believes that the contribution should have been abolished months ago, and we are very pleased about that; the Under-Secretary of State—who, bless his cotton socks, lives in a world of his own—cannot even understand why we want to abolish it. When, a few weeks ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) made a simple statement—that the 20 per cent. contribution should go now—the Minister said, "Why?" The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities does not believe in the abolition of the 20 per cent., so we do not even have to debate with him why; he understands why he does not want it to be abolished. He thinks that every person, whatever their means—even if they have no income to pay it, which applies to 3 million women who are subject, with their husbands, to joint and several liability—should make a contribution, because he still believes in that charge. Everybody else, however, is left with the mess that has been created, not merely in terms of individual difficulty and suffering but in terms of the administrative and legal chaos engendered by the problems of collection. The cost of collection is something that even those who are willing to contemplate the misery of the poll tax are able to understand.

In the first short debate yesterday, when my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) raised the 20 per cent. question and the difficulty that faces students who have never been compensated for the 20 per cent. contribution, the Minister of State suggested that the Audit Commission had not come down firmly in favour of the abolition of contribution and questioned my hon. Friend's figures. It may be instructive, therefore—in order to prevent the waters from being muddied—to put on record what the Audit Commission said. In response to the Government's original consultation paper on the council tax, "A New Tax for Local Government", in paragraph 15 the Audit Commission said:

> "The administrative costs of the principle of universal payment of community charge are high. On average, after taking into account the uplift in income support which they have received, charge payers, who receive 80 per cent. relief, contributed about £6 a year net to the public purse in 1990-91."

In paragraph 16 the Audit Commission said:

> "Pursuing these defaulters for such small amounts is not a good use of scarce recovery resources when there are much larger debts outstanding."

In the document entitled "Administration of the Community Charge: Some Longer Term Considerations" the Audit Commission said:

> "Exempting 20 per cent. of payers would more than pay for itself and would ease the pressure on the system, particularly in areas where collection is very difficult, anyway."

Those clear quotations from what the Audit Commission said vindicate my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and suggest clearly that there is widespread support for abolishing the 20 per cent. contribution now in order to prevent the chaos that already exists over collecting the poll tax now.

I should have thought that the problems of collection would have been a matter of concern for anyone who claimed that he or she was in favour of probity and prudence in respect of public finance. The problems of collection are mirrored nationally in other forms of taxation, with £4 billion of tax outstanding from the last financial year in income tax, value-added tax, corporation tax and duties. Over £1 billion is outstanding on VAT. As much as £364 million of income tax was written off last

year, never mind awaiting collection. I must be compensating for some of that lost revenue because I am still trying to get the Inland Revenue to pay back some of the money that it owes me.

The problems of non-collection of the poll tax are exacerbated at local level in a way that none of us could have foreseen. We made strong predictions about the problems which would occur. That is why we believe that it is crucial to tackle them head on, not in the daft ways about which we heard in Committee. We were told that local authorities that were struggling to collect the tax should be penalised by ensuring that their services had to be cut still further—a more insensitive suggestion is unimaginable. Lord Boyd-Carpenter repeated that suggestion from somewhere in the depths of the countryside.

Inner-city local authorities have had to face the problems of deprivation, education, housing, transport, the environment, leisure and public health while struggling through the courts with the 7·5 million summonses which had to be taken out this year to enforce collection of the poll tax.

Conservatives in this House and in the other place have made stupid suggestions about how to deal with this genuine problem. Some people ask, "Could not the tax be collected through deductions in benefits?" The need to go through the courts and obtain deduction orders contributes to the administrative and legal difficulties. Even if deductions from benefits could be managed—suddenly, that has become a favoured solution to the problems engendered by inadequate incomes and by increased interest rates and mortgage charges—we cannot continue to pile deduction on deduction. There are deductions for mortgage interest payments, deductions for the direct fuel costs of people with small children or elderly relatives who would otherwise be threatened with having their service cut off, deductions for outstanding community care loans—another Government invention—and deductions for water charges.

One cannot have all those deductions and expect people to have their poll tax contributions deducted as well. They would be left with virtually no money with which to buy their food and clothes. Presumably, their only recourse would be to EEC handouts and the Salvation Army. If one took that into account—and presumably a gift at Christmas to salve someone else's conscience—they would still be left in the new year with the impossibility of making ends meet. That is the reality of the struggle that people face in paying the poll tax.

What are we to do? How do we persuade the Government about the reality? Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) pointed out the struggle that occurs in Strathclyde, which has faced an additional year of the poll tax, and the £34 million of cuts which had to be made to cope with last year's problems of non-collection. Those are real cuts and difficulties, not imagined ones.

Conservative Members would dismiss that point on the ground that a Labour authority cannot manage its affairs, but it would be difficult to pursue that case. Strathclyde council has never been pilloried as a loony-left council. It struggles with the problems that occur in major inner-city areas of Glasgow and a major rural hinterland.

We must try to persuade Conservative Members that there are other reasons why it would be prudent for them to agree to the abolition now of the 20 per cent. contribution. The cost of doing that would be small.

Conservative Members keep exaggerating what the cost of abolition would be. It seemed to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) in May and to myself in June and November that the cost of the 20 per cent. contribution kept going up, sometimes by as much as £200 million! It has been spelt out again and again—and I have already mentioned the Audit Commission—that the cost of not collecting or of struggling to collect is so great that it would be a saving if we abolished the 20 per cent. now. It would allow local authorities to concentrate specifically on those people who can afford to pay the poll tax but who are currently not paying. It would allow them to ensure that their administrative time, their legal expertise and the time of the courts could be spent in endeavouring to do what Conservative Members are constantly telling us should be done and which they now have the opportunity to help us to do.

Abolition would not only help those who are struggling to raise the 20 per cent. contribution but would have a beneficial economic effect nationally. *[Interruption.]* I might be able to enlighten the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), if he listens carefully. I am keen that he should understand why we want to abolish the 20 per cent. in case he again makes the mistake of saying that he does not understand why. The national debt is also dramatically affected by the non-collection rate. Authorities have to borrow to pay the basic revenue running costs and because the cost of borrowing is so great for them, and because the increased public sector borrowing requirement to cover that has an effect on the national debt and on the inflation rate, it is important that the Government take that into account. In that way, we might persuade the Government that the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution could help to solve the problems of the nation as a whole.

Abolition would not cost very much because nobody has been able to prove what the true cost would be. In Committee I think it was the Minister of State who for the first time came up with some figures for the earmarked contribution. For next year I think that he suggested that with the uprating the figure would be £1·40 a week for a single adult under the age of 25. That is the contribution that they claim that they have made towards the amount that has to be raised, but only a few months ago the Government made their position very clear. They said:

> "There is no specific amount for the community charge in any one individual's benefit."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. *446*.]

The Government said that the compensation formed "an integral part" of overall rates. Either it does or it does not; either it is included in those benefits as a general contribution or it is not. The abolition of the contribution and the decision which has been taken for 1993 that it should not be clawed back could easily be applied to the poll tax. If it were, there would not only be a sigh of relief from those affected but we could get on with the job of trying to see out the poll tax in a reasonably orderly fashion.

Those on the lowest incomes and those who are struggling to pay the 20 per cent. contribution and to make ends meet would not only be relieved of the contribution

[Mr. Blunkett]

but would have gained their share of the benefit from the switch to value added tax. Those on the least income were the ones who gained the least from having the £140 flat rate reduction last March, but they end up having to pay the VAT increase for the benefit of those who gained most.

I hope that the Government will take on board what I have said and will be willing to respond in a reasonably acceptable fashion. I have presented the case without rhetoric and in a mild and gentle fashion. I have not even had to resort to my box of tissues which I offered round in Committee to try to avoid getting the cold that I now have. I hope that I have managed to get across a reasonable case in a reasonable fashion.

If there was ever time when the Prime Minister could make reality of the gentle rhetoric of his conversion from the harsh and uncaring doctrines of she who nurtured him —and he has shown no real signs of that in domestic, political and social policy—it is now through this measure. The Government should abolish the 20 per cent. contribution and help the individuals affected which would help to abolish the poll tax with some semblance of order, financial competence and common sense. It is not a lot to ask.

4.15 pm

If the Government abolish the 20 per cent. contribution now—they may choose to do so just before the election —they would do a great favour to millions of people who are not written about in the papers, who do not appear on front-line news programmes on television and who probably do not even get a mention on "Yesterday in Parliament". We are not talking about 100,000 people who

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I will make some brief points which arise from the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). He said that if it is expensive to collect a tax, it should not be imposed or collected. I hope that that will be the principle of any Labour Administration who take office in the 21st century. It will be very expensive to collect my tax, so I look forward to its not being imposed.

There is a slight contradiction in one concept. We always hear from the Opposition that local authorities are starved of money, yet it is proposed that local authorities should be more starved of money by exempting people who, I take it, the Opposition imagine might vote for them from having to pay anything into the kitty.

There is nothing unfair about what the hon. Member for Brightside calls the poll tax, which is in fact the community charge. It is a simple licence fee for local authority services. If we have the benefit of those services —I do not—we use them. What is wrong with paying a licence fee for that? To bleat that there are people who cannot afford it, although they can afford to drink in pubs, to have television sets, to run motor cars, to go to football matches and the like, is special pleading. It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Brightside should suggest that if it is expensive, as it is, to collect something as simple as a television licence fee, one should merely be told that one does not have to pay. If it is expensive for somebody to clean out the dustbin, presumably one does not get the dustbin cleaned. That is the other side of the coin. Under the socialist millennium and other Kinnocchio, we shall have in our imperial concept——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not in order to refer to the Leader of the Opposition by such a name.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker. I was not referring to the Leader of the Opposition, because it does not occur to me that he will ever be Prime Minister of Britain. I was referring to an imaginary empire.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): First, the hon. and learned Gentleman obviously has not grasped the point. What we propose will save local authorities money by taking away from them the duty to collect the 20 per cent. charge. Secondly, can we assume from the nature of the speech that the hon. and learned Gentleman is making that he intends to vote against the Third Reading of the Bill at 10 o'clock tonight? What he is saying does not match the principles of the council tax. There will be 100 per cent. rebates, so many people will have nothing to pay for local services. He opposes not the socialist millennium, but the millennium of his hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I have not yet come to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. I am dealing with the hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench. What I do at 10 o'clock tonight is a matter which is deep in my conscience and will not be revealed even to the Whips at this time.

The philosophy of the Opposition is easy to follow. It goes this way: "The local authorities are starved of money. Those whom we think will vote for us should not have to contribute to that money." Are we seriously saying that, because it costs as much to issue a 1s 6d postal order as it does to issue a £25 postal order, the people who buy the 1s 6d ones should not have to pay for them? That is essentially what the hon. Member for Brightside is saying. It is a fatuous concept.

If the hon. Member for Brightside can produce for me cases of people who have deprived themselves of paying the television licence fee or the car tax, never go to a pub and live in meanness because of the 20 per cent. factor, I will say hurrah. But I believe that the whole thing is a charade of whingeing and whining, complaints and mercy begging. Let us all simply pay our licence fee for local authority services. Let the Opposition stop complaining that local authorities are underfunded while suggesting measures by which they should be further underfunded.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) has completely missed the point. We are well aware that he does not like the new council tax and that he favours the poll tax. That is fair enough. He has made his objections clear. I respect his view, although I do not agree with it for many reasons, which we discussed in Committee. One reason is that the tax should be based on a person's ability to pay. That is what it is all about.

By no stretch of the imagination could we say that many of the people caught by the 20 per cent. rule have the ability to pay. That is why they do not pay. There is no question of going to football matches for the people who pay the 20 per cent. There is no question of having a car or going out to the pub at night. They simply cannot afford it. Many of them have about £42 a week to live on, to clothe themselves and so on. On the social argument alone, on which the hon. and learned Gentleman touched, we

should do away with the 20 per cent. rule because the people to whom it applies are the least able to care for themselves with the money that they have.

But we do not argue on the social point. We are arguing on the basis of the cost of collecting the 20 per cent. I see my borough treasurer fairly regularly. The local authority is short of money because of the difficulties that it faces. When we debate the standard spending assessment, we will deal with the reasons why the authority is short of money. When we discussed the new council tax, the borough treasurer wanted two things. One was to stop having to collect the 20 per cent. from people whom he was having to pursue through the courts. If they cannot pay the 20 per cent., how can they pay the 20 per cent. plus the cost of going to court? That does not bear argument and will merely increase the debt.

In Committee, we argued about the impossible position in which local authorities would find themselves when they tried to collect the poll tax. My local authority, which is small compared to many, made 60,000 alterations to the register in nine months of the financial year. It issued 57,007 reminder notices, 46,164 final notices and 12,457 summonses.

The police can no longer take the summonses out as they are too bogged down. If they do, the courts cannot deal with them because they are too bogged down. My authority has issued 9,680 liability orders and 5,698 financial information requests and has authorised attachment of earnings in 438 cases, attachment of income support in 371 and issued 149 warrants to bailiffs.

All those transactions will continue while the authority introduces the new tax. The death of the poll tax and the birth of the new council tax are causing problems within the financial department and the treasurer asks two things: first, do away with the 20 per cent. rule and, secondly, allow local authorities to design the new format for the tax, rather than running it centrally. The people on the ground are more capable of dealing with the problem than are central Government.

The disadvantages of the 20 per cent. rule for local authorities—its collection, the routine of trying to get it, and finishing up in court—so far outweigh the financial benefits which accrue from it that it would save them money if they could do away with it. Under the old system, local authorities would review the rent liabilities—people who had not paid the rent and thus had not paid the rates, as they were built into the rent structure. As hon. Members will know, treasurers used to cut their losses. When they felt that it would cost more to pursue liabilities than they were likely to get back, they wiped out the liability. That is what is happening at present with those people who have to pay 20 per cent.

If borough treasurers find that they have crossed over the border and can no longer recoup their money, surely in any financial circles it would be argued that it would be sensible for them to cut their losses. If authorities pursue 20 per cent. of the tax through the courts, they will only get themselves into more debt rather than recoup their money.

Abolition of the 20 per cent. rule would give local authorities room to manoeuvre to pursue those who owe the largest amount, as it would release staff, and save police time and court time. It would be a saving all the way down the line, rather than a loss. It seems too ridiculous for words if, for the sake of ideology, we force local authorities to spend more to recover less. It is time that we considered the problem more seriously than the Government have done until now. Let us do away with the tax and get down to the business of running local authorities in a sensible way.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): It will not surprise Opposition Members who served on the Standing Committee that I rise to speak on the amendment because we must consider what the Opposition are asking. The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), in reasonable terms, suggested that we should allow local authorities to wipe out the responsibility of those who fall into the 20 per cent. community charge category, and that we should put that in the statute—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—I am merely quoting back what the hon. Gentleman said in his speech. The Opposition give the cost of collection as the reason.

Mr. Blunkett: For the sake of clarity, I must put it on record that we did not suggest an indemnity, or wiping out the debt that is currently owed.

Mr. Walker: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman made that clear, because it is a fundamental point.

The important aspect of the argument of the hon. Member for Brightside was that, because of the cost of collecting the debt and the involvement of so much manpower—he drew attention to the situation in Strathclyde, and the splendid councillors there; I imagine that that is why Strathclyde is so short of policemen—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition are suggesting that, if their proposal were adopted, local authorities would be able to concentrate their energies on collecting the remainder of the debt. He claimed that some people were able to pay but had not paid.

4.30 pm

What is to prevent a local authority from taking that action now? If a local authority wished to separate debts between the 20 per cent. and other categories—it would not be difficult to do that because it is clear from the value of the debt whether people are in the 20 per cent. or another category—it could chase the outstanding higher debts. That would be a businesslike and logical approach to the problem. Obviously, one should go for the bigger debts first. The cost of collection makes that the logical approach to take. That would allow the authority the scope that the hon. Gentleman claims the amendment would provide. In other words, I argue that authorities already have that scope if they wish to use it.

Mr. Maxton *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The local authority determines whom it takes to court and which debts are chased. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) explained what happened with rent arrears. As he said, when it was known that certain arrears would never be recouped—because the cost of chasing them would be so great—they were written off.

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Gentleman served, as I did, in Committee on the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 and will be aware that the law was changed under that measure in terms of collection between the rating system and the poll tax. He is right to say that, under the old rating system, the local authority had the ability to write off a sum if it wished to do so. That course

[Mr. Maxton]

is no longer available to an authority under the new system, and that is one reason why we are in our present mess.

Mr. Walker: The proposal about which I was speaking was put forward by Labour Members, and I was simply commenting on it. Local authorities can chase such debts as they determine in law shall be chased. If authorities do not chase higher debts, as against those in the 20 per cent. category, it is their decision not to go after them. I understood the hon. Member for Brightside to claim that Strathclyde faced financial problems because of the number of people in the 20 per cent. category and the need for the authority to use so much manpower to chase that debt. He went on to say what ratio of the total debt was represented by the number of people in the 20 per cent. category.

Mr. Maxton: Representing 70 per cent.

Mr. Walker: Yes, 70 per cent. of the debt in Strathclyde, being the number in the 20 per cent. category. Hence, the authority should be chasing those in the 30 per cent. category, if it thinks it can get the money which is owed.

Mr. Maxton: It is clear that the hon. Gentleman does not understand Scottish law on this matter, and I leave it to my English hon. Friends to deal with the law applying to authorities elsewhere in the country. Local authorities in Scotland are obliged to take out warrants against those in debt. The Act instructs them to do that. Once a warrant is taken out, it is for the sheriff officer to decide who will and who will not be proceeded against.

Mr. Walker: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman consults his former hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) about that, for he probably knows more about the detail of the provision of the Act than any other hon. Member. Having travelled the route of a non-payer, he was on the receiving end of what a local authority is capable of doing under the law as it stands. The hon. Gentleman's case fell down because he said that, if we gave local authorities the ability to write off and do what they wished with the 20 per cent. payers, they could then concentrate their energies on the rest. Nothing under the present legislation stops them proceeding against those who cannot pay but should pay.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is simply confusing the argument, and I suspect that he is doing so deliberately.

In a previous incarnation, I used to issue warrants. I was a provincial solicitor for the South of Scotland electricity board, so I know the warrant system perfectly well. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, before the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, agents acting on behalf of a person who was owed money, whether substantial or insignificant sums, could pick and choose between the debtors against whom they proceeded.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kirkwood: I shall give way in due course.

It is significant that, under the 1987 legislation, local authorities were obliged to take out warrant proceedings against all and sundry. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) may speak about this point, but I understand that the only discretion allowed by the 1987 Act was that priority could be given to the order in which instructions were given to sheriff officers to pursue debtors. Local authorities had discretion to that extent only. If that is what the hon. Member for Tayside, North is trying to say in his confused way, I agree with him, but I suspect that he is pursuing the argument simply to confuse the matter, which amounts to administrative chaos and much hardship for those who cannot pay.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman is getting it right.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is encouraging.

I have been following the argument from a social security viewpoint. Alas, I was not privileged to be one of the chosen few who served on the Standing Committee, although I read some of the proceedings with interest. When the Minister winds up, will he say what consideration the Department gave to that question before the legislation? I perfectly understand the exigencies of a political emergency that had to be dealt with quickly, but was active consideration given to dealing with that problem and abolishing the 20 per cent. contribution? What is the current assessment of the cost of that? It would be helpful to the debate if the Minister could say a word about that, because his Department must have an estimate, although it may be difficult to arrive at an accurate figure.

I welcomed the statement by the Secretary of State for Social Security that compensation would not be clawed back, because £700 million is not an insignificant figure. There was much uncertainty about whether the Government would go all the way and haul that money back out of the pockets of those who qualified for income support, to add to the other misery that such people were suffering. The Government's made the right response to that problem.

Nevertheless, the problem in Scotland is peculiar to the extent that the legislation applied for a 12-month additional period. Nineteen-eighty-nine was a particularly difficult period for those on low incomes, because they had just begun to feel the effects of the Social Security Act 1986, which took effect in 1988. Water rates, particularly north of the border but also I suspect in other parts of the country, started to bite. Many people lost single payments to which they were entitled. Much of the transitional relief was taken out of the system as the relief funds that had quite rightly been introduced ran out.

The combination of all those factors in 1989-90, particularly in Scotland, took a heavy toll of pensioners who used to qualify for supplementary pensions and, under the new income support system, received pensioner premiums. Much hardship was caused. All of us north of the border—I speak for all parties—heard people on low incomes, particularly pensioners, explain how they simply could no longer make ends meet. When two-pensioner households had to pay two 20 per cent. contributions, it made the difference between profit and loss. Those who had previously been able to manage found that the combination of changes, including the 20 per cent. contribution, made it impossible for them to make ends meet.

As a result, a high proportion—some estimates make it 15 per cent., some as high as 40 per cent.—of people subject to the 3 million warrants issued north of the border have found it impossible to make ends meet. Discussions that I have held with representatives of citizens advice bureaux and other poverty pressure groups suggest that there is a continuing problem which has been rolling on since 1989-90 during the two or three years of the poll tax. Those problems are getting worse.

Many pensioners are now taking recourse in the deregulated credit market; they borrow money from money lenders. Some of them buy their consumer durables and clothing from catalogues that enable them to buy on credit. Many of them are storing up problems that will get worse before they get better. The Department had a duty to consider that combination of circumstances, and I hope that the Minister will say that that aspect has at least been considered. The Department faced a difficult political problem, and, like everyone else, I welcome the fact that the poll tax has been abandoned. However, when considering alternatives, the Department had a duty to consider all the circumstances before it opted for the Bill.

It is a great shame, a tragedy, that the opportunity was not taken to abolish that level of difficulty in 1992, as the amendment suggests. I accept that it may have been expensive to do so. However, no other single act of the Government could have more effectively ameliorated the continuing problems of financing the poll tax.

I subscribe entirely not just to the content of the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), but to the way in which he deployed the argument. I do not think that we should give the issue a high political profile, although of course it contains political aspects. The hon. Gentleman made his proposal in a measured way. His suggestion was underscored by the essential administrative argument and the Audit Commission's claims, which I think are now widely accepted by hon. Members.

Huge administrative costs are involved in collecting the 20 per cent. contribution from those who are least well-off and sending out poll tax book after poll tax book through doors every time there is a change, keeping the registers up to date and employing extra staff in local government. One aspect that riled people in the small market towns that I represent in south-east Scotland involved the adverts that were seen week after week for local government officials in finance departments on wages that were, for my part of the country, relatively high. Such officers were being employed in droves. New computer equipment and computer operatives were also being taken on to keep the administration under control.

They have managed to do remarkably well in south-east Scotland, where the non-payment rate is relatively low. That is because people in my district of the country are honest, law-abiding citizens, as they were in the 16th century, when they used to murder Englishmen with gay abandon. We celebrate that every year in our common riding festivals, to which hon. Members are hereby invited——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart) *rose*——

4.45 pm

Mr. Kirkwood: I give way to the Minister, who is obviously going to come next summer.

Mr. Stewart: I do not dispute what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the honesty and integrity of his constituents. I hope that he will agree that the other reason why Borders regional council has done well in collecting the tax is that, from the outset, it enthusiastically tried to maximise collection.

Mr. Kirkwood: Yes, that is absolutely right. One scheme that the council came up with, of which I was fortunate enough to be able to take advantage, was the allowance of a small discount for people who paid straight away. That worked extremely well. However, such a system is open to people such as me, but not to all my constituents.

Mr. Douglas: Will the hon. Gentleman refer to the record? In the Borders in October 1990, 42 per cent. of the community tax was unpaid and in October 1991 it was 49 per cent. Is that what the hon. Gentleman considers a relatively good record?

Mr. Kirkwood: Yes, it is for that stage of the year. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the end-of-year figures, he will see that the total collection rate is 96 and 97 per cent. Therefore, he will find that the lower percentage was a statistical freak.

It would create huge administrative costs and be sheer lunacy to proceed with the tax for the year 1991-92, which will be an extremely difficult year for many people on low incomes. It would fly in the face of the evidence from local authorities, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and other organisations that have studied the problems. The Government should accept the timeous amendment, which will make a substantial difference to those who are least welloff and would go a long way to easing the transition between the hated poll tax and the new council tax when—God help us—it is introduced in 1993.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) started by saying that he agreed with the Labour party spokesman and ended up by giving a fine display of how community charge collection could work in practice. Perhaps that explains why his pressing bid to serve on the Bill's Committee was rejected by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), who leapt in to take her rightful place.

I question two aspects of the amendment: first, what it says and, secondly, what the Opposition have said it says and their reasons for doing so. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) waxed gently but eloquently in favour of the abolition of the 20 per centers. I do not believe that the amendment removes the 20 per centers. If it did, there would be a considerable new poverty trap for the many people who are one step above the income support requirements and who consequently miss out on so many benefits. There would be a sudden drop from the 20 per cent. qualifying level to zero. The amendment produces a sliding scale down from 100 per cent to zero, to which I do not object in principle—it is something that we shall enact in future legislation.

[Mr. John Bowis]

However, the hon. Member for Brightside cannot suggest that everyone on a 20 per cent. charge will be excluded from payment under his proposals. In addition, he cannot say that the collection problems will be less, as instead of pursuing people for their 20 per cent. bills he would have to pursue them for 1, 2 and 5 per cent. bills.

Mr. Blunkett: I want the hon. Gentleman to concede that if the taper were kept at the present 15p, as opposed to sharpening it to the 20p proposed for council tax benefit for 1993, people would be better off with the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution—with 100 per cent. available rebate. Instead of being penalised from 1993, as some who are struggling just above benefit levels will be, they will be pleased to find that they, too, are helped.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman has not answered my point. He suggested that a few people who have their charge removed altogether might benefit, but I maintain that the sliding scale would still exist, which would make the system that much more difficult to implement.

So much for the wording of the amendment; what about its purpose, as spelt out by the hon. Member for Brightside? It is supposed to relieve people who are liable for up to 20 per cent. of the charge. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that it is in his hands and those of his colleagues in local government to relieve such people in the coming year. We already have a system to enable people to meet the challenge and remove the charge from everyone on income support. All that local authorities need to do is set their spending requirements at such a level that they come in at or below target. The 20 per cent. of community charge incorporated in the income support system will then pay, or more than pay, the amount required by local authorities.

It has been said time and again that my council provides good-quality services at low cost. I do not wish to repeat the fact that this year and next we will have a zero charge, good though that is. I want to cite the fact that last year we had a £148 charge. This year, before the Budget change, we had a £136 charge. So we are talking about collecting from our 20 per centers about 50p a week, which is more than adequately compensated for in the income support system. Each and every one of my less well off constituents benefited considerably—they were in pocket as a result of the system.

The system that enabled that to happen depends crucially on good management by local authorities, on councils looking after taxpayers' money that they receive from the centre and charge payers' money that they collect locally, and on their spending it wisely. My borough of Wandsworth has achieved the zero charge so that every less well off constituent is in pocket, not by means of additonal grant from Government—as I have often said, the neighbouring borough of Lambeth received one third more in Government grant last year, has done so this year and will next year—but by spending the money wisely.

The ability to set a low charge while maintaining quality is entirely due to the fact that over the past decade my council has been able to make £50 million efficiency savings. Let us compare that with the activities of many Labour authorities. The Labour-run council of Leeds, for instance, sent about 800 people to celebrate twinning arrangements in Germany, at a cost of about £76,000. Was that really the right priority, the one that the less well off people of Leeds wanted?

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The hon. Gentleman should check his facts and spell out to the House the precise amount of the contribution of the local chamber of commerce, which wanted to establish trade links.

Mr. Bowis: I even missed out one item: the sum of £17 a day expedition given to each of 12 councillors who accompanied the 800.

The former leader of Wakefield council had his room rebuilt three times in four years. He then moved into the chief executive's office because his room was not big enough and had a shower installed in it. When a new chief executive arrived, he decided that his room was not big enough either and had it expanded at a cost of £16,000. Wakefield council spent up to £1·5 million refurbishing the town hall. Are these priorities helping the less well off people in these boroughs, or are those councils overspending wastefully? Those Labour authorities could not care a fig about the less well off—if they could, they would ensure that their spending was on target so that the element of 20 per cent. in the income support system would pay for poor people's contributions.

Mr. Allen McKay: It is all very well the hon. Gentleman pointing a finger at some councils' expenditure without asking why it was incurred in the first place. We in Parliament need more room across the road and have spent millions of taxpayers' money on moving across the road. The hon. Gentleman is in favour of that, but he complains about local authorities doing the same. He did not mention Wandsworth's standard spending assessment, but could he tell me why it costs my authority £1 less per person to run the authority than it costs Westminster? Why does Westminster get £2 a head to educate its children when my authority gets only £1? Where is the justice in that? The hon. Gentleman should give us the whole story and compare like with like.

Mr. Bowis: We certainly should compare like with like and it is difficult to do that across the country, but we can do it across boundaries in London, where it is fair to compare allocations. One third more is allocated to Lambeth than to Wandsworth, but the latter makes the money work efficiently so that costs are kept down.

I was not talking about debt charges; I was talking about £1·5 million redecorating costs and questioning that sort of priority. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman occupies a lavish new office. I still make do with my shared office in Dean's Yard. No doubt one day it will be brought up to the standard to which the hon. Gentleman has become accustomed.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): My hon. Friend is right to illustrate some of the absurd spending by Labour councils. Our Labour-controlled county council wanted to close an old people's home in my constituency for want of a few thousand pounds, yet it cleaned up the front entrance to county hall and carved the name "Nottinghamshire County Council" in stone over the entrance—as though we did not know that is what it was called. It also carved the name of every councillor to win a seat two years before, at a cost of £250,000. It is that sort of absurd expenditure which irritates us.

Mr. Bowis: That is an eloquent example of exactly what I am talking about. I should imagine that Nottinghamshire carved her name with shame, not with pride.

I close with two more reasons why overspending can lead to overcharging vulnerable people and they explain why we get angry when we hear Labour Members talking about vulnerable people. Their wasteful policies result in poor people paying more. I refer first to collection. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire rightly highlighted his council's policy in this respect and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland confirmed what he said. Most good collectors are Conservative councils, but not all. There are councils of all parties and of none which manage to collect. Salford manages to collect 103 per cent. of target and Gateshead collects 104 per cent.; so we know that Labour authorities can do it, too. That must include a large number of people on the 20 per cent. who are paying legally and rightly, if not willingly, and at least doing their duty by their fellow citizens.

The campaigns that we have seen by the Opposition parties—not, I must say, the Liberal Democrats, but some other parties, particularly the Labour party—to persuade people not to pay have resulted in surcharges on the vulnerable this year. Those surcharges stand as a record of shame to the Labour party and to any other party that supports that policy of non-payment. The people who are having to pick up the tab for that policy and that connivance in non-payment are not just the Mr. and Mrs. Average in any constituency, but the less well off, those who are in receipt of income support, but who have honestly paid their contributions and now find that people better off than them are causing them to be surcharged to pay for that non-payment.

5 pm

Mr. Maxton: First, as an hon. Member who presumably supported his Government in wasting £14 billion on imposing this tax, the hon. Gentleman might show some humility and apology rather than doing what he is doing. Secondly, will he stop smearing the Labour party as regards non-payment? The Labour party has been absolutely clear in its opposition to non-payment of the poll tax. As the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) will bear out, we have always opposed non-payment as a policy and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Bowis: When I see the leaders of the hon. Gentleman's party throwing out hon. Members on the Benches behind him who advocated non-payment and throwing out leaders of councils throughout the country who have advocated non-payment, I will accept from him lessons about standing four square behind law and order and willingness to pay one's taxes.

This is a debate about the 20 per centers. The Bill introduces a scale down to zero. I do not disagree with the principle of that scale for the future, because once we move to the new tax, when in theory at least the system will change in terms of both income support and the community charge, we are into a new ball game. I am very happy to add as a postcript, as a result of my question to Social Security Ministers, that everyone on income support is given the added bonus. They will not have to hand over to the councils the 20 per cent. element in income support because of the new scale; they will have the benefit of keeping that in their pockets. So the whole country will benefit, as citizens of Wandsworth have to date.

Mr. Battle: The contribution of the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) came across as a last-ditch defence of the poll tax. I shall be surprised if the hon. Gentleman does not vote against the council tax, on the basis that he would prefer the poll tax to remain. Some of his speech sounded exactly like the arguments that we had when the poll tax was introduced—a mish-mash of half-baked myths and half-truths about Labour local authorities and others which do not stand close scrutiny. They are unfounded allegations that could be challenged anywhere within or outside the House.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Leeds city council, which has never been rate-capped or poll tax-capped. Indeed, Conservative Ministers have commended the prudence of Leeds city council. He may find that he will fall out with some members of his own party who support trade links with Europe, while he seems to be running with the Prime Minister and suggesting that we should blow cold on Europe and not build the vital trade links that our cities need to ensure that our industries are taken through to the next century and not rubbed out by this Government's economic policies.

Getting back to the amendment, I find it difficult to understand why the Government are holding out any longer—or, more precisely, who in the Government is holding out—against withdrawing the 20 per cent. rule from next April. Why can it not go through tonight? There are overwhelming arguments for getting rid of it from next April. We would welcome the reintroduction of the 100 per cent. rebate, with the council tax as part of that. It is the only part of the council tax Bill so far which has met with universal acclaim.

There is also general relief, as others have said, that the Government agreed in Committee that there would be no clawback of the compensation element when the council tax is introduced. That is welcome, because it perpetuated a further injustice in the poll tax. Now that the Government have got as far as accepting the principle that there should be no minimum contribution to local government, it is hard to see why the question of timing should hold matters up. It seems to me that that is all that is left; it is simply a question of the timing of the introduction. It certainly cannot be the principle of the 100 per cent. rebate, because that is now universally accepted.

It has been helpful that some Government Members agree with us that the 20 per cent. rule should be abolished now. I was on television with the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) on the "Scrutiny" programme when he agreed that it would be much better if the Government abolished the 20 per cent. rule now; and I know that he is not alone. Many Tory Members agree with that point of view.

That reflects a change of approach by Conservative Members. I believe that they all see and acknowledge that the time is now up for the 20 per cent. minimum rule, on which the former Prime Minister insisted. I hope that the Government will accept our amendment tonight and agree that it is unnecessary to perpetuate that injustice.

All that seems to remain is a lingering confusion about what means-tested income support is and what it is supposed to do. Income support is not part of the tax system, whether local or income tax. It is for people who

[Mr. Battle]

pay no tax because they are on a very low income or have no job. It should be separated, and is separated by the benefits system, from the tax system. It is part of the income maintenance system and should never have been confused with the taxation system. From the start the Government have presented that basic contradiction in their ideology. They have insisted on the notion of universality, that all must pay, regardless of their ability to pay, or, more important, their inability to pay and regardless of their lack of income. It may, on the face of it, seem laudable that everybody should make some contribution. The problem is that that principle comes into direct conflict with a means-tested benefit system, where people are asked what income they have and, if they do not have an income, are given support from the state.

The Government now refer to means testing as "targeting". The problem is that universality clashes and cannot operate with means testing, or targeting. Universality and means testing are incompatible. That is the basic contradiction built into the poll tax from the outset and that is why it is unfair to poorer people.

The whole purpose of income support is to support the incomes of poorer people. It can be argued that everybody should pay their rent and rates or rent and poll tax and we agree with that. But people should not be expected to pay them out of income support if no allowances have been put into income support in the first place. If they have no other source of income, because they have no jobs, the money that they receive from income support should pay their basic bills. That is the basis of income support, but the Government approach has been to lower the level of income support and to deduct, as it were, rent, rates or poll tax. As a result, that income support has been penalised and that is the injustice in the poll tax. I believe that it is not necessary to continue it any longer.

I remind the House of the history of the 20 per cent. rule. Until 1 April 1988, all those on supplementary benefit, as it was then called, received a 100 per cent. rebate if they paid rates because the system was means tested. If someone did not have enough money to pay his or her bills, the principle could take that into account.

The new system of income-related benefit which was introduced in April 1988 allowed only those who received rate rebates to qualify for a maximum rebate of 80 per cent. Everyone at that stage was required to pay 20 per cent. of the rates. In other words, the 20 per cent. principle was introduced during the last year of the rates to prepare for the universal principle of the poll tax. Therefore, the principle of the 20 per cent. contribution was simply carried forward from the end of the rate rebate system to the poll tax rebate system. No matter how low one's income, everyone was required to pay at least 20 per cent. of his or her poll tax bill.

I am surprised that the Government have now conceded that that principle is unjust and are prepared to return to the full 100 per cent. qualification for rebates from April 1993. The Government appear to have acknowledged that they were wrong to try to use the income support system as a means of deducting local tax, or the poll tax as it was.

Why are the Government holding out against all critical opposition, whether from the Labour party, public bodies outside the House, other parties and even some Conservative Members from the Back and Front Benches? There seems to be no logic or economical reason for holding to the 20 per cent. rule any longer. There certainly is no reason of principle.

I emphasise that those people who have been asked to pay the 20 per cent. minimum contribution may have had to face severe financial difficulties. I am sure that most hon. Members will have heard from such people at their advice surgeries, particularly pensioners, who say that the 20 per cent. contribution can cause real hardship if poll tax levels are high. Nor do those levels have to be above the rate for poll tax capping. That should have been taken into account. When the poll tax was introduced, it was simply assumed that 20 per cent. was a notional figure and that people could chip in a small amount to make a contribution because it would not make a real difference to their disposable incomes. In fact, as we have all learnt during the past few years, that 20 per cent. can make a considerable difference to people's incomes.

It was the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), one of the great architects of the poll tax, who, in *The Guardian* on 8 March, said:

"The charge is higher than people on low incomes can afford because the rebate system has become totally inadequate. It was designed in 1988 when we expected community charges to be much lower than they turned out to be."

I agree with that statement. It precisely highlights the problem.

In the responses to the consultation paper "A new tax for local government", those calling for the immediate abolition of the minimum 20 per cent. contribution included the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the Rating and Valuation Association, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of London Authorities, the Association of District Councils, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Society of London Treasurers. In other words, evidence of the need to abolish immediately the 20 per cent. payment has been building up.

In support of the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution, the audit commissioners said:

"It is worth mentioning one change which would assist authorities in their current collection arrangements and therefore, indirectly, facilitate the introduction of the council tax."

That has to be a helpful suggestion. It is a friendly remark suggesting to the Government that the abolition of the 20 per cent. rule will ease in the council tax and ensure that the kind of confusion and chaos that we have seen in local government finance in the past year is not repeated next year.

5.15 pm

In a memorandum in March this year the Child Poverty Action Group said:

"The strong reluctance to make this change—

the immediate restoration of the 100 per cent. rebate—

"stems from the principle underlying the poll tax that everyone should make a financial contribution to local services. We believe this argument is flawed on both principle and pragmatic grounds."

The Government have already accepted the principle that the 20 per cent. contribution is flawed. That is why they decided to reintroduce the 100 per cent. rebate. I hope that the Minister will not cling to it. When he gave his press conference on 28 November he seemed to suggest that it would be inappropriate to introduce some of the changes and that it would be better to wait and introduce all the

changes at the same time under the new system. He seemed to be arguing that, as long as the poll tax had a shelf life, the principle that everyone must pay regardless should be held to, as though it were irrevocably wedded to the principle of the poll tax. I hope that he does not believe that; that he now fully subscribes to the notion that there should be a 100 per cent. rebate system. The working out of the income and benefit system is different from that of the tax system, whether it is based on property or personal income, or on a combination of the two, as is the council tax. I hope that the Minister is not holding on to a residual principle that everyone must pay.

On 26 March, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) said:

"About 70 per cent. of defaulters are those who are supposed to pay 20 per cent.."—[*Official Report*, 26 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 858.]

If the 20 per cent. deduction has become the problem of the whole system, it is nonsense to continue for a further year. If that is the case, it should be tackled now, not simply compounded, allowing problems to build up in the future.

I hope that the Minister will take seriously the Audit Commission's argument for abolishing the 20 per cent. minimum contribution. In its report, "Administration of the Community Charge: Some Longer-term Considerations", it says:

"exempting 20 per cent. payers would more than pay for itself and would ease the pressure on the system, particularly in areas where collection is very difficult anyway."

If the Government cannot accept the amendment and do not agree to abolish the 20 per cent. rule now, the inevitable result will be that the problems that have been experienced this year will be experienced on exactly the same scale, if not worse, next year. It must be good economic management and common sense to abolish that 20 per cent. contribution now.

We are pleased that the Government have at least acknowledged in principle that the 20 per cent. rule should go, but I hope that the Minister can now assure me that there are no pragmatic reasons for not making the change now to be effective from next April rather than having to wait longer. Not many changes were made to the Bill in Committee, but I hope that, as on the clawback, the Government will say that the amendment is common sense and that they are prepared to accept it.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): In a rare moment of wit in Committee, the Minister referred to one Labour policy as Rowland revaluation—rolling revaluation. The Conservatives who supported the poll tax should be called "Bill 'em High" and their corollary "Owen a Lot". Certainly a lot of people owe the 20 per cent. minimum charge under the poll tax. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said, it has been said in the House that about 70 per cent. of all poll tax defaulters come in the 20 per cent. category.

Continuing that charge for the next 15 months has been slammed by many pressure groups such as the Child Poverty Action Group. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux says:

"Clients are finding it increasingly difficult to manage on present levels of benefit. Meeting their basic needs such as food, clothing, water and heating more often than not means that they are unable to meet the 20 per cent. payment in full."

The association added:

"Introduction of a 100 per cent. rebate would relieve considerable hardship for many of our clients".

The Child Poverty Action Group says that the 20 per cent. contribution places a considerable financial burden on many households and NACAB adds:

"While the sums concerned may appear to be small, they are payable for each adult in the household and come on top of many other rising costs that have to be met from benefit."

Those are scathing remarks from organisations that have to help the poorest in our communities—who are hammered by the 20 per cent. minimum payment which the Government insist on continuing for another year at least.

The Audit Commission argues that it is nonsense to try to collect that payment. It says that 20 per cent. payers "contributed £6 a year net to the public purse in 1990-91 . . . while the average collection cost per charge payer was around £15."

It cost more to collect those 20 per cent. payments than they produced in revenue. The commission's pragmatic arguments for abolishing the system include this:

"Exempting 20 per cent. payers would more than pay for itself and would ease the pressure on the system, particularly in areas where collection is very difficult already."

Council rebate and benefit systems are under enormous pressure in trying to process claims and have been forced into chaos. That is the case in my local authority and in many others throughout the country. Many of my constituents have written to say that incorrect bills omitting rebate which are the consequence of that burden on local authorities have resulted in their being summoned to appear before the courts. I know that that is true of charge payers in several other constituencies.

The staff who deal with 20 per cent. rebates could be engaged instead on collecting the poll tax from those who owe the full amount and do not pay it. The Government are preventing councils from effectively collecting those moneys.

As to the benefits clawback and the Government's argument that the poorest should use their benefit payments to meet their 20 per cent. poll tax bills, the Child Poverty Action Group says that it and other organisations query the basis on which the Government calculate compensation,

"since benefit rates in April 1988 were set 50p per week lower for each adult than the illustrative benefit levels given in the 1985 White Paper, uprated in line with the Rossi index. Claimants have also been paying additional VAT . . . The arguments about the exact amount of compensation can get very complex . . . But the figures"—

that is, those produced by the Government—

"take no account of community charge levels higher than average".

Many are higher than the average and the poorest end up losing. The Government do not seem to care. The CPAG adds that the figures take no account either of

"the losses that many claimants have suffered in previous years, when the Rossi index, used to uprate means-tested benefits, did not include increases in community charge levels."

The CPAG concludes that the Government accepted that they will not claw back the compensation element in means-tested benefit when the council tax operates, so they have already accepted that the double counting argument is no longer relevant. As the Government have done that in relation to the council tax, they should do so in respect of next year's poll tax, abolish the 20 per cent. payment, and not reduce benefits.

When my right hon. Friend and hon. Friends and I make that argument on the Floor of the House, we are met with stony silence by the Secretary of State and his

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

Ministers. The Government's nastiness in refusing to abolish the 20 per cent. payment proves that, although the Tories claim to be different since the departure of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), they remain intent on punishing the poor.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) concluded his remarks sooner than I expected.

The continuation of the 20 per cent. poll tax payment is unfair, uneconomical, and unreasonable. The Government do not have a leg to stand on in view of the arguments that they previously deployed as to why it is necessary to maintain the 20 per cent. payment until the introduction of the council tax in April 1983. It is clear that nothing but meanness of mind on the part of the Government prevents them from implementing 100 per cent. rebates from April 1992.

The Government's action is unfair because of the hardship, distress, illness, and other problems that it will cause for many in our communities who cannot afford to make a 20 per cent. contribution. Conservative Members say that that represents only a few pounds a week—but if a person's income is only a few pounds a week, that contribution represents a considerable amount of money to him or her.

I will not rehearse all the problems that people face in trying to make that payment, but I cite the example of a 22-year-old man in my constituency who is unable to obtain full-time work. After he has paid his rent and modest food costs, he is left with £3 a week from which to pay the bus fares—which are expensive in Bristol—that he incurs in attending job interviews, and his community charge contribution. It is beyond belief that such a person should be expected to continue paying poll tax when the Government have accepted in principle that a 100 per cent. rebate ought to be introduced.

The same applies to pensioners. Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House have experience of pensioners coming to surgeries and experiencing the humiliation of having to say, "This is how much pension I receive a week, and this is how much I spend on gas, electricity, and rent. The two do not balance, and I cannot afford the poll tax."

Often, pensioners cannot afford to pay even for the fuel needed to keep them warm in cold weather. They need constantly to balance their meagre finances—paying one bill this week, and another bill next week. It is cruel of the Government, having accepted the principle of a 100 per cent. rebate, to make people suffer for yet another year. That is the unjust nature of continuing to force a 20 per cent. poll tax payment on the poorest in our communities.

Many people are struggling to meet their poll tax liability. They are the very people at whom the amendment is directed.

Mr. Cohen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, but, as she said, I did keep my remarks succinct. My hon. Friend made a good point about high public transport costs in Bristol. Is she aware that in London they account for about one third of the benefit level?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Although transport costs are interesting, they do not come within the amendment.

Mr. Cohen: My point was that claimants must pay their 20 per cent. poll tax contribution out of the benefit that they receive, although a third of their benefit is taken up by transport costs. Is that not deporable?

5.30 pm

Ms. Primarolo: It is indeed. It is even crazier that qualification for benefit depends on claimants' ability to prove that they are actively seeking work and attending interviews—which, of course, requires them to travel.

Council after council has clearly demonstrated that it costs more to collect the 20 per cent. minimum contribution than is gained through that contribution. Its abolition would mean a net saving for poll tax payers who are not receiving benefit. Hon. Members have explained that this afternoon, quoting from the Audit Commission report and from what local authorities have said. The 20 per cent. contribution is unfair, forcing people to endure unnecessary suffering; it is also uneconomic and unreasonable, even when judged according to the Government's logic.

The Government's consultation document on the council tax stated clearly that 100 per cent. rebates would be introduced, and we welcome that. The Government also said that they would have to consider adjusting benefit rates when the council tax was introduced because of the "compensation element" given in means-tested benefits in April 1988 and 1989, when claimants were required to make a 20 per cent. contribution.

On 28 November, the Government themselves kicked that stall away by announcing that there would be no clawback when the council tax was introduced. They have now accepted the two main principles involved: first, that the poorest should make no contribution to local government taxation, and, secondly, that there should be no clawback to compensate for the changes made in the social security system.

There is, to put it mildly, a strong case for putting both principles into practice immediately so that they are operational by April 1992. The arguments for reintroducing 100 per cent. rebates have already been well rehearsed, but the Government's arguments for not introducing them in 1992 should also be considered. First, they have claimed that the poll tax—the community charge—is different from the council tax; secondly, they have said that benefit levels for 1992-93 have already been set and that change is therefore impossible.

In Committee, the Minister said:

> "In 1993, we shall move to a new system that is based on property. Until then, the system of taxation will be based on people. We increased people's social security benefits so that they could contribute to the personal tax".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 5 December 1991; c. 963.]

According to the Government's own description, however, the council tax is only partly a property tax; it is also a personal tax. The single-person discounts are an obvious example of the way in which the personal element is retained.

The Government have said that there will be no clawback of the minimum contribution. They have kicked away that stall quite nicely, too. It has been difficult to sustain the argument that the community charge is a charge for services in practice. The Government's own statements comparing the distributional impact of the poll

tax with that of the council tax lend weight to the view that the poll tax is just another form of local government taxation.

Finally, the Government imposed the requirement for a 20 per cent. minimum contribution to domestic rates before the poll tax was introduced. Their argument that the 20 per cent. payment cannot be abolished because of the personal-taxation element is a load of rubbish. Although the council tax is both personal and property-based, the Government are providing 100 per cent. rebates, and in any case the 20 per cent. contribution was orginally introduced under a property-based system.

Yet again the Government have trimmed their arguments to suit whatever they choose to do at any time. Perhaps we all do that to some extent, but this is an important issue: we are discussing whether the poorest and most vulnerable members of society should make a 20 per cent. contribution. The Government have admitted that there is no reason for that contribution to be made any longer, and have said that it will not be made after 1993. Why, then, do they not abolish it from 1 April 1992?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I deliberately waited until what seemed to be the very end of the hon. Lady's speech before intervening; after all, she did say "Finally" a few moments ago.

At the beginning of the debate, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) taunted me: indeed, he invoked the Almighty's attention to my cotton socks, so annoyed was he by the fact that, in Committee, I had asked the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) why he wanted to abolish the 20 per cent. rule. I have not yet received a full reply to that question.

One point has not been raised either today or in Committee. Opposition Members seem blindly to assume that abolishing the 20 per cent. rule would cost local authorities nothing. That is not true. Has it occurred to the hon. Lady that local authorities would still incur a cost in working out who should be exempted? She cannot duck that part of the equation. We have heard only a partial argument today, as we did in Committee.

Ms. Primarolo: I wish that I had more time. I can say "Touché" to the Minister, for we have already made that very point to him. We asked whether local authorities would be burdened with costs when trying to calculate who would be entitled to the 25 per cent. single-household discount under the new system, and suggested that without a register it would be difficult for local authorities to establish who was receiving income support. In Committee, Ministers continually told us that there would be no problem: council tenants, even if they were not receiving 100 per cent. rebates, would receive housing benefit and income support.

The Government have now decided not to claw back the compensation element in means-tested benefits— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Only one debate can take place at a time, and the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) has the Floor.

Ms. Primarolo: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The 100 per cent. rebates will be very welcome, but they will not be introduced until 1993. We should like them to be introduced in 1992. On the Government's own admission, abolishing the 20 per cent. minimum contribution is logical. The Government have accepted that claimants should continue to receive compensation, as well as ceasing to pay the 20 per cent. contribution.

The conclusion is simple. The Audit Commission's pragmatic arguments for the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution have always been convincing. According to "The Administration of the Community Charge: Some Longer-term Considerations", published in 1991, the Audit Commission said:

"exempting 20 per cent. payers would more than pay for itself and would ease the pressure on the system, particularly in areas where collection is very difficult anyway."

That answers the Minister's point. The Audit Commission is supposed to be expert in knowing what local authorities can or cannot do.

I hope that even at this late stage the Government will realise that they are being unfair, unjust, unreasonable and illogical and that they will therefore vote for the amendment so that 100 per cent. rebates can be introduced for those on benefit from 1 April 1992.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I wish to refer to the position in my area, which will not have escaped the Minister's notice. He is aware that I am deeply concerned about those in Rotherham who will have to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax next year and who will have to pay 20 per cent. of that part of the successor tax that relates to property when the new system is introduced. While the Government determine the level of poll tax, in so far as they determine the standard spending assessment, those areas that receive an unfair and excessively low standard spending assessment will find that they have to continue to raise a much larger figure, even from the poorest who pay 20 per cent., than should be the case.

Three years ago, the Department of the Environment could not include employment as a factor in determining standard spending assessments, or refer to the tourist character of an area in determining SSAs, but now it has given way and allowed contributions to be made and support to be given to tourist areas. However, it has not allowed unemployment to be taken into account in areas such as mine. That inevitably means that those who live in poor areas or in areas with high unemployment will find that the poorest in the community, even though they have to contribute only 20 per cent., will inevitably have to pay, proportionately, a great deal more.

The Minister and others believe that people ought to pay 20 per cent., but I notice that their belief does not extend to Wandsworth, where no one has to pay anything. The residents of Wandsworth paid nothing last year and they will pay nothing next year. I suspect that, if the Government remain in office, the people of Wandsworth will not even have to pay anything the year after that. However, it does not seem to have dawned on Ministers that they may not be providing a fair level of SSAs to areas that refrain from levying a poll tax and that then receive the benefit of not having to incur administrative costs of at least £2 million.

The request that the 20 per cent. relief should be changed so that the poor receive 100 per cent. benefit should be extended to the rest of the country and not concentrated merely on the borough of Wandsworth. I take a dim view of the unfairness that is inherent in the methods of grant determination, an unfairness that inevitably will continue. The Government have been told during the last two or three years of the inherent unfairness

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

of the system. Until that unfairness is dealt with, it is wrong for the Government to impose burdens on the poorest and for the poorest to continue to experience higher burdens of taxation simply because they live in poorer areas.

While the Government continue to classify poor areas as rich, needy areas as affluent and necessitous areas as salubrious, the system will remain grossly unfair. If the Minister looks again at the figures for my constituency, he will have to confess that they are grossly unfair. While that unfairness exists, I object to my constituents having to pay an unfair burden of poll tax. That is particularly acute when it comes to the neediest in the community.

5.45 pm

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) raised topics that were not raised by any other speaker. We do not take account of unemployment when establishing the standard spending assessment. However, we do take account of social factors. If unemployment continues apace for a period, it is reasonable to assume that its effects will be reflected in social factors. It is precisely the measurement of social factors that gives a higher standard spending assessment to Tower Hamlets, Lambeth, Hackney and to a lesser extent to Wandsworth than to Rotherham. The hon. Gentleman must not say that social factors are not taken into account. They are. It is precisely that which leads to the higher settlements for the places that I mentioned.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) opened the debate by speaking softly and gently. He urged me to reply in the same tone. I am not entirely sure that I shall be able to do so. There were elements in his speech that excited me somewhat. In particular, I found a deep contrast between the hon. Gentleman's approach and that of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). Perhaps unusually, I found a certain amount of good sense creeping into the argument on the Liberal Benches. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire appears to recognise that the proposal would have a cost. He asked me, very reasonably, what that cost would be. I shall answer his question.

The hon. Member for Brightside seemed, for most of his speech, to assume that the proposal would cost nothing. It was an extraordinary approach, particularly when one recollects that his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) accused the Government of having wasted £14 billion on the community charge—not a figure with which I agree. Money has been spent, but that money has not been wasted. It has been provided for the community charge reduction scheme—to reduce the community charge by £140. That money has gone into benefits and has been used to help people to afford to pay their community charge in one way or another.

Although the hon. Member for Cathcart plucks the figure from the air, if he recognises that all these measures are designed to help people to pay the community charge and that they have a cost which has to be found from the central taxpayer, it follows as night follows day that the Opposition's proposal would also involve a substantial cost.

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: After I have given way to the hon. Member for Cathcart, I shall tell the House what that cost is.

Mr. Maxton: If the Minister is so concerned about ensuring that people can pay the poll tax, he should accept the amendment. That would be the best way of ensuring that the very poorest get out of the poll tax net altogether. I gather that, as the Minister had £4 billion to provide the £140 discount, all he would have had to do was to make a reduction of £126 and use the other £14 to abolish the 20 per cent. rule, not from 1 April next year but from 1 April of this financial year.

Mr. Portillo: We shall come to the figures in a moment, when the hon. Gentleman will be "illuminated".

I thank the hon. Member for Brightside, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) and others, including the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who applauded what the Government are to do when the council tax is introduced, which is to provide 100 per cent. rebates. I confirm that there will be no clawback of the amounts that were put into the social security benefits. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was absolutely right to say that the implied cost—£680 million—is not insignificant. It means that the benefits will be £680 million higher than they would otherwise have been had they been increased simply in line with inflation since 1989. Whether it is expressed in terms of the burden that it imposes on income tax, corporation tax, value added tax or in any other way that one chooses to express it, £680 million is, as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, not an insignificant amount.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) did not deal with what concerns the Government—our priorities, what can be afforded and what it is right to do. She seemed to be engaged in a debating society debate about whether giving up contributions to local taxation from April 1993 meant that the Government had no logical basis on which to sustain them during 1992-93.

In a personal tax—the community charge—based on the principle that everyone should pay something, it is appropriate that those payments should continue to be made. I say that not merely as a matter of dogma but as a reflection of many expectations outside the House. Moneys have been put into people's benefits. Those moneys have been raised by taxpayers. They are the rich and those on low incomes—the spectrum of people in this country.

People have a right to expect that the moneys that have been provided to meet the 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge should be used for that purpose, that that policy is sustained and that local authorities should make every effort to collect the contributions.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): The Minister tried to peddle that argument in Committee. It was unconvincing then, and it is unconvincing now. If the basis of the 20 per cent. contribution is that it is a necessary corollary of a personal tax, and as we have it on the authority—often repeated—of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland —the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)—that the council tax is 50 per cent. a personal tax, logically, there should be a 10 per cent. contribution under the council tax. That is manifestly not the case. What has happened to the Minister's principle?

Mr. Portillo: I wish to express the thanks of the House to the hon. Gentleman for appearing near the end of the debate——

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is very sensitive, but I shall give way.

Mr. Gould: I think that everyone present believes that the Minister's remark was a particularly cheap shot. I was out of the Chamber for only a brief period and, unlike the Secretary of State, I have religiously sat through all the debates today and yesterday.

Mr. Portillo: As ever, the hon. Gentleman's sensitivity leads me to believe that I must have been closer to the target than I suspected. The hon. Member signs up as a member of the Bristol, South debating society. I am not saying that it is impossible to abolish the 20 per cent. contribution; this is a tax under which a contribution is expected from everyone and under which those moneys have been made available. The problem of non-payment has been made much worse by the activities of some Opposition Members to whom I shall come in due course.

The amounts which have been put into benefit, as presently uprated, are £1·31 for single people under 25, £1·48 for single people over 25 and £2·62 for couples, yet the 20 per cent. contribution averages about 80p a week for single people and £1·60 a week for couples. We do not know what the charges will be next year—I hope that they will be not much higher. The benefit rates will rise to £1·40 for single people under 25, £1·58 for single people over 25 and £2·80 for couples. The House can see that the amounts that are available under income support are well above those that people are asked to pay.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall not delay the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps he will tell the House from where he has extracted those figures. Earlier this afternoon, I quoted an answer by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security—the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe)—at column *446* of the *Official Report* of 27 March, which suggested that those figures could not be extrapolated from the benefit levels and that they had never been included as a specific amount.

Mr. Portillo: As the hon. Gentleman knows from his experience, the theology of social security is that social security benefits cannot be broken down into amounts for particular purposes. None the less, a specific amount was added when the upratings were first made. I have uprated the amounts for the years since then.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire wanted to know the costs of implementing the measure. One must remember that we would have to pay 100 per cent. rebates to those on income support and, to avoid a cliff edge, have a sliding scale for those who were above the income support level but on low incomes. The total cost of increasing benefits not only to those on income support but to those further up the income scale would be £440 million this year and £500 million in 1992-93.

Mr. Kirkwood: Are those English and Welsh figures, or are they national figures including the Scottish figure? Perhaps the Minister would like to write to me about that matter.

Mr. Portillo: I believe that they are Great Britain figures. It is a considerable sum.

Much has been made of the Audit Commission's figures. I tried to deal with them to the satisfaction of the House. The Audit Commission was looking at 1990-91. In that year, £71 was the average amount that the people paying 20 per cent. were asked to pay. The Audit Commission compared the £71 that those people were asked to pay and the amount that had been added to income support, which, on average, was £6 below the £71. That seems to be a wholly spurious comparison and is not of any interest. If one were to relieve people of the 20 per cent. contribution, one would have to increase the benefit levels, and I have outlined the cost of doing that.

In any case, I do not agree with the Audit Commission's collection figure, which it puts at £15 but which I put at £12·50, on average. Taking 1990-91, when the average contribution was £71, the net revenue that was collectable after deduction of costs was about £60.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) made a good point when discussing the costs of collection. The good sense which he talked was met by an intake of breath among the Opposition. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment—my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key)—made a good point, which was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), when he said that the cost of administration did not go away when 100 per cent. benefit was paid to people. One must still assess them and provide them with the benefit, so there is still a lot of administration. The Labour party has managed to avoid that point throughout the debate.

It was breathtaking that the Labour party has talked about all the difficulties of non-payment and collection. The Labour party has shown extraordinary irresponsibility in concluding that the only response if a tax is difficult to collect is to abolish it or, if it is difficult to collect from a portion of the population, to let those people off.

There was something even more breathtaking than that. We sat here yesterday and listened to Labour Members attack the Scottish National party for advocating non-payment. History is now to be rewritten —as though by a group of Soviet historians—to remove from the history books the contribution of Labour Members who advocated, and set the example of, non-payment.

I should like to put on record the names of those Labour Members who signed the statement that advocated non-payment. The hon. Members for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)——

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Portillo: —the hon. Members for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray), for Tottenham (Mr. Grant)——

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member wishes to raise a point of order.

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is incumbent on the Minister as a matter of order to read the statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is up to the Minister whether or not he reads it. It is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Portillo: I was just about to come to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who signed the statement, so he will be able to read it out himself. Other hon. Members who signed were the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and Mr. Eric Heffer, the hon. Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott), for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas)—he is now in his place—for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), for Leyton, for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) and Mr. Pat Wall, the hon. Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo)—also in her place—for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) and for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell).

6 pm

That is not all—three Scottish Labour Members of Parliament declared that they would not pay the community charge when they launched the Committee of 100 to campaign against the community charge in Scotland. They were the hon. Members for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. [illegible]) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. [illegible]).

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun yesterday said, extraordinarily, that he had not paid himself but that he had not urged anyone else not to pay. Do the Opposition know nothing about the example that legislators set? Do they know nothing about the effect that people who are sent to Westminster to make laws may have on their constituents if they say that they will not pay taxes that have been passed in the House?

We have seen an extraordinary display from the Opposition today. They want to forget their past. They say that the 20 per cent. contribution should be abolished because it is difficult to collect. They want to forget that they made it difficult to collect the 20 per cent. contributions because they urged people not to pay the tax, did not pay it themselves and set a terrible example. It is not for that reason that I ask the House to reject the amendment, but for the arguments that I have outlined. When hon. Members vote tonight they will bear in mind the heavy guilt felt by the Opposition.

Mr. Maxton: I have heard the Second Reading speeches from members of the Government Front Bench and I have sat through the Committee stage waiting to hear one Minister or one Conservative hon. Member say that they were wrong about the poll tax. I have waited for them to show some humility for having imposed the tax on the people of Scotland and then on the people of England and Wales and to apologise for the fact that they got it dramatically wrong. But what do we get? We have heard yet another arrogant speech from the Minister of State in which he tried to justify the unjustifiable.

Having listened carefully to the Minister and to all the Conservative hon. Members who have spoken, I do not understand why they are getting rid of the poll tax. All of them argued in favour of its retention. That is what they have been doing, so why on earth will the hon. Members for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)—who is not here—and the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) vote for the Third Reading of a Bill to abolish the poll tax? The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross may not be aware that clause 100 is entitled "Abolition of community charges". He will vote for the Bill tonight despite the speech that he made earlier.

It is clear that the Government are getting rid of the poll tax not because they no longer believe in it, but because they know that it is an electoral disaster which will bring them down. It will remain an electoral disaster until the general election. It is returning to prominence and the Government will suffer as a result.

If the Government are not prepared to accept any of the sound practical and principled reasons given by the Liberal Democrats and by Labour——

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok) *rose*——

Mr. Maxton: Let me finish this point. If they are not prepared to accept our arguments, I shall offer the electoral argument. Their electoral chances will improve if they can show that they are doing something about the poll tax before the election. The one thing that they can do about the poll tax before the election is to abolish the 20 per cent. minimum payment on 1 April 1992 instead of leaving it until 1993. That is the one thing that they can do to improve their electoral chances, but they are not prepared to do it.

The truth is that the Government want to hang on to every last vestige of the poll tax for as long as possible. Tonight and during all the debates on the 20 per cent. minimum payment and on the council tax we have witnessed the struggle in the Tory party between those who want to get rid of the poll tax completely and those who want to keep it. As a result, the Government have come up with a half-baked compromise which satisfies neither element and which will create almost as big a chaotic mess as the poll tax did.

The Minister said that the principle behind the 20 per cent. payment was that everyone should pay something. However, the 20 per cent. minimum payment was first introduced not for the poll tax but for the old rating system. When it was introduced the Bill covering England and Wales had not yet been introduced into the House. Therefore, we can assume only that its introduction on 1 April 1988 was a wholly cynical way of trying to show that the numbers who would benefit from the introduction of the poll tax would be greater than would otherwise have been the case.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), looks rather puzzled, so I shall explain. The Government introduced the minimum payment under the rating system on 1 April 1988. All single people had to pay 20 per cent. of the rates which for, say, a council in Castlemilk in my constituency were about £450; so a single person would have had to pay £90 a year. That would have applied to any single person—to a widow, a pensioner or a single parent. From 1 April 1989 when the poll tax was introduced that person had to

pay only £50 instead of the £90. Suddenly, the Government could claim that such people were beneficiaries under the poll tax. It was a wholly cynical exercise in statistical manoeuvring to justify the system.

I cannot use the word that I want to describe the arguments that I have heard from Conservative hon. Members but it is blatantly obvious——

Mr. Blunkett: Skulduggery.

Mr. Maxton: My hon. Friend suggests "skulduggery" —I am not sure whether that is a parliamentary term but it is good enough. The Government imposed the poll tax which meant that the poorest people just outside the rebate system paid exactly the same as a millionaire and that everyone paid a minimum amount. They now intend to retain the 20 per cent., but they are happy about the fact that the Bill will give a 25 per cent. discount to every single person, whatever his income. They are happy to ensure that the maximum amount paid by the wealthiest person will be only three times that paid by those just outside the rebate system, but they are not prepared to get rid of a 20 per cent. minimum payment for the poorest in society.

I am sure that most people welcomed the £140 a year reduction because everyone welcomes a cut in taxes, but, as I suggested to the Minister, if instead of giving that reduction they had given only £126 a year, the remaining £14—or 10 per cent.—could have been used to get rid of the 20 per cent. minimum payment not on 1 April 1992, as is now suggested, but on 1 April 1991. That would have been the sensible and humane thing to do. The 20 per cent. payment was unfair from the beginning and it should never have been imposed. The Government now have an opportunity to get rid of it if only they would act with some humanity for once.

It is an impractical tax. Above all else, that has brought it into disrepute. The tax has brought the whole system into disrepute because the level of non-payment has not been due to the non-payment campaigns of Labour Members or of the SNP, but to the fact that the vast majority of people to whom the 20 per cent. applied simply could not afford to pay it.

The note that I have just received from the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), does not say, "Sit down." It says, "Merry Christmas and a happy new year. Will you join me for a drink which I am prepared to pay for?" Anyone who believes that will believe anything.

The system is unworkable. The vast majority of those who have not paid the tax are those on rebates and especially those who are on the 20 per cent. minimum payment. Some 70 per cent. to 80 per cent. of those who have not paid the tax in Scotland are either on the minimum 20 per cent. payment or are on rebates. The non-payment campaign is not the cause. I opposed the principle of the campaign, which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) enunciated last night. I also believe that it has always been a dangerous diversion away from the truth about the 20 per cent. minimum payment and non-payment, which is that people simply could not afford to pay. It has given Conservative Members the constant excuse to attack the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), the SNP and some of my hon. Friends. The poll tax remained in place for six months longer than it should have simply because the Government were able to attack those people and had an excuse for keeping the poll tax on the statute book. It would otherwise have collapsed and gone.

In Scotland, local authorities have now issued 3 million summonses for poll tax debt. The vast majority of them have been issued against the very poorest in our society. It is in itself an obscenity that we are hitting the widows, the single parents and the old-age pensioners. To tax such people makes the tax uncollectable and a waste of time.

Conservative Members suggest that local authorities could get the money deducted directly from income support. In the vast majority of cases in which that has been tried the social security departments have turned down the application because most people who have not paid already have deductions, which means that nothing more can be deducted. How do the local authorities get the tax?

I remember that during the passage of the Abolition of Domestic Rates, etc. (Scotland) Bill I said that we should finish up with warehouses full of Walkman radios which had belonged to youngsters who could not afford to pay the tax. That is what we are coming to. It is not a matter of whether local authorities try to collect the tax. The fact is that one cannot get money from people who do not have it. Local authorities have to try to get the money through the warrant sale and poinding procedure. To try to do that for 3 million people is impossible. We do not have the sheriff officers to do so and——

Mr. Bill Walker: It would be helpful for the hon. Gentleman to tell the House what the adult population of Scotland is today.

6.15 pm

Mr. Maxton: I know the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Does he deny that there are 3 million warrants? I do not deny that some people have received more than one warrant for debt because the tax has been in existence for three years. The point is that the warrants have to be collected individually. If someone settles a warrant for 1989-90, he may still have a warrant outstanding for 1990-91 and another outstanding for 1991-92. That does not negate my argument that 3 million warrants are outstanding.

It is impossible to collect debts from people who do not have the money to pay and who have few goods which, under the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, can be taken from them. The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross will know that the Debtors (Scotland) Act, which should have abolished warrant sales altogether, went only halfway down that road. It took out of the warrant sale procedure many domestic goods. As a result, there are few things, especially in a poor household, which the sheriff officers can poind and take away for sale. That is why I used the example of the Walkman. Often it is the only thing a young unemployed man or woman has which a sheriff officer could collect. What would one get for a second-hand Walkman? A fiver or £10 does not pay off the debt and is far less than the cost of trying to collect the money.

The Government are desperately trying to cling to the last remnants of the poll tax and especially to the one part of the tax which, above all, has been unfair and has made it unworkable—the 20 per cent. minimum payment. The Government have now deserted the principle that everyone should pay something towards local government

[Mr. Maxton]

finance. If they had any humanity left, they would get rid of the tax now. They would accept our amendment or at least admit the principle of it and then table amendments in the other place. Unfortunately, they do not have the humility or the guts to do that. They do not have the guts to stand by their principles, as is shown by the 20 per cent. minimum payment, nor do they have the guts to get rid of that payment on 1 April 1992. The whole problem is—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should know that I make my speeches in my own way without instructions from anybody.

The Government could have got rid of the poll tax itself on 1 April 1992 if they had taken our advice. That would have been the humane thing to do. Now they have an opportunity at least to get rid of the most obnoxious part—the 20 per cent. minimum payment—on 1 April 1992. If Ministers cannot bring themselves to do that, Conservative Members who urged the Government to get rid of the poll tax should join me and my hon. Friends in the Lobby to vote for the amendment, which aims to get rid of the 20 per cent. minimum payment now.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 235, Noes 320.

Division No. 29] **[6.18 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. Martyn Jones and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James

Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise for rising at this point. I wonder if you can help me. I am in a new and slightly strange position of not being privy to all the discussions which take place in the Labour party regarding its attitude on matters relating to the important Bill which is before the House on Report. As you will know, Mr. Speaker makes a provisional selection of amendments, which he puts before the House in a certain order. Some are selected, some are not. An order of those selected for debate is given. Clearly the debate is not open-ended. We are guillotined and there is no opportunity to debate all the topics that hon. Members would wish to debate.

I have tabled some amendments, which have been selected in a group comprising amendments Nos. 57, 122, 85, 68, 69, 107, 124 and 108, which seem to be the only amendments to deal with enforcement procedures such as the use of bailiffs, poindings and imprisonment. Given that the selection is provisional, do you, as the current occupant of the Chair, have any opportunity to rearrange Mr. Speaker's provisional selection of amendments to ensure that between now and 8 o'clock we shall at least have a few minutes to debate enforcement procedures and my desire to oppose the current poll tax enforcement procedures being put lock, stock and barrel into the Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Member's dilemma, but the selection was made yesterday and there is no way in which it can now be changed.

Clause 2

LIABILITY TO TAX DETERMINED ON A DAILY BASIS

6.30 pm

Mr. Gould: I beg to move amendment No. 110, in page 2, line 2, leave out from 'dwelling' to end of line 4.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may take the following amendments:

No. 113, in page 7, line 10, to leave out clause 11.

No. 64, in clause 11, page 7, line 10, leave out

'amount of council tax payable'

and insert 'billing authority shall calculate'.

No. 65, in clause 11, page 7, line 11, leave out 'shall be subject to'.

No. 70, in clause 11, page 7, line 11, leave out 'discount' and insert 'personal surcharge'.

No. 71, in clause 11, page 7, line 14, leave out 'discount' and insert 'personal surcharge'.

No. 17, in clause 11, page 7, line 16, at end insert

'or;

(c) there are two or more residents of the dwelling one of whom is a disabled person and one is his live-in carer who does not fall to be disregarded for the purposes of discount.'.

No. 114, in clause 11, page 7, line 16, at end insert

'or;

(c) there are two residents who are married to each other or living together as husband and wife and they live with one or more residents each of whom falls to be disregarded under paragraph (2) or paragraph (9) of Schedule 1.'.

No. 66, in clause 11, page 7, line 17, leave out

'amount of council tax payable'

and insert 'billing authority shall calculate'.

No. 67, in clause 11, page 7, line 18, leave out 'shall be subject to'.

No. 72, in clause 11, page 7, line 19, leave out 'discount' and insert 'personal surcharge'.

No. 73, in clause 11, page 7, leave out lines 21 to 23 and insert

'there are at least two residents of the dwelling who do not fall to be disregarded for the purpose of the surcharge.'.

No. 7, in clause 11, page 7, line 25, leave out '25' and insert '40'.

No. 9, in clause 11, page 7, line 25, leave out '25 per cent', and insert '50 per cent.'.

No. 74, in clause 11, page 7, line 25, leave out '25' and insert '50'.

No. 8, in clause 11, page 7, line 25, leave out from '25 per cent.' to end of line 27.

No. 75, in clause 11, page 7, line 32, leave out 'discount' and insert 'personal surcharge'.

No. 81, in clause 33, page 23, leave out lines 10 and 11 and insert—

$$\frac{R-P-PT}{T}.$$

No. 82, in clause 33, page 23, line 18, at end insert—

'PT is the aggregate of the amounts the authority estimates will be payable for the year in respect of the personal surcharge as determined under sections 11 and 12;'.

No. 83, in clause 44, page 31, leave out lines 1 and 2 and insert—

$$\frac{R-P-PT}{T}.$$

No. 84, in clause 44, page 31, line 8, at end insert—

'PT is the aggregate of the amounts the authority estimates will be payable for the year in respect of the personal surcharge as determined under sections 11 and 12;'.

No. 18, in clause 79, page 51, line 45, at end insert

'; or

(c) there are two or more residents of the dwelling one of whom is a disabled person and one is his live-in carer who does not fall to be disregarded for the purposes of discount.'.

No. 14, in clause 79, page 52, line 1, leave out '25' and insert '40'.

Mr. Gould: In Committee, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), constantly assured us that the council tax was a combined tax. He preferred to describe it as a combined property and personal tax. He was not quite so keen when it was described as a combined head and roof tax, although I think that he eventually accepted that that is a perfectly accurate way to describe it. He certainly conceded that the council tax combined those two very different elements in such a way as to combine the difficulties which attend both.

In Committee and on Report I think that we have established that there are real problems with the property tax element. There are problems with regional banding, with the compression of the band and consequent unfairness and with the mechanisms for carrying out valuations—what my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) described as a "Mickey-Mouse valuation". That could just about have been tolerated if Ministers had been prepared to acknowledge that it was necessary to move to a straightforward property tax to get rid of the poll tax. Unfortunately, they were not prepared to do so. As a consequence we are saddled with this hybrid monster—part personal tax, part property tax, or part roof tax, part head tax, as I prefer to describe it.

Clause 11 introduces the notion of personal discount, which is the means by which the personal element is given

effect. That element or discount has rightly attracted a great deal of criticism and attention from organisations outside the House. When and if the Government implement the tax, they can certainly not claim that they were never warned. They have been warned by me and my hon. Friends, but in case they were inclined to set those warnings aside, they have also been warned by all the local authority associations, by the Audit Commission, by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and by many journals of opinion in the world of local government. In the estimates of most objective observers the Government are running real risks in the implementation of the new tax by adding an uncomfortable and difficult-to-operate element of personal tax.

The oddity is that we have yet to hear a convincing argument from Ministers as to why that element is there. Ministers are clear about one thing—although other people are less clear—that the discount system is not there to deal with the problem of people who cannot afford to pay the council tax.

I give the hon. Member for Eastwood credit for the fact that he is clear that the discount has nothing to do with the ability to pay. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) is looking as blank and astonished as he did in Committee, when I made the same argument. He is going to rise to step into exactly the same trap.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am not looking blank. If we are worried about a person's ability to pay, that is where the rebates come in.

Mr. Gould: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has at least gleaned that from his long hours spent in Committee, because that is not true of all his hon. Friends. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis)—although I concede he was an assiduous attender in Committee—is not present. He seemed a good deal less clear than the hon. Member for Nottingham, South has revealed himself to be.

I absolve the Minister from all confusion. He always said that the basis for the discount was nothing to do with ability to pay. I agree that it certainly cannot be justified on that basis because, as the hon. Member for Nottingham, South said, the only way in which we can deal with ability to pay is through the rebate scheme. That is what it is intended to do.

The discount scheme has nothing to do with benefits. As we have frequently pointed out, a millionaire—that figure of our demonology, as the Minister would have it—who lives alone will get a substantial discount whereas a low-income family with four children will not. It is clear that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South is right—discounts have nothing to do with the ability to pay. I hope that when the hon. Member for Battersea eventually arrives he will point that out to him, because he will recall that in Committee the hon. Member for Battersea insisted that a single mother with children should have her ability to pay taken into account and concluded:

"The discount system does that."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 26 November 1991; c. 355.]

It is perfectly true that he subsequently denied that he said any such thing, but the *Hansard* record is against him.

So whatever else may be said for the discount system, it has nothing to do with fairness or ability to pay. Indeed, it has that familiar characteristic of so much Government legislation in this sphere, that the better off one is the more benefit one derives from the discount. Someone living alone in a £29,000 house in Wales, for example, would get a discount worth £27·25 a year, or 52p a week. Someone living in a £330,000 house in London would receive a discount of nearly eight times that amount, £200 or £3·85 a week. It is all too characteristic of the poll tax and everything that has flowed from it.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office, then attempted to make the argument that the basis of the discount was that a single-person household made fewer demands on local government services than a two-person household. As soon as we examined that argument—my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) was particularly severe on it—it became clear that no such inviolate rule could be established. There were many instances of single people making substantial demands—perhaps a single parent with a large number of children—whereas a pensioner couple might make few demands. So there was no basis on that score to be identified for supporting the discount scheme.

Even if there were something to be said for the argument, why stop at the distinction between one and two-person households? Why not carry the argument through to three, four, five and six-person households? The Minister was alert to the problems into which that line of argument might draw him. His basis for the argument was clearly his touching, but rather primitive, view that, somehow, all relationships must be based on contracts—that there was a sort of market element to all tax relationships between the community and the individual and that unless the individual had somehow bargained for a given level of services, the tax could not be valid.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman referred to three, four and five-person households. I have been trying to work out the implications of amendment No. 70, by which he would impose a personal surcharge. Is that his plan and does the Labour party now propose a personal surcharge on the third, fourth and fifth person in a household?

Mr. Gould: I am delighted to learn that the hon. Gentleman attaches such literal importance to all amendments that appear on the paper. As an experienced parliamentarian, he must know that the purpose of amendments is often to reveal inconsistencies in proposals and the inconsistency in that case is well revealed.

The next argument to be advanced was that the council tax remained to some degree a personal tax—that it was a combination, as we heard earlier, of a property and personal tax—so it was right that that element of head tax should differentiate between a one and two-person household. Again, that left unanswered the question why that logic was not carried through; that if the old principle of the poll tax was retained in the new tax, why was not that element of personal tax also paid by the third, fourth, fifth and sixth member of the household? When confronted by that argument, the Minister rapidly abandoned that line of reasoning.

6.45 pm

The real, convincing explanation for this monster dare not be articulated by Ministers. It is that whereas the Secretary of State—I pay tribute to him in that he was one of the few clear-eyed Members prepared to say, "We must drive through legislation to abolish the hated poll tax"—finally persuaded his reluctant, or seemingly reluctant, hon. Friends that that step was necessary, even his courage

failed him at that point. He was assured, no doubt not least by his Minister of State, that it would be virtually impossible to get such legislation through without making major concessions to those battalions who had fought so long and hard in the cause of the poll tax. They would not depart the field without a battle, he was told. They had to have their victory and trophies to take home. He was also told that while it was clear that all those supporters who would die in the last ditch for the poll tax would certainly fight for it—even if they were forced to abandon the poll tax—the last thing they would do would be to vote for a property tax, or something which looked astonishingly like the much reviled rates.

How was the trick to be achieved? It was achieved by incorporating into the sensible proposition and basic idea of a property tax the notion of a head tax. The discount idea came from that. But the oddity is that having screwed up their courage—and screwed up their proposal as a consequence of doing so—the Government discovered that the sacrifice had been made in vain. After all, where were those great battalions of supporters for the poll tax? Did they stay to fight the battle? No, not even the Minister of State stayed to fight. He now tries to escape the problem by saying that he supports the poll tax as he supports its abolition. As a grammatical construction, it may be a good sentence, but as a logical proposition it has deficiencies.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): The hon. Gentleman talks about a logical proposition. Will he explain why amendment No. 110 would do away totally with the discount, whereas amendment No. 74 would have a discount or rebate of 50 per cent.? Is Labour policy to have no discount or one of 50 per cent.?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman labours under the difficulty of not having heard any of the arguments in Committee and probably of not having heard any of the other arguments on the subject, so his state of ignorance is understandable. There is no question but that we are opposed to discounts and that we believe this to be an unacceptable element of head tax. I appreciate why the hon. Gentleman tried a time-honoured diversionary tactic when things were getting uncomfortable.

The importation of this remnant of the poll tax is unnecessary because virtually no Conservative Member will vote against the Bill. Government supporters will troop into the Lobby in support of a measure to abolish the poll tax—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps one or two will not. I pay tribute to their sense of principle. Those who swore undying allegiance to the poll tax and to their right hon. Friend who forced it through have all melted away. That may be a kind expression for what they have done. They have skulked or slunk away, so the whole sacrifice was unnecessary. It may have been unnecessary, but it has left the council tax in a hopeless mess of confusion and it is worth considering some of the consequences of that confusion.

The single person discount will apply not to a handful of properties, but, potentially at any rate, to 7 million households—33 per cent. of the total. In some London boroughs as many as 50 per cent. of households are single-person households. That is what the Audit Commission discovered and why it is worried sick about the proposal. Not only must the 50 per cent. of households in some London boroughs that are single-person households be identified and sent separate bills and so on, but those are the very people found by the Audit Commission to move frequently; 50 to 60 per cent. of some registers in inner London change over the course of a year.

So the problem of first identifying and then tracking, tracing and billing all those people on a differential basis is already horrific. That is why the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has issued a grave warning—I apologise for using again the example which that body provided, but it is so striking that it bears repeating—saying:

"A CAB in Greater Manchester reports a client who had six changes of income status and three moves of address (all in different local authorities) in ten months. For three months the client was a full time student living in local authority A paying 20 per cent. of the community charge. Then the client moved to local authority B, had a part-time job and claimed community charge benefit (CCB). Then she claimed income support and was once again paying 20 per cent. of the community charge. Following this she had two months on a fluctuating income . . . and in receipt of CCB. This was followed by a return to her parental home in local authority C where she claimed income support and was responsible for 20 per cent. community charge . . . She then returned to local authority A to become a full time post-graduate student and became liable to 20 per cent. of community charge".

That is not a particularly unusual case, but it illustrates the enormous problems with which local authorities will be faced in trying to decide the appropriate bill to be applied to a given person on a given date.

In addition to the 7 million households, bills must be sent to the owners of empty properties, who will be charged 50 per cent. of the total bill, so that two discounts will be available. Status discounts will also affect the picture. Those will apply to households in which one of the inhabitants is a student or someone who suffers from an illness such as Alzheimer's disease and is therefore exempt under schedule 1. Notwithstanding that huge number of households and all the changes in address, we must also bear in mind the fact that people's status might change from day to day. A person who lives in a flat with a student and pays only 75 per cent. of the bill will be liable for 100 per cent. of the bill if the student gives up the course for any reason. Liability is to be determined day by day, which is a horrific prospect. Little wonder that most local authorities are already quailing at the task that lies ahead.

Mr. Allen McKay: It is interesting to note that, except for the Secretary of State, all the hon. Members on the Government Front Bench are members of the No Turning Back group.

Mr. Gould: That is a good illustration of what an unsuccessful battle the Secretary of State has had to carry his Front Bench team with him. That was well spotted by my hon. Friend. The Secretary of State is in an awkward position. He does not get to his feet to defend the measure—far from it. He occasionally graces us with his presence—I imagine that he derives a certain schadenfreude from the situation—but he leaves it to his No Turning Back group colleagues to defend the measure. At least they have the comfort of trying to defend it on the basis that they have salvaged something from the poll tax.

I pay tribute to the Minister of State's understanding of the measure. I think that he virtually drafted it, which is why he handled it throughout the Committee stage. The Secretary of State did not dare to come into the Committee Room because he did not understand the Bill and knew that he would be cut to ribbons if he dared to offer a view on it. Although the Minister of State understands the

matter, even he was led into a tangle by the discounts structure. Knowing the Minister of State as I do, I can think of no more wounding charge to make against him than that he was caught in illogicality in his own Bill. The discount system led him to assert that somebody who, on grounds of Alzheimer's disease, for example, was to be exempted from a personal contribution of 25 per cent. could nevertheless become responsible for somebody else's personal contribution under the principle of joint and several liability. What a heartless position and what nonsense.

How are local authorities to fight their way through the maze which the Government have created? How are they to track the millions of single householders who change address or status day by day, so that they can send out the appropriate bills? The Bill offers little guidance. Schedule 2 provides a few vaguely drawn powers for local authorities and Ministers have occasionally pontificated on how local authorities may grapple with that problem. But when a local authority treasurer, such as the treasurer in Birmingham city council, says that the only possible chance of dealing with the problem is by setting up a database and keeping a register, the Minister—far from saying that that may be the best way to proceed—says that it would be unlawful.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: No, he does not.

Mr. Gould: If the hon. Gentleman would care to invite the Minister to come to the Dispatch Box, he will hear confirmation from the Minister's own lips. I asked the Minister about that just a couple of days ago and he confirmed that his advice was that keeping a register is not only not necessary but unlawful. It seems that the Minister will not stir himself to dispute that—*[Interruption.]* I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply because it will be interesting to see whether he has departed from that position.

With little help or guidance, local authorities are faced with an enormous problem, but are told that it would be unlawful to keep a register.

Mr. Douglas: Will the hon. Gentleman probe the Minister a little further about which legislation makes that list or register unlawful? Would it be unlawful under the data protection legislation? I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we need such a list.

Mr. Gould: The Minister will no doubt speak for himself when the time comes, but he may take refuge in the data protection legislation and in the wider principle that a local authority is entitled to do nothing without specific statutory authority. The Minister will probably say that the Bill gives no such authority for the keeping of a register and will probably dismiss provisions such as the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. That is the advice that he currently gives to local authorities.

There is a puzzle in all that, however, because the handbook, "Guidance for Party Workers on the Council Tax", issued by Conservative party central office, says that the head tax element is not extended to three, four and five-person households, because it would require the keeping of a register. Such households constitute 13 per cent. of the total and Conservative party central office says that 13 per cent. could not be traced without keeping a register. Yet, in respect of the 33 per cent. of one-person households, we are told not only that a register is not needed, but that if a local authority tried to keep a register it would be acting unlawfully. I hope that the Minister will try to sort out that conundrum because it is a real, practical problem for local government.

The only advice that local government has had on that question is that it can resort to what the Minister calls "canvassing", but which most people would understand as snooping, and that they can refer to the electoral register. One of the great objections to the poll tax was the obstacle that it placed in the way of civil liberties. We know that 1 million people, wrongly and misguidedly, disappeared from the electoral register because they hoped that that would absolve them from having to pay the poll tax. We are now told under the new proposal that Ministers will encourage local authorities—indeed, they will leave them with little option—to refer to the electoral register. Therefore, the incentive for people to stay off the register will be greatly increased.

The pity of it all is that, even when local authorities resort to the electoral register, it will help them little because the electoral register is a snapshot of who lives in a particular building at a given moment in time. It will not help local authorities to track day by day, as they are required to do under the Bill, people who change address and status. The Government are asking local authorities to undertake a hopeless task.

Ministers are really saying that local authorities should simply forget about who should receive what sort of bill and just send out a standard bill to every household and wait for the cries of pain. Once they have been told that there is only one person in the household, they have to re-bill, or send another piece of paper with a different bill. It is all very simple. However, when I asked the Minister what calculation he had made of the number of communications needed to establish those facts—how many times bits of paper would flow backwards and forwards between a local authority and a household in one year to establish who was where on specific dates—he said that no estimate had been made. When I asked him about the cost, he said that no estimate had been made. But Ministers know that re-billing costs money.

When the Government changed the basis of billing for the current year by a last-minute change in the Budget, they made provision—I cannot remember the sum, but it was a substantial amount, perhaps £18 million—to cover the cost of local authorities having to re-bill. Therefore, they know that the procedure costs money, but blithely they say that that is what local authorities must do. Local councils have to shuttle bits of paper backwards and forwards to try to establish the correct bill.

7 pm

There are other costs involved in addition to those of the local authorities. When we take account of all those who will receive a single person's discount—7 million in principle—all those who will receive a double discount because their properties are empty and those who will receive status discounts, we find that the fair estimate, derived from Government figures, is that the discount scheme will cost £780 million. I used that figure in Committee and was not challenged, so I feel emboldened to do it again as I think that it is probably right.

Ministers are inclined to say that it is wonderful that £780 million is to be saved on account of poor people living alone, irrespective of whether or not they are well off. In truth, the £780 million is not simply saved—it does

not disappear, but has to be paid by somebody. Who pays for it? The ordinary family, which is why, under the Government's proposals, bills for such families will be so much higher than they would be normally. All the concessions made to well-off people who do not need help on financial grounds will have to be paid by someone.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I want to test the hon. Gentleman's definition of an ordinary, average family, as opposed to the well off. Let us suppose that a widow who, according to the hon. Gentleman's condescending phrase, is an "ordinary, average" widow, married in 1910 and now, aged 100, lives in the same house that she originally bought and mortgaged for £500. That house, for reasons quite beyond her control, is now worth £500,000. The widow produces absolutely no money and lives on a widow's pension. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that she is a well-off person, not an ordinary, average, rather poor widow?

Mr. Gould: The hon. and learned Gentleman has, characteristically, completely misunderstood the point. The widow he described would benefit from the Government's new generous provision introduced in the Bill and no doubt qualify for a 100 per cent. rebate. As the hon. Member for Nottingham, South rightly said, that is the right way to deal with people whose ability to pay is called into question. Nothing that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross said removes the fact that the discount system is entirely misplaced and will cause enormous practical problems.

We have established on many occasions, and have done so again this evening, that the proposals for the discount system, the genesis of which is so disreputable, are unworkable and unfair. They will make it impossible for local authorities to implement the tax. They were included in the legislation for a political purpose, which is no longer necessary.

I conclude as I did in Committee by adopting the language of the *Local Government Chronicle* which, on 1 November, in a leading article, stated that the discount system would have to go sooner or later because it was unworkable and unfair. It stated that it would be better to do away with it now than allow it to cause a similar disaster to the one that we all suffered under the poll tax.

I wish that I could have some confidence that Conservative Members were alert to that danger, but unfortunately most of them have decided to sleep-walk their way through the Bill and we are now confronted with another poll tax disaster.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I support amendment No. 9.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) spoke of the genesis of discounts. I thought that it would be worth while to cast my mind back to the rating system. The great, central inequality of that system is highlighted by the classic example of two identical houses in one of which lived a widow while in the neighbouring one lived a household with two or three wage earners. It was that central inequity that made the rating system so terribly unpopular and resulted in the Leader of the Opposition rightly condemning it as grossly unfair.

During the 1979 election campaign I received much support because of my criticism of the rating system. I was embarrassed when I fought the 1983 election and nothing had been done about the rating system. It was a further embarrassment to me that when I stood for the third time in 1987 the Government had still not acted on the rating system, when we had consistently given a pledge to eliminate the inequity of that system.

I was initially enthusiastic about the principle of the community charge which, when it was introduced, was going to benefit my constituency of Torbay through the grant-related expenditure assessment. However, GREA did not last long, and by November of the same year the standard spending assessment was introduced, to the tremendous disadvantage of my constituency, which ended up with the highest community charge in the south-west. From the moment that the details of the SSA became available, I consistently voted against the community charge, and that has remained my position to date.

I am now in a curious position. Amendment No. 9 recommends an increase in the discount from 25 to 50 per cent. I believe that that eliminates the inequality which was at the heart of the original rating system. My difficulty is that the Opposition oppose all discounts. I fear that in the Division I shall have to support the Government, which I had never intended to do, on the basis that it is much better to have a 25 per cent. discount than no discount at all. I urge the Government to accept amendment No. 9. The 50 per cent. discount would help those 7 million homes in this country housing single people who do not use the same level of services as those in neighbouring houses.

The Opposition may well dislike the idea of discounts, but it will be helpful to Government canvassers during the next election when it is stated that the Opposition opposed all discounts. Even if single people living alone receive only 25 per cent. discounts, they will be much better off than they would be under the Labour party's proposals.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: As the Opposition believe that taxes, particularly local taxes, should be based on ability to pay, is it not absolutely scandalous that they suggest that the elderly and the single, whatever house they live in, should have to pay more than those with the ability to pay and are not willing to grant a discount?

Mr. Allason: My hon. and learned Friend is entirely correct; I endorse his remarks.

My constituency contains many single pensioners. There are probably more people over the age of 70 living in my constituency than in the constituencies of any other right hon. or hon. Member. I am concerned about those people because they do not use local authority services much but are penalised by high charges. South West Water, for instance, has the highest standing charges in the country.

My amendment would result in a reduction in the burden on these people to the tune of 50 per cent. I recommend that to the House because it will offer great relief to people who live alone. The elderly people in my constituency worry about their financial predicament. Generally, people become more worried about these matters as they get older. Amendment No. 9 would give many people tremendous relief—not just the elderly living alone but many other people at the lower end of the income scale, such as single-parent families. All would benefit from this generosity.

The principle of discounts has already been accepted —the Government accept the 25 per cent. I am merely asking for an extension of the logic which is already so well

known to Marsham street. We should increase the 25 per cent. discount to 50 per cent. I would even accept an increase to 35 per cent. There is a certain logic in claiming that single people living alone should be allowed to pay half the charge paid by their neighbours. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): In Committee, my hon. Friends and I tabled an amendment to increase the discount from 25 to 50 per cent. Unfortunately, it was not well debated, due first to filibustering by Labour Members——

Mr. Maxton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure you would agree that, when an hon. Member uses the term filibuster to describe our proceedings, that is a slur not on Labour Members but on the Chairman of the Committee in question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I do not think that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) meant it that way.

Mr. Bellotti: The two Chairmen of that Committee gave distinguished service, and I am sure that no one took my remarks to mean what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) says they meant.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West) *rose*——

Mr. Bellotti: I want to finish my introduction before I give way.

There were some amazing interventions by Ministers in Committee as well. I remember one of 384 words during the discussion immediately before the debate on discounts. That resulted in my proposal to increase the discount to 50 per cent. not being taken until one and a half minutes before the guillotine fell. Despite that, I managed to speak 322 words in the time left to me by Labour Members and Ministers. At least tonight I have about 45 minutes in which to speak, and whether I take that much time will depend on how we get on. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) wants to intervene now I will give way to him—but I see that he has changed his mind.

I commend amendment No. 7 to the House. It would increase the discount from 25 to 40 per cent. It is true, as the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) said, that single-person households face difficulties with meeting some of their costs of living from their income. One need only think of water, gas, electricity and telephone charges, which fall disproportionately on single person households. The council tax, too, will fall disproportionately on them because the 25 per cent. discount is not enough, given the average income of single person households compared with that of households containing two or more people.

7.15 pm

As the hon. Member for Torbay said, the Government have conceded the principle that some extra benefit should accrue to households containing only one person. The 25 per cent. discount represents the Government's attempt to meet that need, but have they really considered whether the figure relates precisely to people's incomes?

Mr. Maxton: I find the hon. Gentleman's arguments astonishing. He and his party advanced the idea of a local income tax based on ability to pay. Now he suggests a 40 per cent. discount for every single householder, whatever his income. His system would mean that single householders on good incomes would pay much more than houses containing two or more people who, together, had poor incomes. What is the logic in that?

Mr. Bellotti: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman has said, because it enables me to explain that proposals for a local income tax relating it to ability to pay have been rejected in Committee and on Report, so we are now in the business of trying to improve this unfair tax which is based on property. To do that, it is right to examine people's incomes and to see whether they can afford the tax.

The argument usually deployed is that the millionaire will benefit enormously, but there are very few millionaires. On the other hand, there are millions of elderly pensioners on low incomes in single households, all of whom will be hit by the council tax. We should pay more attention to those millions of elderly pensioners than to the much smaller number of millionaires.

This problem was known under the rates as the widow factor. The plight of widows was recognised by all parties; we all agreed that the rates were unfair to them. Indeed, that was one of the main reasons why the Government brought in the poll tax, which failed abysmally, just like the rates.

Even the Government have recognised the problem of widows. The Secretary of State for Wales, for instance, has said:

> "How much more abominable than a tax on widows? But that is what the rating system is."

The council tax will treat widows unfairly in the same way, because it does not give them the discount that they deserve.

The proposed discount will go only a certain way towards doing what is needful. We believe that a single-person home should receive a discount proportionate to the income of its occupant. Twenty-seven per cent. of people aged between 65 and 74 and 50 per cent. of those over the age of 75 live alone. Millions of people in our country live alone——

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Is the hon. Gentleman talking about England, Wales, Scotland or Britain?

Mr. Bellotti: In every constituency represented by every hon. Member there are many elderly people living alone. Even with a 25 per cent discount, single adults living alone in a property banded above D will pay more under the council tax than under the poll tax. Is this fair? I do not believe that it is, and we ought to look at it again.

It is interesting to note that there is some all-party support for the idea of raising the discount above 25 per cent. Some members of the Committee would have liked to support such an amendment in Committee and we have had a speech already tonight from the Government Back Benches in support of it.

I will quote some specific figures that give credibility to amendment No. 7. Taking first the retirement pension of a single person at £52 and of a couple at £83·25, the single person's pension as a percentage of the couple's pension is 62 per cent. Then, looking at average pensioner income —this is from written answers in *Hansard*, 25 July 1990, c. *305-6*, based on 1987 net income figures—the single person figure is £75·10 and the couple's figure is £145·67. The single person's income is 53 per cent. of the couple's income.

[Mr. Bellotti]

The next example, gross household income, is taken from the 1989 family expenditure survey. The pension of a single retired person mainly dependent on state benefits is £58·88 and that of a couple is £101·50. The single person's pension is 58 per cent. of the couple's.

Taking the average of those three quite different sets of figures, we draw the conclusion, as does Age Concern, which has advised the Committee and hon. Members in general on this, that the average single person's income is 60 per cent. of that of a household consisting of two people.

On the basis of those figures, and with the advice which Age Concern and other sources have given, we believe that the figure of 40 per cent. is the right one if one wishes to take into account the ability to pay and the income of the people whom we are taxing. Those are good principles for any taxation system. I challenge the Minister to deny that 40 per cent. is the right figure. If there are any sources available to the Government that disprove that figure, it is right that the Minister should put those sources to the House. He could not put them to the Committee and I look forward to seeing whether they can be put forward tonight. If they cannot, the Government must surely recognise that the 25 per cent. is 15 per cent. below what it should be and that we are asking single-person households, on average, to subsidise households of two or more persons in the payment of the council tax.

It is people on lowish incomes in that sort of situation who will suffer far more than those on higher incomes. I do not make any apology for accepting that single millionaires will be at an advantage in that situation, but the millions of people on lowish incomes, particularly the retired, will be penalised most. It is on behalf of the latter that we should have had an opportunity of voting in Committee, which we were denied, and that we should have an opportunity tonight to vote in the House. We know that there are hon. Members on the Government Back Benches who would have supported the proposal that the discount be increased from 25 per cent. to 40 per cent. Not to have a vote, because of the guillotine and for other reasons, is to fail the very people for whom we should be speaking.

I hope that when the Minister replies he will treat this matter seriously. We could not have a debate in Committee and the House deserves serious answers on this extremely important issue. If we do not get them, when this tax is put into place many single elderly people, in particular, will feel not only hard done by but that they have not been properly considered.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am absolutely delighted that in this Bill the Government have provided the discount for a single-person household and that that discount is automatic and mandatory. I am delighted, too, that my constituents can be told in the coming months that the Labour party does not want the single-person household to have a discount.

As the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said earlier—I apologise for referring to him when he is not in his place—there are 7 million single-person households in this country. He also pointed out in Committee, when we had no figures to put to him, that there are a very large number of second homes whose owners will effectively receive a 50 per cent. discount through only paying the property element of the tax. It is that 50 per cent. for the empty, unoccupied homes that makes it very difficult for me to go along with my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), who wanted the 50 per cent. to apply to a single-person household.

The hon. Member for Dagenham quite rightly used the Government figure of £780 million as the amount by which the discount system will be beneficial to single-person households. I objected in Committee and in the House tonight to his implication—it was not stated in so many words—that the £780 million would be paid locally by the other people in the area picking up the bill for the single-person households. That is a gross distortion of the truth.

The reality is that the number of single-person households in a particular district is part of the profile that is drawn in order to establish the standard spending assessment, and therefore the grant that goes to the local authority. So that £780 million is being paid by all of us from the generality of taxation.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Just to underline what my hon. Friend is saying, it is also the case that the profile takes into account second homes, so that the same principle applies there too.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: That is absolutely right. That £780 million is part of the 85 per cent., give or take a couple of percentage points, that central taxation and the unified business rate provide in financial support to our local authorities.

Perhaps I can draw a little further on the hard work and research of the hon. Member for Dagenham. He pointed out in Committee that, according to the Audit Commission, the proportion in inner city areas is probably around 40 per cent. and in some London boroughs is as high as 50 per cent. Yet the Labour party still opposes these single-person discounts. I represent an inner city seat. If 40 per cent. of my households are single-person households—I do not think that it is quite that high—I shall make absolutely certain that every one knows the Labour party's policy for them.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I do not think that my hon. Friend will be able to do quite that. He will be able to tell them about the Labour party's opposition to discounts, but he will not be able to tell them how much they would pay under the Labour party system, because the Labour party will not say.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: That is fair comment. I do believe that it is a case of think of a number and double it.

The Labour party says that we cannot argue that a single person should pay less than a family next door with several working adults. We have all made mistakes politically.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The poll tax.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Yes. We made many mistakes, but there was one piece of common ground for hon. Members on both sides of the House, which apparently no longer exists. It was that it was unfair for the single-person household to pay the same as the household with two, three, four or five members. That was said year after year.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman voted for the community charge.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Yes, I plead guilty. I voted for it. It seemed a damn good principle at the time.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does my hon. Friend think that that is an entirely happy precedent when he is discussing discounts which are fraught with anomaly, difficulty and contradiction? He has been wrong once; can he be sure that he will not be wrong again?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: What do people say about needing enemies? Of course we all make mistakes. My hon. Friend may be that perfect example of a person who never has——

Mr. Wilkinson: No. I made the same mistake.

7.30 pm

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Yes, I made a mistake. No, I do not think that I shall make the same mistake again.

The Labour party now shuts its eyes to the two, three or four-person household, and it ignores the single pensioner living alone. Day after day, Labour Members love to quote the case of the single millionaire. Unhappily, I am not a member of the exclusive club of millionaires. I can think of only one or two in my acquaintance, but in order to find an answer to the perennial argument of the single millionaire, I asked someone whom I believe is a millionaire. The House will forgive me stealing someone else's comment. He said, "Martin, don't be silly. There is no such thing as a single millionaire. We would at least have a butler." That quietly disposes of the argument. Never mind, it seemed a good story at the time.

The Labour party said that it wanted some mechanism other than discounts; that it would deal with pensioners with what it called a single pensioner premium. But, as Conservative Members pointed out in Committee, to talk about a single pensioner premium is to concede the principle behind discounts. It was also pointed out in Committee that, if single pensioners received such a premium, so would a millionaire. Conservative Members asked, why just a pensioner—what about a single widow? There seemed to be no answer to that question. The Labour party is not consistent, but it never is.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) is not in her place. In Committee, she was keen to defend the rights of the single working mother with a 20-year-old daughter who came home from college. She was determined to defend the discount to that mother, although that did not seem to fit the rest of her contributions in Committee.

When my hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that such a student would be invisible, that a student returning for the summer holidays would not affect that household, I was not sure whether the hon. Lady was pleased or angry. She should not accept my hon. Friend's assurances. But having 22,000 students milling around my city, I am delighted about the Government's attitude to student discounts and particularly to the student gap, as it is called —the three months which often used to cause problems under the old community charge arrangements.

In Committee, we had long discussions about that, and were genuinely sympathetic to the worries expressed by the citizens advice bureaux. However, they seemed to be arguing that, somehow or other, the single person's discount would deter people from renting out rooms in their homes. That argument is almost impossible to accept. It is a completely unfounded fear, but even if there were the odd few cases of people refusing to rent out a room in their home because, in their ignorance, they felt that, as landlords, they would be penalised, are we seriously to argue that we should deny the discount to the other 7 million people? That is an extraordinary situation.

As we are running short of time, let me end with one area where there is a clear divide. I have said that the most unpopular aspect of the old rating system was the fact that the single person household paid the same as the multi-occupied household next door. That was common ground between Labour and Conservative Members, but it is no longer. The hon. Member for Dagenham has said time and again that the Labour party objects in principle to the discount system, and perhaps we should emphasise that. That is something that we should proclaim loud and clear. That is the biggest criticism that we can lay at the Labour party's door.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I shall not detain the House long, but I want to refer to two aspects of discounts. The debate and the Bill are not just about local government finance but about the acceptability of local government finance. The point has been made clearly that the rating system was completely unpopular, particularly to people living on their own. That is accepted by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti), just as it is accepted on the Conservative Benches. It is incredible that the Labour party, which has reformed itself and brought itself up to date in so many other policies, is going back to an old policy on local government finance.

But what made the community charge so unpopular was its size and certain iniquities. The great advantage —let us talk about the advantages—to many single people was that the community charge was fairer than the rating system. In this short debate, we have to address ourselves to the question whether the discount of 25 per cent. being suggested for the single householder is sufficient. I would venture to suggest that it is not.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), because common sense dictates that to run a household on one's own is considerably more expensive than for two people with two incomes. We must recognise that. I appreciate that the legislation, as drawn, enables my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to draw up regulations which could redefine the 25 per cent. Therefore, I join those who say that that 25 per cent. should be altered, perhaps to 33⅓ per cent.

Discounts for empty properties will be assessed at 50 per cent. My hon. Friend the Minister knows full well that, under the rating system, local authorities had a great deal of discretion about whether to charge on empty properties. Under the community charge, they retained that discretion. In fact, they had even greater discretion, because they were allowed to charge from nothing up to twice the standard community charge. But, as I understand it, the present legislation insists that all empty properties will be assessed at 50 per cent.

Some of the people who complain most bitterly about the community charge are those who discover after their homes have been repossessed that they must pay the charge not only on their new property—because it is imposed on the individual—but on the property which they lost, and which they thought was now the responsibility of the building society. They discover to their horror that they are still legally liable.

[Mr. Peter Fry]

Some local authorities, such as Torbay, that have within them a large number of second homes, from which they must derive some income because of the cost incurred in administering that situation, might like greater flexibility—such as that available under the rating and community charge systems. East Northants district council wrote asking me to make that specific point.

Despite the two question marks that I put over the Bill, I believe that the Government are right to proceed with the reforms that it contains. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities on the way that he has piloted the Bill through the House so far.

Mr. Portillo: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) for his kind remarks. I am not surprised that he ventured into the fray this evening, because he has already won an outstanding victory for his constituents and I well understand his desire to enjoy another. Before the Bill came before the House, we decided to make a change so that an authority with very enlightened policies—such as East Northants—which was able to reduce both its community charge and that which the county imposed should be permitted to continue doing so under the council tax. Therefore, the tax imposed by any county can be reduced by a district. That is an important reform for my hon. Friend's constituents and I congratulate him again on that victory.

It is satisfying when a Minister is attacked from opposite directions—by both one's own right hon. and hon. Friends and Opposition Members. That is quite something. I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). It was full of fantasy, was entertaining and purported to represent conversations in the Department of the Environment. The hon. Gentleman produced a more entertaining account than life itself—and given that life has been fairly entertaining over the past year, that is quite an achievement.

The hon. Member for Dagenham said that the Government are not prepared to move to a property tax and he is absolutely right—we are not. I do not believe that the British public are prepared to move to a property tax. They got fed up when there was one and only a party that has been out of power and living in blinkers for the past 12 years could possibly propose returning to a naked property tax.

The hon. Member for Dagenham said also that the proposed discounts have nothing to do with ability to pay. It is certainly the case that they are not crafted against people's incomes. However, the hon. Gentleman is well aware that large numbers of people—such as widows, single pensioners and young people starting out in life—live on their own as single occupants of households. They are not touched by the rebate system, because—generous and expensive though it is—it does not reach them.

Although Labour promises more generous rebates, no one believes it, because the proposal has not been costed, no details of it are available and no money would be made available. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) would be shocked if she knew the extent to which the hon. Member for Dagenham attempts to lead the public into believing that Labour would operate a more generous rebate system.

That leaves groups of people who are above income support and rebate levels, but who none the less have quite modest incomes. We believe that a single person discount is suitable. The hon. Member for Dagenham—greatly to his political peril—refuses to acknowledge the resentment that was felt by those living alone because their liability under the rating system was the same as the family living in a similar property next door. That shows an extraordinary lack of understanding by Labour and I am delighted by it.

7.45 pm

The fact that Labour is committed to giving no discounts is—as was said by my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and for Torbay (Mr. Allason)—marvellous news from our point of view. It is extraordinary that Labour should be so out of touch with public feeling.

It is rich for the hon. Member for Dagenham to claim that he is worried about the complexity of our proposal; that from the hon. Gentleman who suggests that there should be property valuations on four different bases and annual rolling revaluations on a banded basis—although he keeps rather quiet about it. It is extraordinary for the hon. Gentleman to say that he is worried also about the administrative complexity of our proposal. We could propose a simpler system. A naked property tax would be simpler, but it would not be as fair. We are prepared to adopt a system that is a little more complicated, provided that it is fairer and responds more to the wishes of the British public.

No register is needed. The onus is on the individual claiming the single-person discount to inform the local authority and there is no reason why it should not conduct a canvass to establish who will be claiming that discount. That is quite different from asking single persons entitled to the discount to inform the local authority of that fact and to record their names. It is absolutely different from keeping a register of every adult in the community. Labour has not made headway with that point.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 is not designed for that purpose and it is dubious whether it could be used in that way. It could run foul of data protection legislation. The Data Protection Registrar is quoted as warning local councils that they could break the law if they maintain a register of all adults for the council tax. The *Municipal Journal* also quoted David Smith, the assistant registrar, as saying that "excessive" or "irrelevant" information held on computer would fall foul of the Data Protection Act 1984. For households that did not qualify for council tax discount, data on adults other than the liable person did not appear to be necessary. The 1976 Act, which does not apply to Scotland, is not suitable for that purpose and I am considering whether it should be disapplied for that purpose. I propose to consult local authority associations on that very point.

Mr. Douglas: Has the Minister clarified with the Data Protection Registrar the question of local authorities compiling a list? What would be the difference in data protection terms between a list and a register? They would seem to have the same purpose. Can the Minister give any assurances on that point?

Mr. Portillo: A local authority will record those people who step forward as being entitled to single-person discounts. It may record also those who are liable persons. There is no problem with that; it is quite different from a register.

Mr. Gould: That matter is of great practical importance to local authorities. Does the Minister agree that his own remarks today and those of the Data Protection Registrar are a good deal less categorical than the Minister's earlier assertion that the keeping of a register would be unlawful? When does the Minister propose to resolve that issue? Does he understand and accept that it is important that local authorities should receive reliable guidance as soon as possible?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, and when the hon. Gentleman reads my remarks, he will see that I said that I am considering disapplying the 1976 Act and that I want to talk to local authority associations about that, so we will be in consultation with them.

I voted for my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay in 1983 in Battersea. I did so with great enthusiasm—not least because of his stand against rates. I commiserate with my hon. Friend on his misfortune this evening, in finding himself inadvertently supporting us in the Lobby. My hon. Friend will realise that I do not wish to mislead him and that the setting of discounts for single people is a matter of judgment. Given that we wish to raise a given sum by means of the tax, a more generous discount will involve a higher headline figure for double-adult and larger households.

Let us take the example of a band D property containing two adults, whose council tax for standard spending is £400. If we allowed single people a 50 per cent. discount, that amount would have to rise to about £440. Let me add that the council tax is partly personal and partly property-based. If we regard the proportions as "half and half", it is logical to assume that households containing two or more people should pay 100 per cent., that the occupants of a house that is empty or not their principal residence should pay 50 per cent., and that a single occupant—being, as it were, in the middle—should pay 75 per cent.

Mr. Wilkinson: In my constituency which is in outer London, someone living alone and receiving a 25 per cent. discount will pay less than the current poll tax charge—£215—only if he or she lives in a property in the lowest two or three bands. In my constituency, such properties simply do not exist.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend has chosen his example carefully. He will probably find that such a person will pay much less than he or she paid in rates and the Government have just reduced the community charge by £140. When the aim is to raise the same amount by means of a different tax, the burden is redistributed: some people pay more, while others pay less.

As we know, the Opposition are committed to an arrangement that would involve no transitional relief for people such as my hon. Friend's constituents, who may pay more under the council tax. We are committed to the provision of such relief. The Opposition are committed to an arrangement whereby there would be no limit to the amounts charged; under a Labour Government who returned to the old rating system, my hon. Friend's constituent would have to pay vast sums. Labour's would be an envy tax, which would squeeze the last penny out of everyone who happened to live in an expensive property.

Under Labour, there would be no capping of councils. Whatever those in the extremist town halls run by Labour decided to spend, the impost would be levied on the poor people living in the areas concerned. They would have to pay through the nose, as they did when Labour was last in power and as they did under the rating system.

Here is my warning to anyone who is considering voting for Labour and a return to the rates: do not be young, do not be single and do not be a widow, for Labour says that there should be no discounts. For that reason, I know that my hon. Friends will join me enthusiastically in defeating the amendment.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) described the Bill's flaws and weaknesses in detail. Understandably, the Minister did not address my hon. Friend's points: after all, the Government have been unable to reply to many of the points that have been raised by Opposition Members over the past two days.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) and others referred to the old rating system. The Minister has made great play of the fact that that system had to be abolished; it took 14 years for it to happen and, after a few months, a new scheme that had received the full support of the Minister and his hon. Friends had to be scrapped because it was not working. The poll tax created much hurt and hardship for many people, but not once did Conservative Members express any regret.

Conservative Members who supported the poll tax now say that it does not work and that it must go. Having admitted that he was wrong then, the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) was asked how he knew that he was not wrong now. Time will tell. I am sure that the elderly, the young and the single will perceive that the new system will inflict as much hurt and hardship as did the poll tax, if not more.

According to Conservative Members, those who do not benefit from services should not contribute to the cost of those services. What will they tell Ministers about what should be paid for social services, the police, the fire brigade, street cleaning and highway maintenance? They are talking poppycock; it is impossible to assess the amounts involved. Instead of going around his constituency explaining what Labour policy is, the hon. Member for Nottingham, South should explain what Tory policy is. Clearly, he wants to explain Labour policy because he is afraid to tell his constituents about Tory policy.

We want to hear a proper response to the points made by Opposition Members. We have merely heard bids from Conservative Members: a 50 per cent. discount here, 40 per cent. there and 35 per cent. somewhere else—and 25 per cent. from Ministers. It is a dutch auction. What has not been explained is who will pay for the discounts.

Clearly, those who pay will be the people who do not receive such discounts—the pensioner couple and the single earner in a family household. We have been told that the Bill is self-financing. Someone must pay for the discounts, but it will not be the Government; it will be members of the community who are not entitled to discounts. That is what people in constituencies such as Nottingham, South and Torbay should be told.

As the Opposition pointed out in Committee, we need a fair and proper rebate system, based on ability to pay. That is what the Government are shying away from. Such a system would be far better than a system that paid discounts to people who were not entitled to them. How will local authorities set their budgets if they have to

[Mr. O'Brien]

calculate so many discounts? The Minister said that it was for the people entitled to discounts to apply for them, but how can a local authority set a budget if it will then have to disburse millions of pounds for discount purposes? The whole concept is misleading. The Minister should discuss the matter with the local authority associations. If the discount proposals outlined in the Bill stand, local authorities will have great difficulty in setting and administering their budgets.

When I questioned the Minister in Committee about the discount for disabled people who are in band A, he said that unfortunately no provision would be made for disabled people in band A who need to make adjustments to their property. No Conservative Member has referred to a discount—not even the hon. Member for Torbay——

It being Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to Order [12 November], to put the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 207, Noes 343.

Division No. 30] **[8.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John.
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin

Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then, pursuant to Order [12 November], proceeded to put the Questions on the remaining amendments, moved by a member of the Government.*

Clause 26

POWERS OF ENTRY

Amendments made: No. 125, in page 17, line 6, leave out '24 hours' and insert 'three clear days.'.

No. 126, in page 17, line 7, at end insert

'; and there shall be disregarded for this purpose any day which is—

(a) a Saturday, a Sunday, Christmas Day or Good Friday; or

(b) a day which is a bank holiday under the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 in England and Wales.'.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Clause 89

POWERS OF ENTRY

Amendments made: No. 117, in page 60, line 6, leave out '24 hours' and insert 'three clear days.'.

No. 118, in page 60, line 7, at end insert

'; and there shall be disregarded for this purpose any day which is—

(a) a Saturday, a Sunday, Christmas Day or Good Friday; or

(b) a day which is a bank holiday under the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 in Scotland.'.—*[Mr. Allan Stewart.]*

Clause 94

SUBSTITUTED AND REDUCED SETTINGS

Amendments made: No. 119, in page 64, line 2, after 'a', insert 'substituted or'.

No. 120, in page 64, line 4, after 'that', insert 'substituted or'.

No. 121, in page 64, line 5, at end insert 'substituted or'.—*[Mr. Allan Stewart.]*

Clause 116

SAVINGS AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

Amendments made: No. 127, in page 78, line 1, after first 'Act', insert

'(except section (*Transitory exemption for school leavers*))'.

No. 128, in page 78, line 6, after first 'Act', insert

'(except section (*Transitory exemption for school leavers*))'.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Schedule 1

PERSONS DISREGARDED FOR PURPOSES OF DISCOUNT

Amendment made: No. 129, in page 80, line 44, after 'impaired', insert—

'(aa) as regards any period which includes the day he is stated in a certificate of a registered medical practitioner to have been or to be likely to be severely mentally impaired;'.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Schedule 2

ADMINISTRATION

Amendments made: No. 130, in page 87, line 36, leave out from 'shall' to 'of' in line 37 and insert

', as respects each dwelling shown in the copy which in the opinion of the authority will be a relevant dwelling on the day when the list comes into force, notify the person concerned'.

No. 131, in page 87, line 39, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

No. 132, in page 88, line 1, leave out 'an exempt' and insert 'a relevant'.

No. 133, in page 88, line 3, leave out 'owner of the dwelling' and insert 'person concerned'.

No. 134, in page 88, line 12, leave out 'an exempt' and insert 'a relevant'.

No. 135, in page 88, line 14, leave out 'owner of the dwelling' and insert 'person concerned'.

No. 136, in page 88, line 25, at end insert—

'( ) For the purposes of this paragraph a dwelling is a relevant dwelling on any day if—

(a) on the day the dwelling is an exempt dwelling; or

(b) in respect of the financial year in which the day falls and the dwelling, the amount set under section 30 or 93 of this Act or, where the authority is a regional council each amount set under section 93 of this Act is nil.

( ) In this paragraph any reference to the person concerned is a reference to a person who, in respect of the particular dwelling, would be solely liable to pay to the authority an amount in respect of council tax for the particular day if the dwelling were not or had not been a relevant dwelling on that day.'.

No. 137, in page 89, line 13, at beginning insert—

'.—(1) Regulations under this Schedule may include, as regards a case where, in respect of a particular dwelling, persons would be jointly and severally liable to pay to an authority an amount in respect of council tax for a particular day if the dwelling were not or had not been on that day a relevant dwelling for the purposes of paragraph 8 above, provision equivalent to that included under that paragraph subject to any modifications the Secretary of State thinks fit.

(2)'.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Schedule 3

PENALTIES

Amendments made: No. 138, in page 93, line 18, leave out '10' and insert '10(2)'.

No. 139, in page 93, line 28, leave out '10' and insert '10(2)'.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Schedule 4

ENFORCEMENT: ENGLAND AND WALES

Amendments made: No. 140, in page 97, line 6, leave out from 'have' to 'in' in line 7 and insert

', or subsequently ceases to have, the debtor'.

No. 141, in page 97, line 44, at end insert—

'(7) The provisions of this paragraph (except sub-paragraphs (3) and (4)(b) above) shall apply to elected members of billing authorities or relevant precepting authorities as they apply to persons in employment; and for the purposes of the application of those provisions in relation to any such members—

(a) any reference to a person having the debtor in his employment shall be construed as a reference to such an authority having the debtor as an elected member; and

(b) any reference to the debtor's earnings shall be construed as a reference to allowances payable to the debtor by such an authority.

(8) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (7) above—

(a) a relevant precepting authority is a major precepting authority other than the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District; and

(b) a person is an elected member of a relevant precepting authority other than a county council if he is appointed to the authority by a constituent council of which he is an elected member.'.

No. 142, in page 101, line 23, at end insert—

'(2) Any reference in this paragraph to attachment of earnings includes a reference to attachment of allowances.'.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent signified].

8.12 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I wish to say at once how much I have enjoyed the deliberations on the Bill. I have many reasons for saying that. First, the Bill has enabled the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities—my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo)—to establish a formidable parliamentary reputation because of the way in which he led the Government side in Committee, aided and abetted by Under-Secretaries from virtually every part of the United Kingdom. They deployed the case as admirably as we all knew they would. I thank them and all my hon. Friends who helped them in Committee.

Secondly, I pay tribute to the Opposition for the way in which they conducted themselves. They started with one general speech and they recycled it hour after hour, day after day. As I listened a few minutes ago to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), I remembered all too well the speech in which he first addressed this subject about a year ago. His speech today was identical to that one and was certainly no better.

There have been lengthy deliberations on the Bill. Despite the opportunities provided by the guillotine arrangement for a full and lengthy analysis of the Bill, the Labour party filibustered to use up the almost over-generous time—as it appears—which the House made available to it. It is something of a disappointment——

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I served on the Standing Committee. On several occasions, we said that we felt that Tory Members were deliberately wasting the Committee's time. It was firmly pointed out to us that such a complaint was a criticism of the Chair and not of the conduct of hon. Members. Does that apply here as well?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I am sure that the Committee Chairman would have reproached any hon. Member who did not follow the procedures of the House.

Mr. Heseltine: Because, like me, you were not in attendance for every moment of the Committee's deliberations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it may be extremely helpful to remind you that the Committee Chairman had to reprove hon. Members at one stage——

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: It happened twice.

Mr. Heseltine: I must update my information. The Committee Chairman had to reprove Opposition Members twice for filibustering. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) is correct—that has proved beyond peradventure our worst suspicions about the conduct of those affairs.

Another curious aspect of the conduct of the debate will not have escaped the attention of the House. It is a year since we were told that the Labour party would conduct a tooth-and-nail opposition to the Bill. The Labour party was, we were told, totally opposed to it. Labour Members thought that it was wholly unacceptable, ill-considered, ill-prepared and beyond anything that local government was prepared to accept.

One would have thought that today, with this last chance, we would find Labour Members gathered on the Opposition Benches to cheer on their leading spokesmen as they tore into this piece of Tory legislation. I must confess that I have kept a note as the hours have gone wearily past to see whether the first three or the next five would add to the number of Labour Members present as the tension mounted. It is now the dinner hour, and we are within nearly an hour and an a half of the solemnity of the Bill passing from this place, and there are the Labour Members—just seven of them—to deploy their case. That says all there is to be said.

There is no fight left in Her Majesty's Opposition. The reason is not just that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities destroyed their arguments day after day; they have failed in another respect to match up to the enormity of the opportunity we gave them. I should have thought that the Opposition would come forward with their own measured proposals tabled in amendment after amendment so that their argument could be weighed against ours.

I do not for one minute suggest that the Opposition did not think of that idea for themselves. Just a few weeks ago, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was leaping about all over the place, waving a Bill which he had carefuly drafted to get rid of the poll tax. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly aware that the Opposition can draft Bills and amendments and have them debated. The moment that he failed to succeed in that particular—and wholly irrelevant—gesture, the idea of putting in amendment form the proposals in "Fair Rates" had no appeal for the Opposition. We know why—they do not have the first idea how they would grapple with the complexities of local government finance, how they would draft the legislation and what instructions they would give. That has been manifestly proved by the way in which they have conducted their opposition to the Bill today.

There is a third reason why I have so enjoyed the passage of the legislation. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) yesterday entertained the House with a historical re-run. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) here—he is a former member of the Labour party, who is now found somewhere else, in the Scottish nationalist movement, I think. He yesterday took what I thought was a wholly justified onslaught.

I thought that the Labour party was less than fair to the Scottish National party yesterday when it tried to suggest that it was that party which had somehow incited the nation not to pay the poll tax. I am not saying that the Scottish National party was not part of that process—I am sure that it was, because there are few bizarre extremities in which it is not playing its role. However, the idea that it was the Scottish National party which incited the nation not to pay the poll tax is not historically accurate.

When I read *Hansard*, I could hardly believe it. I shall read three quotations which are jewels of parliamentary history. In the first, the hon. Member for Garscadden said:

> "Politicians who hope to make law cannot pick and choose which laws to obey. It is a luxury which they cannot afford and which sets a dangerous precedent."

What were certain Labour Members of Parliament doing without let or hindrance from their leaders or Front-Bench spokesmen who have no complaints, who campaigned for them, who sought to get them elected to the House, who sat with them, who issued the Whip and allowed them to

[Mr. Heseltine]

take part in Committees, no matter what protests they made to stop people paying the poll tax? Now an Opposition spokesman is suggesting that that is a dangerous precedent.

However, it did not stop there. The hon. Gentleman went on to say:

"Non-payment was bound to affect local government services—it was designed to do so. Marginal reductions in funding hit many of the most vulnerable in the community."

We have been saying that for days, weeks and months. The Opposition have been bringing about those marginal reductions in revenue which, according to their own spokesman, hit the least privileged members of society, the very people whom the Labour party claims to represent.

The third quotation is very much along the same lines. The hon. Gentleman said:

"When a library closes or education services suffer, people are entitled to ask, 'Is this the price that we are now paying for the SNP non-payment campaign?'"—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1991: Vol. 201, c.35.]

No, it was the price we were paying for the Labour party's non-payment campaign. A new scale of hypocrisy was yesterday introduced into the debate by the parliamentary Labour Party.

The fourth and final reason for supporting Third Reading is simple. The legislation, despite all the delaying tactics of the parliamentary Labour party, brings the poll tax to an end at the earliest possible practical opportunity. While the Labour party has tried to ensure that the poll tax remains on the statute book, we have been determined that it should go, and a Third Reading will bring that about.

The Bill provides for the poll tax's replacement, also at the earliest possible opportunity, by a new fair council tax which will be in place by April 1993. It also preserves the arrangements made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reduce the levels of the community charge by £140 per payer, and we are determined to maintain those lower levels of payment in the new system. That, of course, contrasts starkly with the aim of the Labour party, which is determined that there will be an unfettered ability for local authorities—too often controlled by Labour—to spend without regard under any system of local government finance that it would introduce.

As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities eloquently said, there is now a very sensible and clear distinction. We shall have a fair system in place by 1993. There will be rebates for those who cannot afford to pay, there will be discounts for single people and a broad spread to reflect the ability of people in homes to pay a reasonable amount in accordance with the circumstances of the household. Against that, the parliamentary Labour party is determined—if it won power—not only to increase income tax to 59p in the pound, but to allow local taxes to rise without let or hindrance. The more Labour can tax people, the more it will be pleased. One fact from which the country can take satisfaction is that the Bill on which we are voting tonight will be on the statute book next year, when this party has won the election to ensure that that happens.

8.25 pm

Mr. Gould: I suppose that we should be flattered that the Secretary of State graced us not only with his presence but with a contribution to the debate. Clearly, that was a late change of plan as Government business managers had provided us with a piece of paper which assured us that "Mr. Michael Portillo" would open for the Government. Who knows which of our taunts or what embarrassment the Secretary of State felt at our jibes that he did not have the courage to speak about the measure and knew nothing about it finally forced him to his feet? Was it worth waiting for? I fear not.

The Secretary of State confirmed all that we had said—that he knew nothing about the measure. It was no wonder that he dared not come to Committee to suffer the assault on the details of the provisions because he did not understand them. Consequently, even under pressure, he waited for the moment when he could indulge in his favourite tactic of airily using a broad brush. It struck me that he was in the mode in which he is most comfortable—a mode which has no relation to the detail of the Bill, to the facts of life or to the realities of local government. He could make a few broad points of doubtful validity and then sit down with the sycophantic cheers of a handful of his supporters ringing in his ears.

The one interesting thing that the Secretary of State said was that he enjoyed the passage of the Bill through the Committee. I bet he did. I bet that he enjoyed it enormously from his dinner table, from his opera seat, from the theatre or from his bed, for heaven's sake, while the rest of us were doing our duty and considering the Bill that he had introduced as a supposed solution to the problem of the poll tax.

The Secretary of State said that the great virtue of the Bill was that it abolished the poll tax. There is cause for celebration in the fact that clause 100 proclaims the end of the poll tax, but would that it were so. If the Bill did abolish the poll tax, we could at least say that, whatever its other failings and shortcomings, it had at least achieved that. However, I am afraid that even that limited purpose is inadequately served by the legislation. We have heard hints to that effect from the speeches made even today by some Conservative hon. Members, very few of whom—indeed none of whom, as I understand it—are willing to stand up for the principle of the poll tax. As I understand it, none of them will vote against the Bill because of clause 100. All those brave soldiers in the cause of the poll tax who were going to surrender their honour and virtue at high cost and die in the last ditch will all troop through the Lobbies to vote for that clause. The only exception of whom I know among Conservative Members who is likely to vote against the Bill will do so on different grounds.

Mr. Wilkinson: Abstain.

Mr. Gould: Even to abstain is an achievement. As I understand it, no one else among all those poll tax warriors will vote against the Bill. How they must choke on it. Every word that the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), for example, uttered throughout the Committee dripped with regret for the fact that the poll tax is to go, and dripped with support and enthusiasm for the whole principle of the poll tax.

Is the poll tax unfair, as the Secretary of State and the Government say? The people could not be persuaded that it was fair. Is it unfair according to the hon. Members for Battersea and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), and according to all the others who think like them? Not a bit of it. The poll tax is a wonderful tax and is not at all unfair. They choke on it, but they will vote for its abolition.

Was the poll tax virtually uncollectable, as the Prime Minister said? Of course not, says the hon. Member for Battersea: if only everyone was as virtuous as Wandsworth council, there would be no problem. The poll tax may be abolished by clause 100 in language——

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North) *rose*——

Mr. Bowis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way? He must give way.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman has only just asked. I will complete the point first. To give the hon. Member for Tayside, North credit, he was looking at me rather than at his hon. Friend the Member for Battersea. I watched the hon. Member for Battersea closely because I expected him to want to intervene earlier. He took an awfully long time to summon his thoughts, to get his wits together and to decide that he wanted to intervene. I am sure that he will establish once and for all his undying allegiance to the poll tax. If he cannot quite do that, I have no doubt that he will explain why, despite that undying allegiance, he proposes to vote for the abolition of the poll tax. Once he has explained that, I have no doubt that his hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North will explain likewise. I give way to the hon. Member for Battersea.

Mr. Bowis: It took a long time coming. We were and are content with the community charge in Wandsworth for this year and next year—zero and zero—but, alas, that has not been the case in many areas in which our nation is ruled by Labour councils which have imposed such high charges that it has been impossible for people to put up with them. In the interests of my fellow man, I am prepared to sacrifice my own personal interest and comfort.

What does the hon. Gentleman mean about collectability? If there is a zero charge, it is not too difficult to collect. Has the hon. Gentleman not yet worked out the mathematics of that?

Mr. Gould: I am not sure that anyone will be persuaded by that bit of sophistry. I was not aware of the point on which the hon. Gentleman seems to rely, which is that no Conservative-controlled authorities or Conservative voters are unhappy about the poll tax. That comes as something of a surprise and it is a good instance of history being rewritten. Let us see whether the hon. Member for Tayside, North can be any more persuasive. Let us give him his chance now.

Mr. Bill Walker: We had some enjoyable exchanges in Committee. The hon. Gentleman will know that I do not apologise to him or to anyone else for the fact that I believe that the poll tax in principle was right. I believe that the level at which it was brought in and the level that it achieved latterly were the reasons why it had problems. If the Government had accepted earlier the proposals suggested by me and by others—which they did latterly —about transferring some of the local charge to value added tax, there would have been no difficulty in sustaining the position on the community charge.

Mr. Gould: No doubt each Conservative Member will make peace with his or her conscience. Each will have his or her own little excuse, unconvincing though it may be, for abandoning the principle to which he or she so strongly adhered. We must conclude that no Conservative Member has the courage of his convictions. No Conservative Member will vote against the abolition of the poll tax on the ground that he adheres to the principle that he has so bravely espoused.

What was most significant about the brief intervention by the hon. Member for Tayside, North and the one point that I found convincing was his assertion that he would offer no apology to me or to anyone else. That is regarded in the country as the most unforgivable arrogance by the Conservative party. Having created such havoc, such misery and such disrespect for the law, having undermined local government, having obstructed civil rights and having spent £14 billion of taxpayers' money, the Conservatives have the arrogance to say that they will offer no apology.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to apologise to electors in Labour areas for their levels of spending? Whether under rates, poll tax or council tax, they have imposed and will impose a great burden. Will the hon. Gentleman apologise for the failure of Labour authorities to collect rates or community charge, which has imposed a further burden, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out? Finally, will he apologise for the Labour party's failure to put in place any proposals for capping authorities that exceed those burdens?

Mr. Gould: I agree that it was the size of the poll tax bills which brought people on to the streets and which caused law-abiding citizens to be prepared to defy the law. The size of the bills meant that Conservative voters threatened to revolt and that Conservative councillors refused the whip. That was all true in Conservative-controlled areas. That was the reality of the poll tax, and the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) deludes himself if he prefers to forget that piece of inconvenient history.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: Yes, but I will not give way to every tin-pot intervention.

Mr. Mans: Despite that comment, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He suggested that some of my hon. Friends were abandoning principles to which they had adhered for many years. Will he confirm that he has not abandoned any principles to which he has adhered?

Mr. Gould: I am in the very comfortable position of being able to give the hon. Gentleman exactly that assurance—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes. My position in principle is well known and I adhere to it.

Let us establish why some Conservative Members can reconcile with their consciences the fact that they will vote for the abolition of the poll tax. There are several reasons. They know that, despite the brave words of clause 100, the poll tax will live on. The bills will arrive again at the end of March next year. Just imagine the outrage and the anger of the millions of people who have been persuaded by the bravura performances of the Secretary of State and by the assurances given by the Prime Minister, including his statement that the poll tax had been abolished. They were inclined, silly people, to believe Ministers' statements. Imagine their anger and outrage when the bills arrive again at the end of March next year.

[Mr. Gould]

Imagine the despair of local government, although it was under no illusions. Local government will be faced yet again with the problem of collecting what the Prime Minister glibly announced some months ago was a virtually uncollectable tax of whose fairness the people could not be persuaded. Imagine the problems that local government now faces. How is local government to grapple with the problem?

I suspect that Conservative Members take comfort from the fact that the poll tax lives on, and they may take further comfort from the expert advice from so many quarters that the Government's timetable for abolishing the poll tax by 1 April 1993 will be extremely difficult to achieve. Conservative Members have the giddy prospect —how it must warm the cockles of their hearts—that the poll tax will survive for yet another year and perhaps even until 1994. They can salve their consciences by saying, "Yes, we are voting for a clause tonight, but of course nothing will really happen for at least a year or two."

Even if Conservative Members were compelled to face the reality that one way or another their beloved poll tax is due to go sooner or later—sooner if we have a Labour Government and later if we have a Tory Government—at least they can again delude themselves with the idea that, if only they can win a general election and implement the Bill, the poll tax will live on.

The 50 per cent. personal or head tax element of the council tax preserves the poll tax with all its mean features intact. The unfairness of the poll tax—the very problem that did for the poll tax, or so we are told by the Government—survives with the council tax. The complexity of the poll tax is also preserved. I would argue, as would many others, that the complexity of the council tax is likely to outstrip even that of the poll tax. As a direct consequence of the complexity of the council tax, the cost of administering it is fearful to imagine. Yet undoubtedly Conservative Members will gladly support the council tax because it will prove to be yet another burden for hated local government.

Another feature that the council tax will have in common with the poll tax is the register. We are told—although with less assurance tonight—that technically and lawfully there can be no register. But it is equally accepted that it might be necessary to have a list, and that if there is not a list local authorities might have to rely on the electoral register. So all the objections to the poll tax on civil rights grounds will survive.

Then there is the question of uncollectability—the other shot below the water that holed the poll tax. The council tax will also be uncollectable. Surely no one disputes that 7 million inquiries will have to be made to find out which are the single-person households. Indeed, more than 7 million inquiries will have to be made. Some 33 million inquiries will have to be made to find out which of those 33 million households are the 7 million single-person households. The information will have to be kept on record and updated day by day as people move from one address to another, change their status and so on. Uncollectability—my heavens, we have seen nothing yet. The council tax will be a monument to uncollectability. Undoubtedly, that too pleases the diehard supporters of the poll tax.

All the problems of the poll tax will remain and will be compounded by a set of new problems connected with an entirely new and untried property tax. The council tax will use an entirely new valuation basis—capital values. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) rightly described the mechanism for carrying out valuations as a Mickey-Mouse process which will cost about £2 per valuation. I always tell my friends to remember the next time that they are charged a large sum for a valuation to remember that it could be done for £2.

The valuation process will provoke a huge number of appeals just as all the other administrative problems of introducing the council tax come to fruition. The valuation process will depend on a banding system. It will do great damage to fairness between one region and another and one council tax payer and another. It is rightly feared and regretted by many Conservative Members who, unfortunately, did not have the courage to express their opinions in these debates.

When we put together the elements of the council tax, we find that the poll tax not merely lives on but lives on with even more horrific problems attached to it. I genuinely think—this is not an attempt at a debating point —that we face a disaster of even greater than poll tax proportions. We have evidence that that is the case. Conservative Members could scarcely bear to contemplate what was being done in their name. At one point during Report yesterday there was literally not one Back-Bench Member on the Conservative Benches. For a period this afternoon just two Conservative Back-Bench Members were present.

The Conservative party is introducing the legislation and Conservative Members had some obligation, however rudimentary, to Parliament and their constituents to understand a measure which their votes would force through the House. The truth is that Conservative Members chose to block their ears and close their eyes. They sleepwalked through the Bill. They refused to try to understand the disaster that was in preparation.

Conservative Members were culpable on the poll tax. Their mistake and their blind support produced that disaster. Even the Prime Minister sought refuge in the excuse that the measure had been bounced through. That was a pretty pathetic excuse from a member of the Cabinet. But it is now a pathetic excuse for all those Conservative Members who chose not to listen to the arguments and to pretend that this time, unlike last time, they could accept ministerial assurances that everything would be all right on the night. Their excuses ring hollow in the ears of millions of people who have been damaged by the poll tax.

Those excuses will not be listened to a second time. In all seriousness, Conservative Members have failed the House. They have failed in their duty and they have failed their constituents. It will be only justice if their constituents take their revenge.

8.45 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I congratulate my hon. Friends on the Front Bench on taking the Bill through Third Reading. There is a clear cleavage tonight, irrespective of where we stood on the community charge, to which I shall refer later. On one side we are offered a council tax which is a mixture of a property tax and a head tax. On the other side we are offered a return to a system

called fair rates. We do not know what is offered to us under the fair rates system. I have no doubt how the majority of the electorate in my constituency would vote, if they were given that choice. They do not want to return to a property system whereby large families who need larger houses and older people who want to keep their houses so that their children and grandchildren can visit them are penalised.

Some form of local government Bill has been introduced almost every year. For eight months I was a Minister in the Department of the Environment. This is yet another Bill. I am concerned that we should get it right in the long run, or put on the record where improvements can still be made either before or after a general election. But the last thing that we want is a rating system, which is what the Labour party wants.

In my view, the community charge was right in principle but was too high. I said that in February 1988. Three years later value added tax was increased and the community charge was reduced by £140. If we had left it at that, the community charge would have remained. But that is history and we must take up from where we are now.

I am still worried about the unfairness of the council tax to people in London and the south-east and areas where property prices are high. The Government have accepted the principle that there should be separate sets of bands for Wales and for Scotland, presumably because the prices of property are different there. However, the greatest variation in property prices is between the south of England and the north of England. People may say that it is difficult to know where to draw the line, but a line has been drawn down the Welsh marshes somewhere and along Hadrian's wall or some other such boundary.

The difference between property prices in the north and the south-east of England is not small. In London and the south-east property prices are 45 per cent. above the average. In the north property prices are 25 per cent. below the average. That is not a small difference. There is a great gulf between one and the other. Only 1 per cent. of properties in London and the south-east will be in the bottom band. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), 83 per cent. of properties will be in the top three bands. In the north few properties—only 4 per cent.—will be in the top three bands. In Greater London as a whole 31 per cent. of properties will be in the top three bands. It is a pity that the Government did not take on board then—I trust that they will do so at some time in the future—the fact that the Conservative-controlled London Boroughs Association has drawn up its own set of bands, which has made the situation clearer.

If the Department of the Environment contacts the Department of Health, it will find that four bands of property apply to doctors buying their surgeries, so the Government do not even need to use the London Boroughs Association scheme. It says here, "Department of Health"; is that not correct?

Mr. Wilkinson: Yes, it is.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: The Department of Health lists four regions of the country. I believe that it would make that list available to the Department of the Environment. The list starts with a factor of 97 for Cleveland, 106 for Avon, 116 for Buckingham and 130 for Harrow and Brent. The Department of Health has already worked out the differences, so we need not send people around the country; we merely need to bicycle from the Department of the Environment to the Department of Health. I sometimes wonder whether one Department knows what another is doing, but I must not raise such questions tonight.

Many people will be shocked that we have not increased the single person's discount from 25 to 33⅓ per cent. or to 50 per cent. I read in the newspapers that that was being negotiated. Presumably the Treasury put a stop to it. I only hope that when the recession ends and taxes pour in we shall be able to table an amendment to do that. In Brent it means that, according to my figures, 92 per cent. of single people will lose out an average of £131 each, which is quite a lot of money. In Brent, 18 per cent. of doubles will lose out and the remaining 82 per cent. will gain an average of £44.

In Brent, North, according to my figures, after the 25 per cent. discount 94 per cent. of single people will lose out and 24 per cent. of doubles. I wished to put that on record because, with all taxes or changes in taxation, those people who are better off as a result will say "Thank you very much" and forget about it and the others who do not benefit will remember and will look to the ballot box, although I trust that that will not happen in this case.

The present recession in London and the south-east is different from any recession since 1929. From 1979 to 1981 the recession affected the north and the midlands, but now it is affecting service industries here. Sainsbury recently revealed that London is the only area where sales of food have decreased.

It is not merely a question of the price of property, because we must take travel into account. Repairs to cars cost twice as much in London as outside. If one drives a long way to have one's car serviced one can save money, but it costs money to drive it there.

House repossessions must also be considered. Figures published yesterday show that the two greatest increases in unemployment were in London and the south-east—this year it has increased by 43·6 per cent. in Greater London and by 56·4 per cent. in the south-east.

Mr. Wilkinson: It has increased by more than 100 per cent. in my constituency.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who spoke on this subject last night, says that unemployment has increased by 100 per cent. in his constituency.

The Government must bear in mind the fact that we are debating Third Reading and that Conservative Members of Parliament would much prefer the Bill to anything that will be offered by the Labour party at any time. There is no doubt about that. It is not a case of salving our consciences; it is a plain fact.

However, at some stage, in another place or later on—whatever we say now, there will be another local government Bill next year—when the recession ends and more money is available, for goodness sake will the Government do something for London and the south-east and other high-priced property areas and do something about banding and single persons' discounts? Let them not wait three years this time. Let it be done then.

Tonight I shall vote with the Government, because I do not want the return of a total rating system. I should have

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

preferred the community charge to remain, but it has gone and I accept that. We have got the Bill to Third Reading and hon. Members who served in Committee have done quite well, but we must remember regional banding and an increase in the personal discount if the measure is to become popular rather than merely being a palliative.

8.54 pm

Mr. Bellotti: When the Secretary of State introduced the debate on Third Reading, we were entertained to a speech commensurate with an after-dinner speech, which is where the Secretary of State spent most of the time while the Committee was considering details of the Bill. That gave the Minister of State a difficult task. A little more than 12 months ago he said:

"Taxes on people's homes are unfair. Property values bear little relation to people's ability to pay."

From that standpoint it was a difficult task for the Secretary of State to pilot the Bill through Committee and on to Report and Third Reading. On occasions, scrutiny of the Bill was almost non-existent.

The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) has demonstrated two key areas which the Committee did not consider in the necessary detail: banding and discounts. If the Committee and the House, on Report, had had the opportunity to explore those in detail, there would have been a great deal of support for his point of view.

Perhaps the Government do not believe that council tax bills will ever be brought into being in this form in 1993. Perhaps that is why they did not deem it necessary to go into detail in Committee. However, we must seriously consider the possibility that the Bill will be brought into being. At this late hour I want to join those hon. Members who would appeal for some rethinking.

The misery, chaos and cost caused by the poll tax, which so many hon. Members from both sides of the House have shared during these debates, will continue with the council tax, unless we are careful. The council tax is not fair and will not be efficient.

First, it is not fair. Surely it is wrong that the richest people, living in mansions, will pay only three times what the poorest people in the smallest flats will be asked to pay. That differential is not enough. Surely there are not enough bands.

That will put the burden on to the least well-off and protect the rich. If there were more bands, the burden would be spread more fairly.

The bands will mean that those on low and average incomes in high property value areas will face the largest bills. Those are the very people in London and the south-east to whom many hon. Members have referred in Committee and during this debate.

People living in tied property will face bills quite out of proportion to their incomes, especially if the property is in the inner city. That will affect ministers of religion, tenant farmers in rural areas, and people who rent and gain no benefit from the capital value of the property that they occupy. Private tenants lost heavily when the poll tax was introduced and stand to lose heavily again under the council tax.

The tax will also create a great deal of resentment. The Government propose to exempt students, but not all students will pay nothing. As we demonstrated in Committee and on Third Reading, many students who live in multi-occupancy properties will be forced by landlords to contribute directly or indirectly to the cost of the property tax. The landlord will not just pay the council tax without passing it on to those occupying the property.

We have received professional advice from many quarters to the effect that the council tax will not be in place. I am pleased to say that, since I have had responsibility for local government finance for my party, the professionals whom I have encouraged to help me in my task have been extremely helpful. For example, the Magistrates Association says:

"The deep concern felt by the magistracy in respect of their involvement in the liability order stage of enforcement of the community charge . . . is . . . now regretfully repeated in respect of the proposed council tax."

That organisation's views have been made well known to Ministers:

"We have put forward our views to Ministers on many occasions and our concerns that the procedure brings the magistracy into disrepute."

Other professional bodies say that the council tax is wrong and gives them cause for concern. Surveyors who have been asked to value property have said that. For example, Mr. James Allen of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland says:

"We greatly fear that the Bill as it now stands will result in an unworkable tax. This will be clearly against the public interest."

He goes on:

"The RICS is particularly concerned at the failure to legislate for a credible system of appeals."

The Government ignore all the professional advice at their peril.

The valuation process is imprecise. On Monday morning of this week the first radio programme I heard, at 7.30, was on Radio Sussex. The interviewer went out with a Mr. Dixon of Enever, estate agents in Brighton, which has been awarded a contract to value 30,000 homes in Brighton. While we are still debating the valuation process and trying to influence the Minister, the Government might have shown a little courtesy by not awarding contracts until after Third Reading.

In that radio programme, the interviewer went round with the estate agent and asked, in effect, "How would you value this property?" The agent replied, "This is a block of flats. I am not able to enter any of the flats. I shall assume that they are all roughly the same size and put them all in band B." They proceeded down the road and the interviewer said, "We are now outside a large detached house. How would you value that?" Mr. Dixon replied, "I would say that this property is in the top band or the one next to it. I shall put it into the band next to the top because that will help to reduce the number of appeals that might come forward."

The programme continued in that vein and it was fascinating. I thought for a moment that I was listening to a BBC comedy, but it was, in reality, a serious attempt to explain to listeners how the valuation process would work. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that it was possible for valuations to be done for £2 per property. In the radio programme, it was suggested that an agent who knew the area well would not even need to leave his office to value property. Could there be a more ludicrous proposition for valuing property?

Clause 5 gives power to the Secretary of State to continue to cap local authorities and alter their budgets. That capping aspect received little attention in Committee

and on Report, although it is an extremely serious matter. Those powers relate to a local authority's SSA. Hon. Members have demonstrated many times that the whole SSA system has brought local government finance into disrepute.

Eastbourne borough council sent a letter to the Department of the Environment referring to its SSA and asking for details of additional costs. Before the powers in clause 5 are implemented, the Government should be honest and answer such questions. The letter simply asked for details of the costs of implementing the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Food Safety Act 1990, short-term leases and the code and guidance on homelessness. The Government must demonstrate that questions such as those will be answered before the capping powers are implemented.

In Committee, the Government were unable to give answers. At this stage of the Bill, it is possible for me to give the answers that the Government gave to Eastbourne borough council. The Department of the Environment responded as follows:

"It is the Department's practice to make an estimate of the cost to local authorities of new policy initiatives which are introduced. That estimate is one of the factors which Ministers take into account when deciding what provisions to make each year for total local authority spending".

Thus far in the letter there would be no objection to the powers taken, but it continues:

"However, that level of provision is not determined simply by adding up a list of estimated costs for existing services and new initiatives. Ministers take into account a number of broad factors such as the scope for efficiency savings and the removal of wasteful expenditure, and what the country can afford generally. The annual settlement represents Ministers' overall judgment, taken in the light of these various factors; it is not constructed by making separate provision for specific items."

So the Government are taking powers to cap local authorities and restrict their budgets, but not taking into account the additional responsibilities which they intend to give local authorities. It is ludicrous that the Bill will place powers on local authorities without the Government estimating the costs involved.

I am grateful to the Minister of State for agreeing, an hour or so ago, to meet my colleagues in Eastbourne. I hope that he will be prepared to meet colleagues throughout the country to discuss how those powers may affect local people.

I wish to discuss a matter that arose on Report, which we were unable to consider properly in Committee—the effect of discounts. I invited the Minister of State to explain, when he wound up on Report, why the 25 per cent. discount should not be increased to 40 per cent. I gave a series of statistics, one of which was Government based, from three authorities, illustrating why the discount should be 40 per cent. It is because the average income for a single-person household is 60 per cent. of the average income for a two-person household. Although I asked the Minister of State to deal with that issue in his response on Report, he singularly failed to do so. Will the Minister who replies to Third Reading reply to that important point? Opposition Members are aware of the fact that, given an opportunity to support an amendment that we tabled on Report to increase the discount from 25 per cent. to 40 per cent., a reasonable number of Conservative Back Benchers would do so. If the Government want to argue for a 25 per cent. discount, they must be prepared to give justifiable reasons for doing so. Not to deal with the issue simply because they are aware that several Conservative Back Benchers and Opposition Members hold a different view is irresponsible.

The Government do not intend to implement the council tax proposals in their entirety. I predict that they will be substantially amended first. At Committee stage the Government took every opportunity to dodge key issues such as banding and discounts and they do the House a disservice by continuing in that vein.

9.9 pm

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): After the engaging and entertaining clash of Titans at the outset of the debate and two contributions by veteran protagonists, I rise more modestly to regret that the Bill should receive a Third Reading with clauses 17 and 83 unamended and intact. My interest in the Bill arises from my role as parliamentary adviser to the Federation of Master Builders. As the clauses deal with the completion of new dwellings, the connection is obvious and topical.

The housing market is currently grappling with the effects of recession, the latest development of which is the growing number of repossessions and repossessed houses being sold at auction at knock-down prices. That, in turn, creates surplus capacity in the market, reduces the need for new building and puts many smaller firms represented in the federation up against the wall. Although the prospects are much brighter, particularly as a result of yesterday's announcement of £7·5 billion next year for housing, some dark winter months lie ahead. That £7·5 billion is exactly the amount raised by tobacco tax, a curious illustration of the principle of quid pro quo.

I shall talk on one point of principle. The principle asserted is that no new housing should attract a charge until it is occupied. The relief of six months that has been granted may seem generous, but it certainly is not in today's circumstances, where we have a sluggish market with houses regrettably remaining unsold for perhaps years rather than months. A builder cannot even let a property that he has built for sale without forfeiting his rights to reclaim VAT, so he is called on to pay tax on a property from which he derives no personal income or residential benefit. The property may receive some services such as street lighting or police protection, but it is a small proportion of the full benefits that a council tax payer can expect to enjoy once he occupies the property.

In the present desperate state of the market it is most unwelcome and unreasonable for the builder, especially the small builder, to have to meet that extra cost. Therefore, I am astonished at the attitude of the Labour party as expressed by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) on clause 83, when he said in Committee that the provision would

"fulfil an important function by stopping builders leaving small parts of buildings unfinished in order to avoid local taxation."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 27 November 1991; c. 501.]

The idea that builders are deliberately trying to prevent houses from being sold is simply absurd. The average small builder has to provide money up front, purchase the land, order materials and pay the wages, so needs to have a regular turnover of build and sell to survive. Where else can he get his money? He has to borrow from banks which, with today's high interest rates, obviously puts him under tremendous pressure.

Mr. Maxton: That same argument could be advanced for people who, as a result of their jobs, have had to move house, cannot sell their existing house, on which they have a mortgage, and also have a bridging loan to buy their new property. After six months they will have to pay 50 per cent. of the tax on the house that is left empty. Why should a builder be exempt from paying that tax when someone else in the same position is not?

Sir Michael Neubert: As I shall explain, we are dealing with one of the nation's most vital industries, the construction industry. An individual has his own responsibilities and can make his own judgment; a builder has to build and sell houses to make his livelihood and to survive. He must be there ready to build houses when there is an economic upturn and a demand for more houses. That is the difference between the individual and the small builder who is in business.

The provision's origin goes back to the bad old days of the Wilson years and the notorious scandal of Centre Point. There is all the difference in the world between a wealthy property speculator who leaves a London landmark empty for years, confident in the knowledge that in a rising market he will eventually recover his extended costs, and today's depressed housing market in which small builders literally have to fight to survive. I am astonished that the Labour party does not recognise the plight of the small business man.

It is unfair to penalise small businesses when they are already hard pressed. I ask the Minister to introduce a provision temporarily to waive the application of this clause in the circumstances. That would enable the Minister by statutory instrument and at his discretion to alter the position if he felt that that was genuinely needed. This small but significant impost on builders gravely irks them.

A further question not discussed in Committee concerns sheltered housing complexes where traditionally and typically there are a number of units with common facilities such as a communal dining room and the all-important presence of a warden. Until that warden is in place and the communal facilities become available, no one takes up occupation of the units, but they might be in different stages of construction and would probably be charged under the council tax proposals.

So much for the principle; the practice I will leave for another occasion when there is more time. I acknowledge that this is a small matter, but what I have said represents a cry from the heart of one of the most important industries in this country—the construction industry, which feels the first effects of a recession, bears the brunt of it and needs to recover to encourage an upturn throughout the economy. My right hon. Friends are planning a package of proposals which we are told will be announced tomorrow. When doing so they might consider this as one of a small number of measures which might help to stimulate and sustain the housing market at this difficult time.

The British sense of fair play dictates that we do not hit a man when he is down. Builders feel that they deserve special consideration at this time. I intend to emulate them by sitting down myself—and hoping to rise again.

9.16 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: I was amazed to hear the Secretary of State complain about the lack of Opposition Members in the Chamber. The sheer brass neck of people like him never ceases to surprise me. He did not bother to defend the council tax in Committee. Tonight, after offering us the sort of speech which is the delight of Tory party conferences—it was the sort aimed at impressing them but which makes no impact here—he was off again. His contribution struck me as about as substantial as the petals on a poppy—one brief shake by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and the petals fell off, and the right hon. Gentleman had departed again.

Conservative Members have a nerve saying that we hit the vulnerable members of the community and attack the least privileged. They are the people who brought in the poll tax in the first place, and who brought in the heartless social security laws and much else besides. They should examine their own record of the past 13 years.

Now the Conservatives want us to congratulate them on ending the poll tax. Not a word of apology or repentance have they uttered, not an expression of regret to the people of Scotland who had the poll tax foisted on them a year before England and Wales.

I do not blame individuals for changing their minds about Government policy; we are all entitled to change our views in the light of experience. But when someone changes his mind he can reasonably be expected to explain what caused that change of mind and to apologise for any harm that he may have done. An enormous amount of harm was done by the poll tax, yet not a word of apology or explanation have we heard from the Secretary of State or any of his colleagues.

It may not be suspicious when one person changes his mind, but the virtual unanimity throughout the Tory party is certainly suspect. It is as if its members had a collective mind—with one or two exceptions who have consistently stuck to their point of view. There is no sincerity in that change of mind or repentance for the harm done.

In his time, the Secretary of State attacked the poll tax, pointing out correctly that it was wrong that a duke and a dustman should pay the same. Astonishingly, we heard not a word tonight in defence of the main point of the council tax—band H will pay only three times what band A pays. If the Secretary of State were here now, I would ask him whether he was not embarrassed to send himself, a wealthy man, a bill for a mere three times what the occupants of modest dwellings will pay anywhere in England.

Government Members talk about rising unemployment in the south-east. As a Member for a constituency with a continuing high level of unemployment, I sympathise with the plight of people thrown into unemployment in London and the south-east. In Scotland, we have seen the effects on our own constituents. We know from our own history what it is like, and we sympathise with the plight of these people. But I will never forget how uninterested those Tory Members were in our plight or how they created unemployment as a weapon in their struggle against inflation and told us that it was a price worth paying. I shall never forget that as long as I live.

The council tax will not be welcomed in the country. At best it will get a grudging acceptance, in the way that people prefer a decayed tooth to one with an abscess. The Government are not bringing in a just and fair tax to

replace the poll tax: they are merely bringing in one that they hope will allay the fears of Tory Members in marginal seats. They have refused to listen to the people, particularly the people in Scotland. They have changed their mind only because they feared the people's verdict if they stuck to the poll tax. Now they are hoping that the people have very short memories. I think that they will find that the people have not.

9.22 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Barking, which I think is a very suitable seat for him to hold, and I thought that it was one of the greatest pieces of hypocrisy that I had ever heard. [HON. MEMBERS: "Dagenham."] Dagenham? Well, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) was barking anyway. The contribution of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) was even more barking.

I find it extraordinary that the Labour party stood in the 1974 election, the 1979 election and the 1983 election on a platform to introduce this tax, and now Labour Members are against it. I find it amazingly hypocritical that they should be expressing its difficulties and complications when it was merely got out by the civil servants from the red file and handed to the Secretary of State for the Environment as a replacement for what I think was a sensible tax—a standard tax for each citizen for a licence to use local authority services—which came to be known as the poll tax.

I say again that nobody objected. Nobody objects to a standard price for a television set, or a motor car, or house insurance, or a loaf of bread or anything else. So what is wrong with a standard price to be paid by each citizen for local authority services? We should remember too that many people do not enjoy or use these services.

I come back to the hypocrisy of the Opposition. If inability to pay is the basis of their complaints about the community charge, why are they so interested in the concept that, if the value of one's home, which one may have owned for two years, or 10 years, or 70 years, and which may be in Dagenham, or Barking, or London, or Scotland, or Stornoway, or anywhere else, happens to alter, one should be charged on the assumption that one is rich thereby, because one's home is worth more? One cannot get rid of one's home. One can no more get rid of one's home than one can take off one's clothes in the Chamber of the House of Commons. *[Interruption.]* It is the modesty of Opposition Members and their ugliness that prevents them from doing this. It is important that people should not be taxed for beloved local authority services on the basis of a capital asset which they cannot realise, the value of which is assessed by some accountant and over which they have no control.

Unfortunately, on Report, we did not reach part II, which applies to Scotland. One of the characteristics of the Bill is that it uses algebraic formulae. I am sure that Opposition Members have studied algebra. That is demonstrated by their grasp and illustration of the benefits of comprehensive education—that is, those who did not go to public school. But I have never met anyone who uses algebra, and the Bill is algebraic.

I want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister one or two simple questions. Clause 72(2) says:

"In this Part, 'dwelling' . . . means any lands and heritages".

Clause 73(4) refers to "any lands and heritages". The Scottish National Farmers Union will be interested to know whether that means that land and farm buildings will be taxed. I should like my hon. Friend to ensure that the absurd Labour party proposals to do so are not part of the Bill's intention.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Where is the algebra in that?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: There is plenty of algebra. Clause 78 has the formula $\frac{A}{D}$. Hon. Members should try it. D equals the number of days in the year. There is also the leap year. It is important that my hon. Friend the Minister should deal with that point.

There is another matter which I do not understand and with which I should like my hon. Friend to deal. This is a most complicated piece of legislation to introduce a simple concept. It talks about "resident owners". A resident owner is an owner in residence. This is a day-by-day Bill. For three and a half days in the week, I am resident in a house in London of which I am an owner, and for three and a half days in the week I am resident in my house in Scotland of which I am an owner. When I am not there, it is a single-person residence, and when I am here, I am in a single-person residence.

I want the Minister to study that carefully, because the Bill is subject to all sorts of orders and preparations. The Secretary of State can make the day longer or shorter and houses and residences different. I want to know what that means. I want to know whether it means that, if I am not resident in the house that I own, that day, even if it continues as the day that it started as—*[Interruption.]* The Bill says that the day shall be presumed to continue as it started. Very well. I want to know whether, if on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I am not resident in my Scottish house and it becomes a single-person dwelling, account will be taken of that fact for the purpose of calculating what I have to pay.

I have never seen legislation drafted worse than this, more complicated, or more open to doubt. However, one thing about it is certain: it is the legislation on which Labour Members fought the last three elections, and is what they wanted—but now they are against it. That shows that Labour Members are hypocrites.

I want the Minister to explain to me simply, because I am a simple person—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and cannot understand this, what is meant by references to resident occupation and day-by-day occupation, and to the other matters that I raised. Although many concepts are capable of variation by Secretaries of State—perhaps including, God help us, but many centuries after I am dead, Labour Secretaries of State—it is important that my hon. Friend the Minister should spell it out that farm land is not included in the description "lands and heritages" and the meaning of the references to residence and daily residence.

9.30 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): The Bill seeks to abolish the poll tax in 15 months' time and to introduce a deeply flawed property-based replacement. As was predicted, the poll tax perished under the weight of those who did not pay it. Even the Prime Minister admitted to Tory Back Benchers shortly after his election as party leader that the tax was unenforceable.

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

Even since then, the problem has grown much worse. On 4 December, the Government admitted that, although by 30 September last year 47 per cent. of the poll tax due in shire counties was collected, by the same date this year the figure was down to 40 per cent. In metropolitan districts, it fell from 44 per cent. to 38 per cent.; in outer-London boroughs, from 44 per cent. to 36 per cent.; and in inner-London boroughs, from 34 per cent. to 28 per cent. I understand that collection in Scotland has fallen from 31 per cent. to 26 per cent. Clearly the poll tax has become more difficult to implement and to enforce as time has gone by.

The Audit Commission acknowledged that in its evidence to the Government earlier this year, when it advised them not to pursue small amounts—such as the 20 per cent. payments on which there was substantial debate earlier. In its further evidence of a fortnight ago, the commission said that district auditors throughout the country recognised that

"Collection seems more difficult in relatively deprived areas and areas with a large number of charge payers on benefit."

Strathclyde estimates that 70 per cent. of all defaulters are those who are liable for 20 per cent. payments. The tragedy is—as I told the House last Thursday—that, according to the *Glasgow Evening Times*, civil war broke out over poindings in the Springburn district of Glasgow, which is one of the poorest boroughs in western Europe. The Bill promotes and extends for another 15 months the mayhem of trying to impose on poor people throughout the country those same enforcement procedures.

I tried to exorcise from the Bill poindings, the use of bailiffs, distraint in England and Wales, and imprisonment. Unfortunately, the relevant clauses of the Bill were not reached on Report.

Clause 100 abolishes the poll tax, but not for 15 months, so it is not dead and buried. It will stay to haunt the Government right up to the general election. They think that the poll tax has gone away, but I have statistics from the Home Office showing that, to 3 September, 8,023,621 had been summonsed over the poll tax. When I ask Ministers how that compares with the last five years of rate collection, they tell me that the statistics were never collected. I know why they were not collected. A total of 23,500 hours of court time were involved; 195,845 people turned up in court to explain why they could not afford to pay their poll tax.

Under the poll tax legislation—and for a further year under the provisions of this Bill—the vast majority are being forced to choose between paying for food, fuel and clothing for their children, and going into debt to pay their poll tax. Millions have chosen not to go into debt.

Matters will get worse. Enforcement will be impossible, and all the options will drift away like sand. We have heard about attachment of earnings and attachment of benefits. In its advice to district auditors, the Audit Commission said that only 15 per cent. of those who had been sent requests for information with liability orders gave local authorities that information. Tens of thousands are suffering deductions from their benefits, but, when it comes to committal proceedings, the Audit Commission notes:

"There have been examples where the police are reluctant to act."

That will not improve the Government's position in the weeks and the months ahead.

I tabled an amendment to delete schedules 4, 7 and 8. It was selected, but, unfortunately, we did not reach it on Report. I wanted to get rid of the enforcement procedures that seek to imprison people who cannot pay the poll tax —the mediaeval barbarity of imprisonment for civil debt.

I have often given the House individual examples. I have often asked Ministers—including the one who will wind up today's debate—why the Bill perpetuates the difference between the law in Scotland and that in England and Wales. In the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, the Government abolished imprisonment for civil debt; in England and Wales, 55 local authorities have sought to imprison some 4,000 people, of whom 156 have been sentenced and 115 have served time.

We were told that that would never happen to people who could not afford to pay the poll tax, but, under the Bill, it will continue to happen for at least another 15 months. In Bristol, 69-year-old pensioner Tony Whitfield was given a 60-day sentence. In Stroud, Maria Jones—who was eight months pregnant—offered to pay £5 a week out of her £42-a-week benefit; she was given a two-month sentence. In Basildon, a 54-year-old grandmother of eight, Sylvia McGilvray, was given a 90-day sentence. In Thanet, Ruby Haddow, a mother of three with no income, was sentenced to 14 days.

Last week, 70-year-old Iris Robbins, whose only income was a state pension, was sentenced to 14 days in Holloway prison. In Tunbridge Wells, Dora Coull, a pensioner and grandmother, was sentenced to a term in Holloway. In Portsmouth, David Shute—a father of five who had been made redundant—received a 28-day sentence. In Caerphilly, 79-year-old Tommy Hopkins, an ex-miner, and County Councillor Ray Davies received sentences. In Bradford, Steve Kershaw received a 14-day sentence, although he was receiving invalidity benefit; and, in Knowsley, 73-year-old Bill Jones—a diabetic with one leg, confined to a wheelchair—was sentenced to a term in Walton prison, along with my hon. Friend and comrade the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields).

Ron Cassidy, from Northumberland, was put in Durham maximum security prison for 90 days, although he owed only £62: he was given a day's sentence for every 69p that he owed. The Bill will ensure that those enforcement procedures are continued for another 15 months.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Good.

Mr. Nellist: The hon. Gentleman may say, "Good"; but already 31 unemployed people, three people in receipt of invalidity benefit and 15 pensioners have been put away because they could not pay the poll tax. The council tax legislation will continue those enforcement procedures.

This Bill should be defeated tonight. The Government ought to have introduced 100 per cent. rebates immediately, and restored the level of rate support grant that existed in 1979, when the Conservative Government were first elected after a period of Labour rule. They ought to have reduced the level of local taxation, whatever version they chose to apply.

The Bill's immediate task, however, should be to halt the prosecution of millions of people—many of them pensioners, many receiving invalidity benefit and many with no income of any kind. I know that the Minister will

refuse to do it, but an amnesty should have been declared. I warn the House that an amnesty will have to be declared. As somebody once said,

"'twere well
It were done quickly."

9.39 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): It is always interesting to speak after the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). The only trouble is that there will be few more opportunities to do so. When he calls for an amnesty for law breakers, it is a condemnation of what he and other hon. Members have done. It is wrong that law makers should ever become law breakers. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East is part of a campaign that could be summarised as follows: can pay, won't pay. Both the hon. Gentleman and his friends could easily have paid the community charge. They chose not to do so. They chose to rob their local authorities of much-needed cash.

This has been an interesting debate. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) claimed that he is a model of consistency. I remind him that in 1983 and 1987 the Labour party campaigned for one-sided nuclear disarmament. I remind him, too, that as late as 1989 the Labour leader of the European Parliament was an opponent of British membership of the Community. The Labour party never has been consistent and never will be.

Last night the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) spoke about the impact of the council tax upon Barnet. When he was asked what the impact of his proposals would be upon Barnet, he offered this memorable sentence:

"One simply cannot pluck figures out of the air."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1991; Vol. 33, c. 95.]

He was willing to shed crocodile tears but he was unwilling to tell the people of Barnet what his proposals would mean for them. The reason is that the Labour party has never cared a tinker's cuss for the ratepayers, council tax payers or community charge payers of Barnet. It regards the people of Barnet and of other London boroughs as people to be exploited by very high taxes and very high charges. The people about whom he spoke yesterday are those upon whom he would seek to impose a 59 per cent. tax in the first Labour Budget.

My point regarding the impact of the council tax on London and Barnet is that 85 per cent. of future expenditure by local authorities will be financed by Government grant. It is essential that the level of Government grant should reflect the needs of London and London's commitments rather than the number of houses in London in the top two bands.

On Second Reading I asked the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to look at the London Regional Transport anomaly in so far as it affected the outer London boroughs. I told him that it would be a touchstone of his sincerity, in that it would show whether he was committed to the needs of Barnet and, indeed, of Enfield. My hon. Friend showed that he had dealt with that anomaly when he said that the rate support grant would cover 1992-93. He was fair to the people of Barnet. As my hon. Friend has stood by the people of outer London, it would be wrong of me if I did not stand by him tonight. He stood by us; it would be churlish of us not to support him this evening.

A choice faces the people of Barnet and outer London. Do they support the Liberal party's scheme, whose figures are so suspect that the boffin behind it decided to resign? Do they support the Labour party's scheme, where the figures are so horrific that the hon. Member for Brightside said that he could not pluck them out of the air and publicise them? He knew that they were so horrible that they would lose the Labour party votes at the next election. Or should the people of Barnet and outer London support the scheme of my right hon. and hon. Friends? I do not claim that the council tax is perfect, but it is preferable to the alternatives that have been put forward by the Opposition parties.

9.44 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I shall deal not with the comments of the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), but with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East is an honourable friend. I have great respect for someone who has the courage of his convictions. The House owes him a debt for standing up for them.

I am a reluctant law breaker—*[Interruption.]* Goldilocks on the Government Front Bench should listen; it is not really pantomime time. The poindings and warrant sales in Scotland will continue, although we sought to remove that provision from the Bill. Three million warrants have been issued. It has been alleged that people in the Scottish National party and others precipitated a great wave of law breaking in Scotland, but the figures show that the momentum will continue as long as the poll tax legislation remains on the statute book.

I wish to tell the House what happens under poinding. My local authority had several options. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and others to suggest that local authorities do not have options. A local authority has various means available to it to get people to pay under diligence. My local authority tried to arrest bank accounts and to have poinding. Having lost cases in the sheriff courts, and because it had the resources to do so, it appealed. That probably cost £30,000, such was the tenacity of that Labour council.

I have pleaded here with Labour Members, and some honourable exceptions have stood up and been counted on this issue. Let us not kid ourselves that resentment about the poll tax does not continue, even though clause 100 abolishes it. If this situation continues, people will not respect the law.

It is all very well for the Prime Minister and others to say that if one is a law maker, one cannot be a law breaker, but what did the Prime Minister do at Maastricht? He opted out. The difference here is that these folk cannot opt out of the strictures of the poll tax. They cannot use the big battalion. They have to defend themselves from the actions of sheriff officers and so on. People in Scotland will continue to oppose the poll tax as long as the Government try, through local authorities, to raise local revenue by such an unfair means.

9.47 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I congratulate and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and those of my hon. Friends who served night after night, on clause after clause, in Committee—not, like Banquo's ghost, viewing it from the gallery occasionally just after 10 o'clock, but every night looking at the detail of the Bill, understanding

[Mr. Blunkett]

it in a way that we would have been delighted to explain to the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) had we had the opportunity.

I apologise to the Disney Corporation for having called this tax a Mickey-Mouse valuation system. The difference between Mickey Mouse and this system is that Mickey Mouse brings pleasure to millions of children and great benefit to the world as a whole, whereas the Bill brings misery and unfairness to millions of people.

I apologise to the makers of KitKat for the comparison which I made in terms of the cheapest valuation. At least KitKats are nourishing and provide value for money—which 20p valuations on properties certainly do not.

We have a banding system which is nonsense. We have a valuation process which is cheap and nasty. We also have a regional banding disparity. The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) would have done better to contribute to the debate on that matter last night than on Third Reading, when it is all past and gone.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) asked what our proposals would mean in the borough of Barnet. Instead of an average of £617—the Government's figure for properties in Barnet—our proposals would mean an average of £456. That would be a clear saving, even in a borough where nearly 50 per cent. of households will be in the highest bands.I hope that he will return to his borough and tell the people exactly what the Government's proposals will mean. They will not mean fairness for those in inner or outer London or for those living elsewhere in the south-east—they will mean deliberate discrimination and a refusal to protect people whose properties are falling in price although their property valuation will be based on the figures for last April. In other words, their properties will be in a higher band than the price of their property warrants 12 months after the given date for the valuation process.

The process is nonsense. It means valuations based on last April's figures, although property prices in London and the south-east are judged to have dropped by 10 per cent. this year alone. It is an absolute outrage and if Conservative hon. Members with constituencies in London and the south-east were representing their constituents properly, they would have said so. The people who cost us as a nation £14 billion in implementing the poll tax are also pushing through this legislation on a guillotine motion. They are the people who refused to listen to the argument about the unfairness of a discount which rewards a millionaire and which can reduce the amount that someone pays merely because he lives alone to an amount below that to be paid by a couple who happen to live in a much cheaper house and in the band below.

The system will cause disquiet and unfairness. People outside the House would learn that if the Conservatives were to win the general election, but they will not win because people will hear of the way in which their properties will be valued and learn about the in-flight valuation. They will see a hot air balloon floating over their gardens and taking photographs. They will ring the local police and ask, "Is this the new head of MI5, or am I being supervised by Big Brother?" The answer will be, "Of course you are. We are checking to see whether there is an extension on the back of your house. Please put the number of your house in big letters on your back lawn or on your roof so we can be sure we don't get the wrong house." There will be in-flight, Mickey-Mouse valuations and discounts which will cost £780 million to implement.

Only one amendment was accepted in Committee and it attached to the allowance of councillors any tax due under the new council tax proposals. We proposed it and it will wipe out the whole of the Secretary of State's speeech at this year's party conference. His spech predicated that after 1993 councillors would not be able to vote unless they paid their tax. Our amendment ensures that they will have paid their tax and will have a right to vote, so we have wiped out his vitriolic nonsense—the great Tarzan speech which brought the conference to its feet and which was the restoration of the prodigal son. That was what it was all about. It was nonsense and we knew it, but the BBC dutifully reported it, although it has not reported the passage of the Bill.

The final throw is fairness. Is the tax fair? In one of his three contributions to the debate, the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross summed it up yesterday when he recalled his childhood. He said:

"Nanny would say, 'Life is not fair, laddie.'"—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 50.]

Some of us believed that we got rid of nanny last November, but no, here she is again. Nanny is watching us all and nanny said that the Britain of the 1990s would be unfair and the Secretary of State—whether he likes it or not—is carrying out nanny's wishes.

The tax is unfair and unworkable and it will be rejected by the British people because it will never be implemented. It will be rejected as the Government will be rejected at the general election. Our fair rates proposals will bring equity and justice and will be implemented as soon as possible after the general election.

9.54 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart: The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was his usual good-humoured self, as he was throughout the Committee, although I thought that at one point he was in danger of being carried away by the heat of his own rhetoric, just like a hot air balloon.

We heard an excellent speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), who rightly condemned Labour's proposals for a rating system. I assure my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) that the council tax will not apply to farm land. I will study his other points with great care and interest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) made some detailed points. I will try to get to them, but I hope that he will excuse me if I do not manage to reach them in the time available. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), in a splendid speech, reminded the House that law makers cannot be law breakers.

I had heard before much of the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), although not always in the same order. He was supported by the massed and serried ranks of the Labour party—[HON. MEMBERS: "Did you count them?"] Yes, I can count up to that number. I refer to two of them—the hon. Members for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe). I must record that the hon. Lady was a most assiduous member of the Committee. I do not wish to be

churlish, but I read in the Scottish edition of *The Sunday Times* that she does not yet have an office. I am sure that that had nothing to do with her attendance and I hope that the Labour Whips have noted the point.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) reminded us of the fundamental difference between the Government and the Opposition. He rightly referred to the whole question of the control of local authority expenditure. The hon. Member for Dagenham said in Committee:

"we . . . propose to double the tax base under the control of local authorities by restoring to their control the setting of the business rate."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 19 November 1991; c. 9.]

There has never been an announcement that means so much bad news for Scottish business rate payers and for Scottish companies. By the next financial year, the Government will have provided £330 million for Scottish business to move towards a level playing field on business rates. In one move, the Labour party will take away that advantage to Scottish business.

In Committee, the Labour party confirmed that it will have no controls over local authority expenditure. That is without precedent, at least in Scotland. No Government in Scotland since 1929 have taken that view. It was not the view taken by the Labour Government of 1945-50 or by the previous Labour Government.

The message that has come through is absolutely clear. It is the message that the policies of the Lambeths, the Liverpools and the Lothians of the land can be applied everywhere with no controls on behalf of the taxpayer, of the business rate payer or of the council tax payer. That was Labour's message throughout the Committee stage. Its message to local government is, "Spend comrades, spend comrades, spend comrades."

The Labour party proposes a "fair rates" system. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said that the fair rates tax system would be introduced on 1 April 1993, and that in the first instance it would be——

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stewart: No, because I do not have time.

The hon. Gentleman said that the system would be the old rating system, but that it would be amended thereafter, and he also said that that was the only way in which the system could be introduced. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. There is no way in which the hon. Member for Dagenham can introduce the system south of the border.

Mr. Maxton: Why?

Mr. Stewart: I will tell the hon. Gentleman why. His system will be on the basis of a revaluation in 1985. It cannot be done in England.

I commend the Bill to the House. It is a reasonable and practical Bill based on pragmatism and fairness. The Labour party wants to retreat to the rates. In its eagerness for an envy tax, it has abdicated its responsibility for responsible local government.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 335, Noes 237.

Division No. 31] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James

King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John

McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Alan Williams be added to the Select Committee on European Legislation.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Denzil Davies be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

PETITION

Greenwich Park

10.15 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I wish to present a petition, signed by more than 4,000 residents of and visitors to Greenwich who are very concerned about the proposed privatisation of the gardening and horticultural work of Greenwich park. I share their concern.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Secretary of State not to proceed with the contracting out of the services supporting the Royal Park.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Sheltered Housing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.17 pm

Sir Marcus Fox (Shipley): This debate may be wider than the Minister anticipates. If so, I am sure that he will be primed with the right answers. The debate is about specific problems relating to the provision of sheltered housing in both the public and private sectors. I must declare an interest because I am a non-executive director of McCarthy and Stone, which is probably No. 1 in the private sector. To balance that, my wife has been on the board of the Bradford and Northern Housing Association for more years than I have been a non-executive director of that company, so my family can truly speak for both sides of the industry.

Because of the recession, which, I hope, we shall soon see the end of, the housing market is suffering. I am concerned not just about sheltered housing but about the whole problem of low-cost housing. Water companies are not the most popular companies in the country. I do not wish to quote the Prime Minister in this debate, but when certain salary increases were given to the chairmen of the privatised water authorities, he was somewhat critical, because they are not exactly on the bread line. The infrastructure charges, in particular, are causing enormous anguish to the construction industry, which is always the last to come out of a recession. Confidence needs to be restored and positive help is needed.

May I point to a direction in which such help could be given? I do not suggest that section 79 of the Water Act 1989 was wrong. Indeed, the great success of privatisation has been freeing the water industry from Treasury control, enabling it to operate in the market and raise the financial resources to invest in whatever is needed to enhance pollution control in line with EC regulations. Much of what was provided by the 1989 Act was welcomed, but, in one respect, we seem to have gone too far.

Section 79 of the Act provided for infrastructure charges to be paid for all new domestic connections to water and sewerage services which range from £370 per house in parts of the north-east to more than £2,000 per house in parts of the Wessex water district. That may not seem to be too penal, but I shall widen the debate because it is about sheltered housing. If we consider housing associations providing accommodation with 40 units, that makes a total of about £80,000 in addition to what they would normally have paid. The same applies in all sorts of other spheres. Someone with a small house in that district will face exactly the same charge.

The relevant clause was introduced in the House after the Bill had completed its Committee stage, and was finally agreed to by the House on 3 July 1989 as part of a package of 460 amendments from the other place guillotined in two short sittings of this House. It was a major amendment, but received no proper consideration or debate in this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham), who is knowledgeable on housing, recently wrote in *Building* magazine that the episode represented a "shameful failure of Parliament to scrutinise the proposed arrangements properly."

My hon. Friends the Members for Rutland and Melton and for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) went to see the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to put the case. It was argued by the water industry that the charges were required due to the excessive load imposed on the system by new development, particularly new housebuilding. In summary, their argument was that existing consumers were cross-subsidising the purchase of new houses and sheltered schemes, and house builders were not making an adequate contribution to the costs that they imposed.

Having re-examined all those facts prior to and following the passage of the 1989 Act, I am satisfied that that is a substantial misrepresentation of the true position. Under the Water Act 1948, the Public Health Act 1936 and the Water Act 1973, the developers have made substantial capital contributions to many large and small housing and other development schemes, either through the requisitioning formula in those pieces of legislation or as a result of negotiated agreements with the former water authorities. Those contributions helped to offset the reduced Treasury funding of the water industry after 1974. It can be argued that new development, far from paying its way, contributed substantially, even prior to privatisation, to improvements in the system. Payments continue to be made under the terms of the earlier agreements. The Bill, when published in 1988, contained extended formulas for the requisitioning of water and sewerage services. Those provided for payments for additional items.

All that is unbelievable in terms of the negotiations that took place between the parties involved. Having followed the brief carefully, I find it unbelievable that, having determined that the agreements represented a fair balance between those involved—consumers, developers and their customers—a bombshell should fall on housebuilders on 11 May 1989, when they were called to meet the Minister and were told that there was to be a new clause introducing a tax on new houses.

The infrastructure charge does not relate to any specific supply of service to any particular development site. It is a payment for the benefit of the community as a whole, based on cost spread over a company's operational district. We in the industry have been making this complaint for some time. The Director General of Water Services has accurately summarised it in the following terms:

"When a customer pays his infrastructure charge, he cannot identify what item he has contributed to, nor can he verify that the works generally described as being covered by his infrastructure charge do not overlap with one of the other charges he has paid, or something that a different customer has paid."

It is argued that this charge is intended to pay for works beyond those covered by the extended powers.

All this highlights the injustice to house builders. It is obvious that much of what was neglected before is now recognised in the charges that are levied. With all this in mind, the Director General of Water Services said in the 1990 annual report that he had reservations about whether the infrastructure charges are the most suitable way of recovering costs and extending water and sewerage systems. That was a significant comment by the official appointed by Ministers to monitor and review the operations of the Act and to regulate the newly privatised industry.

The end of last week saw the publication of the document "Paying for water: the way ahead" by Ofwat. It concludes under the heading "Capital charges":

"In particular, infrastructure charges, introduced at privatisation, have aroused criticism"—

that is an understatement.

"I remain concerned that the level of infrastructure charges, and the variation in charges between companies, is hard to justify . . . I believe that in many cases the current level of infrastructure charges represent a cross-subsidy from new customers to customers generally."

The profits of the industry, at £1 billion, are about 12 per cent. higher than Government expectations and the director general is saying that something is wrong. He is absolutely right. The house building industry is suffering from the worst recession in 40 years while the profits of the water industry are excessive. There are great problems in all areas of the trade, not only in the private sector. It is nonsensical that the Housing Corporation should subsidise housing associations and take taxpayers' money to swell the profits of the water companies.

This request has been made before and resisted, but I ask Ministers to consider it once again. We need to restimulate the economy and the house building industry by reducing its costs. I urge the Minister to ask the director general to look again at these arrangements. He can do that now; he does not have to wait until 1994 for the quinquennial review. The director general intervened earlier this year on profits, price rises and dividends. The voluntary restraints were agreed by the water companies, which admit that they comprehensively outmanoeuvred the Government when negotiating the privatisation regime in 1989.

Everyone understands that these charges are not right. Something must be done about them. Something can be done, and I appeal to the Minister to note carefully what I have said.

10.27 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Does the hon. Gentleman have the leave of the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) and of the Minister to speak?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Norris: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on securing this debate and I am grateful to him for the chance to speak briefly.

I declare my interest as chairman of Haven Services Ltd., a private sector manager of sheltered housing, probably second in the market behind the company with which my hon. Friend is associated.

The whole purpose of sheltered housing is to allow people who become more and more dependent in their later years to trade down the capital value of their properties and convert their capital assets into smaller properties and into an income stream to pay for the increasing care needs of later life.

On that basis, while special pleading is not appropriate, it is clearly right that we should seek a regime which allows such accommodation to be built economically, whether in the public or in the private sector. It is also clearly inappropriate that we should have a regime of charging here which disadvantages in many cases the potential owners of small, modest properties such as sheltered housing. There is only one way in which such very large connection fees are recovered. Our experience is straightforward: they are simply passed on to the eventual purchaser. There is no other route.

In the circumstances, I hope that when my hon. Friend replies he will bear in mind the fact that water charges generally will in the future—I understand this from the report that my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley quoted —be based on the council tax banding which we discussed earlier this evening. It might be appropriate for connection charges, too, to be related to some degree, within an individual water authority's area, to the aggregate of the council band value available to the water authority in a way that would thus reflect the actual value of the properties, whether in the public or in the private sector.

10.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) raises a serious issue and the level of concern is evidenced by the fact that a number of my hon. Friends have stayed for this Adjournment debate—my hon. Friends the Members for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who intervened, for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist), for Keighley (Mr. Waller) and for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), who have been present throughout most of the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley recounted, provision for these charges was introduced as a Government amendment to the Water Bill in another place. The proposal for the charges was first raised in Committee on the Bill, when it was put to the Government that the existing system of funding new infrastructure to serve new development was both confused and unfair to existing customers. That is a dilemma to which we shall return again and again—the difference between existing customers and new customers.

Before the introduction of the charges, new infrastructure capacity needed to serve new customers—such as treatment works and reservoirs—was largely met from charges to existing customers. In some instances, mostly in the case of major development proposals, new infrastructure capacity was funded through planning agreements, whereby developers would make a contribution towards the cost as a part of their proposal. This approach to the provision of new infrastructure capacity meant that existing customers subsidised new customers and planning applications hinged on complicated legal agreements, the negotiation of which unnecessarily complicated and delayed the planning process.

To overcome these obvious anomalies in the provision of new infrastructure capacity, it was proposed that a simple scheme of charges for each new connection to domestic mains water and sewerage be introduced. The advantages of such a system lie in the simplicity of its operation: developers would know in advance the cost of their proposals; it would take away the element of uncertainty in planning consideration; and it would place the burden of the provision of new infrastructure on those who would be served by it rather than on customers generally who would gain no direct benefit from its provision.

We saw the merit of these arguments and agreed to provide for infrastructure charges as a Government amendment to the Water Bill. In May 1989 we announced our intention and consulted the house building industry on the details of the operation of the system, which was included in the conditions of appointment of each of the water and sewerage companies.

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

I think that my hon. Friend, while he has a number of good points, is less than fair when he says that when in due course the Water Bill became an Act this was a sudden bombshell landed on development companies. They were consulted fully and throughout.

As part of the process, limits were set for each of the companies on the charge which would be payable for each connection. Those limits were based on the detailed analysis of companies' forward investment programmes which were being undertaken as part of the K setting process. That applied limits on companies' general charges increases through the formula represented as RPI+K.

Again, I resist any suggestion that in making those connection charges there has been any element of profiteering by the water companies. Either they charge for new connections or they charge existing customers. That is the dilemma that we have to meet.

The process of K setting, involving detailed scrutiny of companies' investment programmes by independent engineering consultants, enabled us to ensure that infrastructure charges specifically excluded the cost of the general upkeep, improvement and repair of the existing system. Those costs continue to be met by charges to customers generally.

There has been some comment on the costs being incurred because water companies are insisting on each dwelling within a development of flats being supplied separately, so attracting a charge for each dwelling. It was the intention that a charge be made for each dwelling and that was made clear when the amendment was presented. In calculating the initial charge each individual connection was included regardless of the demand each would impose on the overall services.

Following representations from many people, the Director General of Water Services undertook a review and agreed a licence amendment with the industry, linking the level of payment to the demand by reference to the facilities provided by the development. That is not cast in tablets of stone. There has been movement by the director general. The level of infrastructure charge to a development of flats under that arrangement is unlikely to differ very much whether it is based on a charge for each flat or on the overall demand scale introduced by the amendment.

Under the terms of the Water Industry Act companies can insist upon a separate service pipe for each connection. That provision exists for good reason—to protect supplies to customers. It has been represented to us that, in some instances, that action could impose a considerable cost burden in supplying water and sewerage to new developments and in those circumstances there is potential for dispute between the companies and the parties. The director general has said that he would like a power to consider and rule on such disputes. That we are considering in the context of the new disputes power contained in the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill which, I am glad to say, completed its Committee stage today.

I appreciate that the introduction of the new charges came at a difficult time for the house building industry. We recognised that at the time and delayed the introduction of the charges until April 1990, nearly a year later. Additionally, specific provision was made for circumstances in which existing development proposals were already the subject of planning agreements to contribute towards infrastructure costs, to ensure that those were taken into account. However, we recognise that there will inevitably be circumstances where development proposals were already under way and where the introduction of the charges will have led to increased costs. We recognise also that, in the present market, developers may face difficulty in absorbing or passing on such costs. Ultimately we would expect the cost to be reflected in the price that developers pay for land, just as with other development costs.

As my hon. Friends will be aware, we were asked by the house building industry to consider transitional relief for developers, in particular a moratorium on the charges in respect of development land held as "stock in trade" land. That request was given careful consideration, but we concluded that for practical reasons a moratorium could not be justified. We recognise that the infrastructure charges system may not be perfect—I believe that all right hon. and hon. Members agree with that—and that it may require adjustment to achieve the right balance between charges to new and to existing customers. Whatever happens, someone will have to pay—and if that is not done by new customers, it will be done by existing ones. However, we believe that the system's inherent advantages far outweigh its disadvantages.

In the long term, a wider system of "impact charges" could, if properly calculated, complement the planning system by encouraging development towards areas where there is unused infrastructure capacity rather than just provide for the funding of infrastructure for new development—but perhaps that matter is for consideration on a future occasion.

For the present, the conditions of appointment that govern the application and levels of infrastructure charges are the responsibility of the director general. As part of his recent review of future charging methods, the director general has also been considering whether a thoroughgoing review of infrastructure charges might be appropriate—and whether there is scope for changing the basis of the charges, in the way that my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley would like. The director general concluded that, at present, such a change would not be possible in advance of a periodic review of the industry's overall charging framework, which he proposes to carry out in 1994.

The provisions of companies' conditions of appointment prescribe the circumstances in which the director general may review their charges. He is already proposing a review at the earliest opportunity. It is not possible for the levels of infrastructure charge and their relationship to charges to customers generally to be considered independently of that review.

The present levels and operation of the infrastructure charges system have been calculated by reference to the cost of the provision of new infrastructure, to serve new development over the period to the year 2000. It would not be possible for the companies to meet the cost of that requirement in addition to their existing commitments.

While I understand the desire to institute a review at the earliest opportunity—I will certainly draw the remarks of my hon. Friends the Members for Shipley and for Epping Forest to the attention of the Director General for Water Services—the infrastructure charges are inextricably linked to the level of charges to customers generally.

All water and sewerage companies are undertaking programmes of work to improve river and bathing water quality, repair and renew aging mains and sewers, and meet new standards for drinking water quality. We would not be thanked for returning to the system whereby existing customers were asked to subsidise new customers as well, and therefore we must be extremely careful not to rush any changes to the present charges system without careful consideration of the impact that they may have on other customers.

I assure my hon. Friends that the director general will continue to monitor the way in which companies apply charges in practice. Recently, he wrote to the companies about the need for common sense and flexibility in the application of charges. He cited in particular cases where sites that previously included connections are being redeveloped.

Companies are required to give a credit in respect of any previous connections. Where the redevelopment may attract a multiple of the standard charge to reflect demand, the director general suggests that there is nothing to prevent them from similarly taking account of the demand that probably existed before.

Companies have flexibility in implementing charges and are not required by the conditions of their appointment to tie themselves without question to the terms of the infrastructure charges system laid down therein.

My hon. Friends have raised an important matter, but one that ultimately comes down to this question: how do we strike the right balance between existing customers and new customers? The Government listened to a number of representations during the Committee stage of what is now the Water Act 1989 and sought to act on what seemed at that time to be a general consensus. They consulted broadly those concerned and presented measures that commanded the House's support. The implementation of those measures is now a matter for the Director General of Water Services.

The director general is, I think, aware of the concerns that have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley and others. I shall ensure that he is fully aware of the anxieties that have been reinforced and echoed this evening; but it is not easy to strike a balance between existing and new customers, particularly against the current background in the housing and development markets.

I hope that my hon. Friends will accept that we and the director general seek at all times to find the fairest possible balance in ensuring that new infrastructure capacity comes on stream and is costed fairly between existing customers and the new customers who will benefit from it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 18 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

INCOME TAX

The Vice-Chamberlain of the Household reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Addresses, as follows:

I have received your Addresses praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Isle of Man) Order 1991; the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Morocco) Order 1991; the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Papua New Guinea) Order 1991; the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Czechoslovakia) Order 1991; the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Iceland) Order 1991; the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Finland) Order 1991 and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Denmark) Order 1991 be made in the form of draft laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Maastricht

1. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom foreign policy of the outcome of the intergovernmental conference at Maastricht.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): We welcome the agreement reached at Maastricht on a common foreign and security policy. This will remain outside Community competence and therefore a matter for intergovernmental co-operation, with all substantive decisions being made by unanimity.

Mr. Greenway: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his formidable and invaluable contribution to the outcome of the Maastricht negotiations. Does he agree that perhaps the most significant development in regard to foreign policy was the clear and unambiguous agreement to widen the Community to embrace the emergent democracies in eastern Europe, and will he make that one of the key aims of the British presidency under the next Conservative Government?

Mr. Hurd: Yes. As the House knows, we have long believed that the Community should be open to European countries who want to join and can take on the responsibilities of membership. I am glad that at our initiative the summit at Maastricht reaffirmed that principle, and that it was agreed that negotiations could start in 1992. We look forward to giving further impetus to the process when we take on the presidency of the Community in the second half of the year.

More immediately, it was very good to see the Prime Ministers of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and the acting Prime Minister of Poland, in Brussels on Monday, signing the association agreements between those countries and the Community and thus bringing to fruition an initiative begun by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

Mr. John D. Taylor: At Maastricht, the Germans argued for a common foreign policy for the European Community. Within 48 hours of the agreement, Germany announced that, irrespective of the Community, it was going to recognise Croatia before Christmas. Does the Foreign Secretary see any inconsistency in the German foreign policy approach to Europe?

Mr. Hurd: I shall be taking two questions about Yugoslavia a little later. There are now no legal obligations arising out of joint action, which will remain until the new treaty is effective.

Mr. Latham: In regard to widening the Community, does my right hon. Friend accept that there is now a powerful case for the admission of Austria and Scandinavian countries that are members of the European Free Trade Association? Would they not act as an invaluable bridge extending to the Baltic states and other parts of central and eastern Europe? Will my right hon. Friend try to speed up that process in every possible way?

Mr. Hurd: Several countries have already applied, and have strong cases for membership. Those cases will need to be examined individually, but, in principle, my hon. Friend is entirely right.

Mr. Ernie Ross: When the Secretary of State was helping to draft the declaration on the middle east peace process, did he have in mind the curfew that has been placed on the Nablus and Hebron areas and on the Al-Bireh area and did he have in mind the illegal occupation of the houses in the Silwan area of Jerusalem? Will he confirm that the occupation is illegal and that all settlements on the west bank are illegal? Will he confirm that curfews constitute collective punishment, which is punishable under article 33 of the fourth Geneva convention?

Mr. Hurd: Within government and through the Community we have often expressed our views and, sometimes our protests, about the nature of the Israeli military occupation of the west bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we believe that the policy of settlements on the west bank is illegal and deeply unhelpful to the peace process.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that when the United Kingdom assumes the presidency of the EC the other Scandinavian countries, as well as Sweden, are encouraged to join as full voting members at the earliest possible date?

Mr. Hurd: Some of them have active debates within their countries on that matter. We believe that the

Community should welcome all European countries that want to join and can take on the responsibilities of membership.

Syria and Iran

2. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed with the Foreign Ministers of other member states of the European Community matters relating to relationships between the European Community and the nations of Syria and Iran.

Mr. Hurd: I last discussed Iran in the Foreign Affairs Council on 15 April. The last discussion of Syria, apart from discussions in the peace process, was on 10 July at a meeting of EC Ministers, which my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State attended.

Dr. Godman: When next they meet will the Foreign Secretary urge upon his European Community colleagues the need for detachment and restraint in their dealings with Iran? That detachment must surely remain while the murderous fatwa inflicted upon Mr. Salman Rushdie remains in place. Until that evil burden is lifted from Mr. Rushdie's shoulders, the Government and the European Community should have nothing to do with Iran and its Government.

Mr. Hurd: There will be no dramatic or immediate change in our political relationship with Iran. I would not want to rule out closer contacts with the Iranians at the right time. Such contacts can reinforce the effectiveness of our views on the point made by the hon. Gentleman, which is that the death sentence on Salman Rushdie is an unacceptable infringement of his rights as a British citizen.

Mr. Adley: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that part of Syrian territory—the Golan heights—is still illegally occupied by the Israelis as are southern Lebanon and the occupied territories? That being so, will my right hon. Friend seek with his Community partners to reactivate the Venice declaration which seems to many of us to be the only likely forum within which positive political action can be taken?

Mr. Hurd: That point is being discussed now directly between Israel and Syria in the bilateral discussions in Washington. That is the best forum for that to be thrashed out and, I hope, in the end resolved.

Ukraine

3. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on how the nuclear weapons in Ukraine are going to be controlled by the Soviet Union following the independence vote.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): We welcome assurances from the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia that they intend that effective unified control is maintained over the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons. We are discussing with the relevant authorities how this will be taken forward in practice, and consulting closely with our NATO allies.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Is he aware that the people of Welwyn and Hatfield are concerned that three republics have a larger nuclear capability than the United Kingdom? Does he agree that British people should be told that if the Labour party were in control and there was a nuclear attack on Britain, there would be no response because the Leader of the Opposition has said that he would not push the button? Is not that the true face of the Labour party—no heart, no brains and a leader who is not only a joke but a jerk?

Mr. Speaker: A what? That was overdone again, I am afraid.

Mr. Hogg: In deference to you, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I had better not respond to the last part of my hon. Friend's question, but I entirely agree with the spirit of his comments. On the first part of his question, we are anxious to ensure that the republics of Ukraine, Byelorussia, Russia and—my goodness, I have forgotten the other one——

Mr. Tony Banks: Kazakhstan.

Mr. Hogg: Kazakhstan—enter into the non-proliferation treaty as non-nuclear states, if that can be achieved.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister obviously does not know his head from his Kazakhstan. Given the need to rid the world of nuclear weapons, is not this a wonderful opportunity to approach the republics, particularly those that want to declare themselves nuclear-free zones—something that used to be sneered at by Conservative Members—in order to eliminate those weapons from the world? Should not the Government grasp that opportunity?

Mr. Hogg: It is indeed an opportunity. The Republic of Russia will probably seek to remain a nuclear state, but there is a reasonable prospect that the other three republics—Kazakhstan, Byelorussia and Ukraine—will be prepared to accept non-nuclear status. The western powers have an interest in seeing how we can assist with dismantling the nuclear arsenals of those three republics. One thing is plain: they do not wish to return the nuclear arsenals to the Republic of Russia.

Mr. Shersby: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that it is the wish of many Ukrainian people that the nuclear weapons on their soil be dismantled and destroyed? What discussions is he having with President Kravchuk on that matter?

Mr. Hogg: I am aware that the President of Ukraine has made the point that he would like his republic to be a non-nuclear state and that he would like the west to assist with the process of dismantling and destruction. We should like to be constructive and we shall consider with our allies how best we can respond. There is, however, a problem: the judgment of the republics of, for example, Byelorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan may alter if the Republic of Russia chooses to remain a nuclear state. We cannot regard the present statements as necessarily being set in concrete.

Mr. Robertson: Does the Minister agree that perhaps a more urgent problem than the control of nuclear weapons in the republics of the former Soviet Union could be the vast amounts of conventional weapons that are in the hands of highly discontented and underpaid armed forces that have serious problems? Will the Minister assure us

that the Government will give the maximum assistance with those weapons as well as with nuclear weapons and that in granting full diplomatic recognition to those republics the acceptance of full international obligations, including the Helsinki process and those features that relate specifically to human rights, will be a priority?

Mr. Hogg: On the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, he will know that the Foreign Ministers of the European Community considered the subject earlier this week and made it plain that, when considering recognition, regard would be had to the extent to which the republics were ready to undertake the treaty obligations to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The most worrying problem about conventional weaponry relates to the implementation of the conventional forces in Europe treaty, because, as the hon. Gentleman will know, there is a mismatch between the military districts as defined in the CFE and the republics. We hope that the republics will be willing to ratify the treaty and implement its terms. But there is a serious problem here.

Mr. Sillars: Does the Minister agree that to resolve the problem it is very important to engage those countries in the United Nations and that as Byelorussia and Ukraine are already members of the United Nations it becomes imperative—in view of his earlier answer about Russia remaining a nuclear power—for them to obtain membership of the United Nations and of the Security Council in their own right?

Mr. Hogg: I shall not deal with the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question because it raises difficult issues which will no doubt be the subject of discussion later. Clearly, these republics will apply for admission into the United Nations in due time and we shall define our views at that time. However, the most recent statement of our approach to the question of recognition, which is also likely to guide our attitude to the adherence of these countries to the United Nations, was that set out in the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers earlier this week.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does the Minister agree that Chernobyl probably happened because of incompetence rather than by a deliberate action? Will he assure the House that proper British expertise in all matters—in the provision of food as well as nuclear issues—will be made available to the republics to help them towards full and truly free independence?

Mr. Hogg: I cannot answer in the unconstrained sense in which my hon. Friend asked the question, but, clearly, we are prepared to play our part—bilaterally through the provision of know-how and technical assistance in appropriate matters and, of course, through the European Community to which we are a substantial subscriber.

Brazil

4. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom staff there are at the British embassy and consulates in Brazil; and how many have specific duties with regard to *(a)* human rights and *(b)* trade.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): There are 19 United Kingdom-based staff at the British embassy and consulates in Brazil. Five are engaged in trade promotion. Six report on political and economic issues, including human rights.

Mr. Battle: Is the Minister aware of the continuing violence against rural workers' leaders and their supporters in Brazil and of the fact that according to recent evidence from the Brazilian Church's Pastoral Land Commission since 1964, 1,667 rural workers have been murdered, that there have been 23 trials and only 13 sentences? That is in areas in which the British Government have an environmental programme in conjunction with the Brazilian authorities. Is there any way that our embassy staff can positively support the efforts of the procurator general in Brazil to tackle that terrible situation?

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes, we are in close contact with non-governmental organisations, lawyers and Brazilian authorities involved in cases relating to rural violence. Indeed, the embassy will certainly be represented at the forthcoming trials to which I think the hon. Gentleman is referring. For some time our policy towards Latin America and, indeed, towards other parts of the developing world, has been guided by a speech made by my right hon. Friend some months ago on good government. We seek to ensure that our reporting staff focus especially on human rights and in Latin America where democracy is now the norm, a great deal of our effort goes towards assisting those democracies in reinforcing human rights and, in particular, in upholding the rule of law and justice.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: How many of our diplomatic officers in Brazil are concerned with the environment? Have they noticed the recent decision of the federal Government of Brazil to allocate 94,000 sq kilometres of tropical rain forest as a preserve for the Yanomami Indians?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Overseas Development Administration—under my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development—has two officers in Brazil who are concerned with our environmental projects and our embassy of course keeps a running brief. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Brazilian Government have recently declared that 94,000 sq kilometres will be set aside for the Yanomami Indians. That is a good response by the Brazilian Government to the concerns that have been expressed on both sides of the House.

Yugoslavia

5. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to recognise further states as a consequence of developments in the Union of Sovereign States and Yugoslavia.

Mr. Hurd: On 16 December we and our Community partners set out guidelines to inform our decisions on the recognition of new states in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. We have not yet taken decisions on the recognition of the republics of the Soviet Union—apart from the Baltic states—as they are still discussing among themselves their future relations.

The Foreign Ministers agreed to recognise Yugoslav republics who meet certain conditions. The arbitration commission of the conference on Yugoslavia, chaired by

Lord Carrington, will advise whether republics meet those conditions. A final decision on implementation will be taken on 15 January, after advice from the arbitration commission.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Foreign Secretary accept that there should be general acceptance of the criteria laid down by the European Community on recognition, but that there might be some stricture about the speed of recognition, especially for Yugoslavia? Delay might give a spurious temptation to the so-called Yugoslavian army to exercise certain initiatives that could be detrimental to the freedom of other republics. Will the right hon. Gentleman pay particular attention to human rights, to the rights of ethnic minorities, and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Brief questions, please.

Mr. Douglas: I understand, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Foreign Secretary keep the House informed and perhaps make a statement when the House returns after the recess?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's first remark. As I have made clear, for some time the question of recognising Yugoslav republics, especially Croatia and Slovenia, has not been a matter of principle—clearly they will not be willing to go back into any entity called Yugoslavia. Recognition has been a matter of timing and judgment—a phrase that I have often used before.

The hon. Gentleman thinks that the timing is a bit slow; others may feel that it is a bit fast. That is a matter of judgment, and on 16 December it was a matter of compromise.

Mr. Wells: Is it not like throwing petrol on a bonfire to promise to recognise Croatia and Slovenia? Does my right hon. Friend know about Lord Carrington's advice that such recognition would encourage Herzegovina to claim independence too, and thus excite the Serbs to fight?

Mr. Hurd: Lord Carrington's view has been that premature recognition would be a mistake, and Mr. Cyrus Vance—the Secretary-General's representative—has made the same point. I have been in touch with Lord Carrington since the EC decision. He is very much in action, and so is Mr. Cyrus Vance. They will both work hard and urgently to carry to a successful conclusion, if they can, the two processes of which they are in charge—the peace conference at The Hague and the prospects for a UN peacekeeping force.

Mr. Rees: Is the Secretary of State aware that those of us who recall the area 40 years ago believe that the German-led policy is the height of folly? The Germans should recall their experiences in the area, when the fighting tied down seven German divisions. Can we be sure that if this goes wrong and there is military involvement —as there might well be—we will not be involved on the coat-tails of the Germans?

Mr. Hurd: One thing is certain: there is no question of German military involvement in any of the republics of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Favell: It has been suggested in several media reports today that if my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary were free to pursue an independent foreign policy, he would not now consider recognising Slovenia and Croatia. Is that correct?

Mr. Hurd: For us, as for the Community, it would have been a matter of timing. There is a tradition of the main states of western Europe splitting in rivalry on Balkan questions. There is quite a history of individual countries backing a particular group, taking a particular line, and it all ending up on the battlefield. I do not believe that the history of that tradition is a good one. It is better to thrash out such differences round a table rather than—eventually —on the battlefield.

Mr. Kaufman: When the deadline for judging whether the republics should be recognised arrives in January, will the 12 Foreign Ministers meet again to decide collectively whether the criteria have been met and whether all of them will recognise or not recognise the republics? If not, and if there are to be individual assessments of the criteria, will the Foreign Secretary assure the House that if Germany decides that the criteria have been met and recognises the republics but Britain decides that the criteria have not been met, the United Kingdom will reserve the right not to recognise the republics?

Mr. Hurd: The decision asks for advice from the Arbitration Commission and from Mr. Badinter. If that advice suggests that the republics which have applied meet the conditions set out in the decision of 16 December, there will be recognition by all 12 Governments. If the Arbitration Commission expresses a negative view about any one of the republics, there is no collective decision to implement, and countries will be able to make their own assessment.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend accept that those of us who have watched the terrible destruction in Croatia are disturbed by the amount of killing time between now and 15 January? Does he also agree that one state which does not meet the generally accepted criteria for recognition is the federal state of Yugoslavia, which has lost control of its own army?

Mr. Hurd: I know my hon. Friend's view and I believe that he had an Adjournment debate on the subject last week. He must not create the impression that recognition will stop the killing. The main hopes for stopping the killing are, first, the peace conference and, secondly, the prospect—not yet a certainty—of United Nations peace keeping. I very much welcome the fact that the Security Council authorised the dispatch of a preliminary team. I hope that Mr. Vance, with whom we have been in touch in the past 24 hours, will feel able in the light of his further explorations to suggest to the Security Council that a peace-keeping force should be sent. The Foreign Ministers, on 16 December, warmly endorsed that effort.

6. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Yugoslavia on the situation of the Albanian population in that country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We strongly condemn Serbian abuse of human rights in the Kosovo. It is clear that any lasting solution for Yugoslavia must incorporate guarantees for minority communities such as the Kosovo Albanians.

Mr. Galloway: The Albanians in Yugoslavia are not a minority population, but the third largest national group in the country; there are more than 3 million of them, but

their national rights have long been abolished by the Yugoslavian Government. The Minister must know that if Croatia and Slovenia are allowed to become internationally recognised next month, the Albanian population—and Albania itself, just across the border—will not sit quietly while the brutal reign of terror imposed by the Serbian authorities in the Kosovo continues. More than 600,000 people have passed through the rough hands of the Serbian authorities since the Parliament was abolished, and have been arrested and interrogated. Some 90,000 have been dismissed from their jobs for political reasons and thousands have been imprisoned for long sentences. Scores have been killed or are missing. What can the British Government do, both bilaterally and in the European Community, to ensure that the national rights of the Albanians and of the other nations in Yugoslavia are fully taken into account in the whole bloody mess?

Mr. Hogg: The safeguarding of national and minority rights is one of the most important issues which need to be addressed in the quest for an overall settlement. The Albanians are in a huge majority in the Kosovo—well over 90 per cent. of the total population. There is also a substantial minority of Albanians in Macedonia. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the draft treaty that my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Carrington has prepared identifies a range of safeguards which should be extended to the ethnic minorities in Yugoslavia. The Serbian Government must recognise that they should extend to the Albanians exactly the rights and privileges that they seek to secure on behalf of the Serbs in, for example, Croatia.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. and learned Friend recognise that, whatever the concern in this country about the mess in Yugoslavia, there would be even more concern if we started sending in British troops, whether as part of a peace-keeping force or anything else? Will he ensure that, before any consideration is given to such a development, we are quite clear in Britain how long such troops would stay, what exactly they would be setting out to achieve, and how they would cope with the aftermath? The last thing I would want to have to sell to my constituents is the idea that they should go into that bloody mess and be shot at by the bandits on both sides.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a serious point, with which I largely agree. It is very important that a peace-keeping force should not be sent to Yugoslavia until there is a peace to keep, and until it is clear that all the warring parties both invite and allow that peace-keeping force to operate. At the same time, the United Nations is clearly contemplating the circumstances in which a peace-keeping force might be sent and I can well conceive of circumstances in which, in order to underpin a peace, a peace-keeping force should be in place. Nevertheless, there are perils associated with the matter, and my hon. Friend has identified a number of them.

Israel

7. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he intends to make to the Government of Israel following their decision to continue the closure of Bir Zeit university for a further three months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Together with European Community partners, we have already made strong representations on this issue.

Mr. Watson: Is the Minister aware that, by 9 January, Bir Zeit university will have been closed continuously for a period of four years and that a generation of young Palestinians will have been denied the right to higher education, which is surely one of the basic fundamental human rights? Is that not just one of the many human rights being denied to Palestinians in the occupied territories, which have been illegally occupied by Israel for 24 years? When will the Minister and the Foreign Secretary get together with their European colleagues, call Israel in, and say, "That is it—so far and no further; no more Mr. Nice Guy," because the soft-soaping approach simply has not worked?

Mr. Hogg: That is the first time I have, by implication, been described as Mr. Nice Guy. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I can assure him that, in whatever role he cares to characterise me, I have spoken clearly to the Israeli ambassador on this. Moreover, both directly and through the medium of the European Community, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made it plain to the Government of Israel that we deplore the closure decision and that we believe that the universities, colleges and schools should remain open. We are deeply concerned by what is happening in the occupied territories and we are urging the Government of Israel to negotiate sensibly with the Palestinians within the occupied territories.

Sir Dennis Walters: As my hon. and learned Friend has accepted the closure of Bir Zeit is part of the systematic infringement of the Geneva convention by Israel which has been going on for years, should not a more robust approach therefore be taken, both by our Government and by the European Community, and should not economic measures at some stage be taken in relation to Israel to prevent the continuation of such unacceptable violations of human rights and of the Geneva convention?

Mr. Hogg: We regard a number of the acts taking place within the occupied territories as illegal—most obviously the policy of settlement, which we believe stands in the way of the peace process. It is a great thing, however, that all the parties have now sat down to negotiate and I wish the negotiations well. We shall do all that we can to support and encourage the process of negotiation. For the moment, at least, I should prefer to rely on that process of negotiation rather than on anything else.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister accept that when universities and other educational institutions are used as centres for terrorist activity—[HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] However much some people may groan, that is the way in which Bir Zeit was being used, and that is why it was closed. With our own understanding of terrorist problems, we should understand what is happening——

Mr. Galloway: You should be ashamed of yourself.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's hon. and learned Friend has as much right to express his views as the hon. Gentleman had.

Mr. Janner: May I say how much I appreciate the Minister's approach—that if, and only if, through patience and good will the present peace negotiations succeed, there is hope for an end to terrorism in that part of the world?

Mr. Hogg: We are strong supporters of the peace process, but I hope that the House will recognise that it will be a long and difficult road. I hope, too, that all the parties will adhere to it, however bleak the prospect may sometimes be. On the question of closures of universities, schools and colleges, I am against that.

Mr. Latham: When my hon. and learned Friend speaks to the Israeli ambassador, in the interests of fairness, does he also discuss with him how much freedom of speech there is in universities in Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia?

Mr. Hogg: As I have often said, I believe that Israel within her pre-1967 frontiers is a democracy, which is not true of many, if any, other states in that part of the world, but she is not a democracy in so far as the occupied territories are concerned.

Yugoslavia

8. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he plans to have with the United Nations Secretary General about a United Nations peace-keeping force in Yugoslavia.

Mr. Hurd: We expect to discuss that and other matters with the new secretary general when he visits London I hope, next month. Meanwhile, the British mission in New York is in constant touch with the secretary general and his staff and I have alredy told the House of Sir David Hannay's helpful discussion with Mr. Vance yesterday.

Mr. Michie: While the Secretary of State has tried to assure the House about the problems and implications of recognition of Croatia, will he try once more to reassure us about that recognition? Does it refer to territory already held by the Croatians or does it apply to old frontiers which are up for grabs? If it is the latter, how will Britain ensure or guarantee that the old or new boundaries are enforced?

Mr. Hurd: The decision of the day before yesterday related to any Yugoslav republics which fulfilled certain conditions that we set out. There was no mention of any particular republic. Obviously, recognition does not carry with it any guarantee of military protection. However, long before this immediate question arose, we and our partners—and, I believe, the whole world—made it clear that we are not prepared to recognise the alteration of boundaries by force.

Mr. Marlow: On Monday, we had a distinct and coherent policy with regard to Yugoslavia. Today we have an undistinguished and incoherent policy. If it is inevitable that the over-mighty Hun is to be in the driving seat of European security and defence policies, would it not be more honest and dignified if these matters were decided by a majority vote as we could then at least honestly state our position?

Mr. Hurd: I entirely disagree with that. I am sure that the right way forward in these matters is to discuss differences around the table for however long it takes, reach an agreement if that is possible, and act on it if we can. And that is what we do. If at any stage in the discussions on Monday, or in all the other discussions that I have attended in the past two years, it had been a question of majority vote, there would have been much less agreement, and to the extent that decisions had been imposed by a majority, they would have been much less effective. Everything that happened on Monday reinforced that view.

Mr. Alton: Instead of an obsession with Germany's position, should we not be obsessed with what is happening in Croatia, where one in eight of the population has been displaced, we have provided only £77,000 in humanitarian aid and the people are being pounded into the ground? Will the Secretary of State consider ways of ensuring that a sky shield can be erected by the international powers over Croatian air space to stop the aerial bombardment of Dubrovnik and Vukovar and also find ways to increase humanitarian aid to people who will otherwise continue to die over Christmas?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that an air shield is feasible or would be effective. I have already stated my view of the best way to stop the fighting. The hon. Gentleman is right about the principle of humanitarian aid, although he is wrong about the details. Via the British Red Cross, we have committed 425,000 blankets at a cost of £1·5 million, and £250,000 in transport costs. Most of that has gone to Croatia. There is also substantial aid from the European Community, amounting to £9·1 million, of which our share is £1·5 million. If the hon. Gentleman is going to talk about humanitarian aid, I hope that he will get his facts right.

Mr. Wilkinson: If Her Majesty's Government have, at least in principle, accorded official recognition to Croatia if certain conditions are met, would it not be very difficult for Her Majesty's Government or the European Community to deny Croatia the legitimate UN-recognised right of self-defence? In that regard, the United Nations surely has a peace enforcement role as well as a peace-keeping role. Unless the United Nations is prepared actually physically to keep the peace, the federal forces have every incentive to maintain military operations against Croatia.

Mr. Hurd: As I have told my hon. Friend before, I do not think that there has ever been any prospect of any member of the European Community or of the United Nations believing that a United Nations or a Western European Union peace-keeping force could force its way into Yugoslavia against the opposition either of the Yugoslav national army—the JNA—or of any armed force. The proposition has always been that a peace-keeping force should enforce and keep a ceasefire which already existed. That remains the position, and it remains the position quite independently of any questions of recognition.

Kenya

9. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had in Kenya with President Moi on Her Majesty's Government's policy on good government.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had extensive and frank discussions with President Moi and senior Ministers during his visit to Nairobi on 11 and 12 September. The Prime Minister also met President Moi at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Harare.

Sir David Steel: Does the Minister recognise that those of us who are friends of Kenya have been concerned for some time that that country has been slipping from the flagship position of good and open government in Africa? Will she therefore welcome the repeal last week of section 2 of the Kenyan constitution, as that action seems to pave the way for the introduction of multi-party democracy? Will Her Majesty's Government continue to press for an orderly transfer to open elections on a free and fair basis?

Mrs. Chalker: Yes, and yes, directly in answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question. We also very much welcome the fact that President Moi has announced that he will go forward with multi-party elections, and we hope that he will also enter discussions with opposition groups about the way forward. That is the way to achieve a peaceful transition. We all wish to see a peaceful transition. We believe that everything that is now beginning to happen can lead to that result, provided that there is good will on all sides. We shall do all that we can to encourage it.

Mr. Colvin: May I ask my right hon. Friend to endorse the hope that the multi-party system that President Moi will formally introduce this week will not be based on the tribal backgrounds of those taking part, as that would be a possible recipe for disaster? As Her Majesty's Government have based their aid to Kenya on progress being made on the political front, presumably there is now scope for increasing that aid to a country which is an island of stability in a troubled area. Aid can have a knock-on effect in neighbouring countries which are also in great need.

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend knows that we warmly welcome the moves that have been made. They are a crucial step on the road to democracy, but there are a lot of steps to go down that road yet. I believe that what we are seeing from President Moi and members of his Government is all going in the right direction. We understand their concern to avoid tribally based parties. We know that the opposition parties will need time to form and organise. However, I believe that as we keep pace with progress month by month we can reconsider further aid on top of the very substantial aid which continues to be well used in Kenya.

Mr. Anderson: The Minister will be aware of the long-standing concern of the Labour party and friends of Kenya about human rights in that country. Now that we are proceeding to the welcome elections in the near future, what steps will the Government take in co-operation with the Kenyan Government in the hope that those elections will be free and fair? I am thinking in particular of the return of those who have been forced to flee abroad, such as Mr. Oginga Odinga, free access to the press, access to the media generally during the campaign, and some form of international supervision by monitors such as those under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman knows that although we believe that Kenya should proceed with all speed to multi-party elections, there is much preparatory work to be done. The Commonwealth and, indeed, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association can play a major role in that. We pay tribute to the action of the Commonwealth in assisting Zambia to obtain a peaceful outcome to its elections. We hope that the elections in Kenya will likewise be peaceful, swift and positive.

I fully accept what the hon. Gentleman says about human rights and the need for people to return from abroad. I also accept that the media must be free if there is to be proper debate of the issues. The hon. Gentleman will understand that it is not for us to tie the hands of the Government of Kenya but to encourage, offer help and point the way whenever we possibly can. That we shall do.

Mr. Alexander: It is clear from this afternoon's exchanges that Kenya has many friends in all parts of the House. Will my right hon. Friend undertake that when she next talks to the leaders of Kenya she will communicate the grave anxiety felt in the House about human rights in Kenya and the way in which some opposition politicians are being treated and have been treated in the past few years?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend may know that I have made the views of the Government and of Members of Parliament well known to the Kenyan Government for a long time. We were greatly angered by the arrest last month of proponents of a multi-party system. Representations were made then to the representatives of the Kenyan Government in both London and Nairobi. There could be no doubt in their minds of the view of the House. I am glad that those arrested have been released and that the charges have been dropped. However, we shall be satisfied only when no more such arrests are made, so that we do not have to go through the same business all over again. There are many things to be done to assist Kenya, but we know that we can help it best by keeping quietly in constant discussion with it.

Burma

10. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with the Government of Burma.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We and our European Community partners have repeatedly condemned the Burmese military junta for its failure to respond to the unequivocal outcome of the May 1990 elections, as well as its continuing disregard for human rights, notably demonstrated by the house arrest of 1991 Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mr. Edwards: While the measures taken by Britain in conjunction with our European partners to isolate the Burmese Government are welcome, the military dictators are still in power, they have no intention of handing over power to the democratically elected Government, and the appalling abuse of human rights continues. Bearing in mind that the United States introduced trade sanctions last July, is it not time for Britain to impose a comprehensive trade embargo against Burma?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made many representations. At least four official statements have been made by the United Kingdom. A further four have been made by the European Community and through the United Nations. However, a general trade embargo would not be effective and would require international support, which is not in prospect at present.

Mr. Lester: Will my hon. Friend consider approaching the new Secretary-General to ask him to appoint a special representative to go to Myanmar? We are most worried that the Burmese Government have disregarded not only the United Nations Commission on Human Rights but the foreign minister of the Philippines who went to Burma on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations but was allowed to make representations only on his own behalf. In view of the United Nations resolution passed this year, it is a question of taking the matter to the highest level at the United Nations and appointing a special representative.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government of Burma continue to disregard all pressure put upon them, but I am pleased that on 30 November the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on Burma, in which we were co-sponsors, which called for an improvement in the human rights situation and for progress towards democratic government. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has begun a scrutiny of Burma, under the confidential 1503 procedure. The special rapporteur visited Rangoon last month and will be presenting his report to the Commission in Geneva in February next year.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister join me and the whole House in paying great tribute to Aung San Suu Kyi as the most worthy recipient of the Nobel peace prize for her courageous struggle against the brutal regime in Burma? As Britain has a special responsibility towards her and her country, can the Minister tell the House what action our ambassador is taking to get access to her and to secure her release? Will the Government now say that we shall initiate urgent discussions with both the United States and our European partners to isolate Burma—*[Interruption.]*. This is a serious matter, whatever Conservative Members may think. What action will the Government take to isolate Burma until the military relinquish power, and democracy is installed?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In my earlier reply I told the House what action the United Kingdom Government have taken, in concert with our partners in the European Community and other civilised countries, to condemn utterly the conduct of the Burmese Government and to call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. I understand that not even her husband is given access to her, but that he has recently been allowed to write letters to her.

African States

11. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with leaders of African states concerning progress towards democracy.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend met most Commonwealth African Foreign Ministers at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Harare in October. At this, and most of the many other meetings that he and I have had with African leaders, progress towards democracy and good governance has been discussed.

Mr. MacKay: While recent developments in Zambia must be welcomed as the first occasion on which an African Commonwealth head of state has left office because of the ballot box, are there not all too many countries in Africa which are not moving towards democracy? What further pressure can my right hon. Friend place upon them?

Mrs. Chalker: As I said, we welcome the peaceful way in which the elections were conducted in Zambia, which now has a new and democractic Government. Many countries are already proceeding towards democracy. In an answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) on 12 December, I listed those multi-party democracies. Many other countries have announced that they expect to proceed towards democratic elections in the coming year—Angola, Cameroon, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Seychelles and Sierra Leone. Progress is also likely in Tanzania. I hope that more countries will join that number in the coming months.

Middle East

12. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that known international terrorists do not receive any support from countries in the middle east with which the United Kingdom maintains diplomatic relations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have repeatedly made clear our condemnation of terrorism and we attach much importance to international efforts to counter it. We maintain a dialogue with a range of countries with the aim of discouraging any form of support for terrorist groups.

Mrs. Dunwoody: When the Minister made it clear a little more than a year ago that he was changing his attitude towards the Government of Syria, he said that he was able to do so because there was no known connection with terrorist organisations, such as that involving the appalling man, Jibril. Since other Governments, such as the American Government, still have Syria on their terrorist list, is the Minister certain that no evidence exists of any link between any terrorist organisation and the Syrian Government?

Mr. Hogg: As the hon. Lady will know, when we resumed diplomatic relations with Syria at the end of last year we discussed that type of question with them and received reassurances which were sufficient to enable us to resume diplomatic relations.

Mr. Kilfedder: Has Colonel Gaddafi yet provided information about the explosives and armaments that he supplied to the IRA? Will the Government seek compensation for the slaughter and mutilation of British citizens which have resulted from the arms and Semtex that he has provided?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend will know that at the end of November we made a number of requests to the Government of Libya. They included the delivering up of the two named individuals for trial, recognition of responsibility for acts, willingness to pay compensation, the disclosure of information relating to the IRA and renunciation of terrorism. Colonel Gaddafi has not complied with any of those requests.

Homicide (Amendment)

3.30 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Homicide Act 1957 in respect of the defence of provocation.

I appreciate that the Maastricht treaty has wide-ranging implications for people, but my Bill has far-reaching implications for the individuals whom it will affect: it is a matter of great moment to them. My main reason for introducing the Bill is that those women who are the victims of domestic violence, who are driven to despair and provoked into killing their spouses, may find that the defence of provocation is useless when it is used in a court of law. This is a grave injustice to those women. *[Interruption.]* The clearest example is that of the case of Mrs. Sara Thornton—a woman who suffered a great deal of brutality. *[Interruption.]*

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt, but my right hon. Friend is talking about a subject—domestic violence—that is vital to the women of this country and, rather than listening, hon. Members are having conversations.

Mr. Speaker: I am listening.

Mr. Ashley: If some hon. Members wish to play the chauvinistic role, I do not mind. I assure them that I have had letters from many of their constituents asking for support. If they want to chat and talk among themselves, and disregard this, fine—I will just go on talking.

The issue is of profound importance both to women and to men, but especially to women. Sara Thornton suffered great brutality and then she killed her husband, but in a court of law it was found that she was not provoked. Sara Thornton took a knife, sharpened it and stabbed her husband. When he died, she was arrested and taken to court. The court found that she was not provoked, because the law says that she had no provocation for killing her husband. The years of brutality were brushed aside.

How did this work out? To understand what happened, we have to recognise that the defence of provocation could not help her, because some time had elapsed between the provocation and the killing. To understand that, we have to go back to 1949, when Mr. Justice Devlin, as he was then known, made a significant ruling: that, to be successful in a court of law, provocation has to cause a sudden and temporary loss of self-control—a sudden loss of self-control. He said that, if there were a time gap, there was time for reason to be restored. If reason is restored, then the act is deliberate, and is murder.

The view adumbrated by Mr. Justice Devlin, that reason could quickly be restored after great brutality, was acceptable once. It was acceptable in the 1914-18 war, when we shot shell-shocked young men. It may have been acceptable in 1949, when we did not really appreciate the effect of violence upon the human mind. However, it bears no relation to what we know in 1991 about the effects of violence.

The fallacy at the heart of Mr. Justice Devlin's dictum is that it failed to appreciate that many people cannot regain normal self-control soon after brutality. We recognised that with the American troops in Vietnam. They were given full consideration. We recognised that with the British troops when they fought in the Gulf. We recognised that with the hostages in the middle east—we recognised the effect of brutality and captivity on their minds, whose balance could not quickly be restored. There is no reason why we cannot have the same consideration for battered and brutalised women that we have for soldiers and captives. The same consideration should apply. However, case law states that loss of control in women must be sudden.

My Bill would simply remove the word "sudden". It includes the requirement that cumulative violence be taken into account. I am well aware some lawyers oppose the Bill on the grounds that it would allow revenge killing, would make killing easier and would induce women to kill. Those are preposterous suggestions, which I hope will not sway the House. Surely we are far too sensible to accept revenge killing; it is not possible. Those women who kill are oblivious to the law. They are desperate and they have been driven by brutality to kill. They are not aware of the fine points of the law.

A similar Bill was enacted in New South Wales in 1982, but there has been no increase in killings by women. The claim that there would be increased killings has not been supported by the facts.

I have spoken long enough, and I simply put a plea to the House. The Home Secretary has promised to consider my plea for a change in the law. He has every right to disregard it and instead to pay attention to the pedantic meddling of the lawyers. If the Home Secretary were to take on the Bill, which is launched in all modesty, he would take a massive step forward in giving the victims of domestic violence a far better deal and a much fairer trial in British courts of law.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jack Ashley, Mr. Merlyn Rees, Ms. Jo Richardson, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Neil Thorne, Mr. Bruce Grocott, Mr. Barry Field, Mrs. Teresa Gorman and Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

Homicide (Amendment) Bill

Mr. Jack Ashley accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Homicide Act 1957 in respect of the defence of provocation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 17 January 1992, and to be printed. [Bill 46.]

Orders of the Day

Maastricht

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and his hon. Friends——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sit down, please.

I must also tell the House that I have received no fewer than 75 applications to speak in this debate today, and about the same number for tomorrow. It will not help the Chair if hon. Members come to find out whether they are going to be called today—indeed, it will be counter-productive. I hope that it may be of some comfort to those who were not called in the debate in November to know that I shall give precedence to them today. I shall put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 pm, and I hope that every Member called before that time and up to 2 am will bear it in mind—including Privy Councillors.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On previous occasions you have deplored the fact that written questions concerning other Members' constituencies have been tabled——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we ought to move on to the debate.

Mr. Skinner: Let me finish.

Mr. Speaker: Raise it with me tomorrow; I shall deal with it then.

Mr. Skinner: This is about a question on today's Order Paper, Mr. Speaker.

Question 129 is in the name of the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), who has never raised the matter of dioxines in Bolsover during the past six months —yet he has a written question about that on today's Order Paper. It was deliberately planted to offset the Minister's answer to my question tomorrow. If you deplore this sort of activity when Labour Members do it, it is about time you deplored it when Conservative Members do it.

Mr. Speaker: I have no knowledge of allegedly planted questions, nor have I seen the relevant question, but I do know—the whole House knows—that the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter many times.

We move on now to the European Community debate. I call the Prime Minister.

3.41 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I beg to move,

That this House congratulates the Prime Minister on achieving all the negotiating objectives set out in the motion that was supported by the House on 21st November; and warmly endorses the agreement secured by the Government at Maastricht.

In no other country of the Community have the issues that were decided at Maastricht been as hotly debated as they have been in this country. I have found in discussions with fellow Heads of Government that they have been frankly astonished by the amount of coverage in our media and by the intensity of the debate that we have had in this country over many months. I think that that coverage is not just a reflection of the measure of controversy; it reflects also the Government's determination to ensure that the fullest information was available to the House and the country before the European Council. It is perhaps also a reflection of a national characteristic—it is by no means a new one.

After meeting Macmillan in Bermuda in 1957, Eisenhower wrote:

"Any conference with the British requires the most detailed discussion. They do not like to sign any generalisations in a hurry, no matter how plausible or attractive they may be, but once their signature is appended to a document, complete confidence can be placed in their performance."

He went on, rather unkindly the House may think, to say:

"French negotiators sometimes seem to prefer to sign first and then to begin discussion."

In this country, every detail of the negotiations has been pored over both by hon. Members and by the press, and not only by them. I have had letters in recent weeks from the public—from schoolchildren, very well informed—on the pros and cons of a single currency, but I suspect that in a number of other Community countries the real debate is only just beginning.

Last month, I set out the issues that would be argued over at Maastricht. No one here or elsewhere in Europe could have been unaware of what we were arguing for. I explicitly said that we would not change our position at the very end of the negotiations. We did not, but we did achieve our objectives.

A full text of the treaty on European union is in the Library of the House. Jurists and linguists will ensure that the text is ready for signature at the beginning of February, but the treaty will enter into force only once all 12 member states have ratified it. The Luxembourg European Council last June agreed that this process should take place during 1992 so that the treaty can enter into force on 1 January 1993.

Before we shall be able to ratify the treaty, it will need to be incorporated into United Kingdom law by amending the European Communities Act 1972. As I assured the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) last week, it would not be right to carry through that legislation in the remainder of this Parliament. It will properly be a matter for the next Parliament.

This afternoon, I should like to set out what the agreement means and how I see the future development of the European Community. The misleading and controversial word "federal" has now been removed from the text of the treaty. Our partners agreed to return to the words of the original treaty of Rome—

"ever closer union among the peoples of Europe".

That has a different connotation. It means that the interests of the Community's citizens must come first and foremost.

That has always been the Government's approach. That is why Britain drove the creation of a single European market to the top of the Community agenda. It is why we have argued for reform of the common agricultural policy, and it is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) fought for and won a fair budget settlement for this country.

I believe that the Community——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Later.

I believe that the Community has made a unique contribution to the development of post-war Europe. Our future is as a European power, albeit as one with continuing responsibilities in many parts of the world. The balance of national interests lies clearly in making a success of our membership of the Community, so we must work with the Community to make sure that the Community works for the whole of Europe, and especially in the interests of the people of Britain.

The Community can fulfil its role properly only if it responds to the needs of its European citizens. It must respect national identity and national traditions. It must not, in the name of some wider European ambition, override the democratic wishes of the people of any one of its member states.

That is why the treaties now agreed at Maastricht were so hard-fought. Real British national interests were at stake in those discussions. The Government's job was to safeguard and to advance those interests. It was not to sign up, without critical examination, to anything that was presented to us with a European label.

I set out to the House a month ago exactly what our goals would be and what we could and could not accept. The outcome matches up to those goals and commitments in every respect. The most significant agreement of the Maastricht treaties is the agreement to co-operate in a legally binding but intergovernmental framework in the three key areas of law and order, foreign policy, and defence policy.

Many of our partners would have preferred to conduct that co-operation through the institutions of the Community. That was not acceptable to us; nor, in my judgment, would it have worked. We have been able to draw a crucial distinction between those areas, such as the single market, where the Community institutions are the best tools for the job, and other areas, such as foreign policy and the fight against crime, where direct co-operation between national capitals is likely to produce the best result.

However, despite that satisfactory outcome, no one in the House should assume that that argument has been settled for all time. Some Community member states will go on pressing for a united states of Europe, with all co-operation within one institutional framework. We shall continue to argue forcefully against that proposition, and I believe that we will win the argument in the future as we have thus far.

The treaty on political union was a challenge as well as an opportunity. The challenge was to ensure that we checked the encroachment of the Community's institutions. The opportunity was to make the Community work better. In the event, a large number of the agreements that were reached stemmed specifically from proposals that were put forward by the United Kingdom. It is worth stating the extent of those proposals. Our proposals were for stronger European security and defence co-operation, making the Western European Union the defence pillar of the European union, while preserving the primacy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. For us, the prime importance of NATO was a vital national interest, and that has been secured.

Our proposals were also for a common foreign and security policy going beyond the Single European Act, but remaining outside the treaty of Rome and beyond the reach of the European Court. They were for co-operation on interior and justice matters, but also for co-operation outside the treaty of Rome and the jurisdiction of the European Court. They were also for co-operation for greater financial accountability, for a treaty article on subsidiarity—an article that specifically enshrines the crucial concept that the Community should undertake only those measures that could not be achieved at a national level—and for the right of the European Court of Justice to impose fines on those member states that fail to comply with its judgments, or with Community law, having previously signed up to it.

We won agreement to all those proposals, and it was vital to the interests of this country that we did.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Will the Prime Minister help with this paradox concerning the future of Europe? The west is moving towards union; the east is moving towards a looser association—a commonwealth idea. Is it not possible that the harmonisation of the interests of individual member states along commonwealth lines rather than by means of a union would offer a more durable future, given that the break-up in the east came about because centralisation occurred without the consent of the peoples of the countries involved?

The Prime Minister: I have much sympathy with what the right hon. Gentleman has said. It is for that reason that I regard the innovation of the pillared structure operating on a co-operative basis outside the Community institutions as a very desirable development in the negotiations at Maastricht. I believe that it opens up new opportunities in the future for a European co-operation, which I believe is in all our interests—but outside the centralising institutions of the Commission, and outside the influence of the European Court of Justice. It is because of the extent of my sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman—although I would not, I believe, go as far as he would in that regard—that I believe that the agreement at Maastricht is so important.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for allowing me to intervene on the subject of centralised institutions. He mentioned subsidiarity, and article 3b of the treaty of union. Does he not agree that that unclear principle, on which it is very difficult to adjudicate, is totally limited by a phrase in the article? It applies to the Community only when the Community does not have matters "within its exclusive jurisdiction".

Given that, by virtue of its powers of regulation, the Community has a very wide area of exclusive jurisdiction, does not that limit subsidiarity, whatever it be, to a very narrow range of topics?

The Prime Minister: Any action taken by the Community must not reach the level necessary to infringe the principle of subsidiarity. In essense, if it can better be done at national level, it ought not to be done at Community level. That is the principle that we have enshrined in the treaty. I shall return to that point in a few moments.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will make a little progress. I shall return to that point; I ask the hon. Gentleman to be patient.

Had it not been for Britain's arguments, we would have had last week a treaty which brought foreign policy and interior and justice matters within the treaty of Rome. We would have had a Community setting itself up as a rival defence organisation to NATO. We would have lost our independent right to decide foreign policy. The European Parliament would have had equal rights with the Governments of member states to decide on the policies and laws of the Community, and the Community's competence would have extended into virtually every area of our national life.

I do not believe that it would have been right to agree to all that. It would not have been acceptable to this House or this country, and it would have been a betrayal of our national interests.

Let me turn to social issues, and set out in detail the reasons why we could not agree to the social chapter in the treaty. Let me first remove a misunderstanding. The issue with the Community is not the quality of social provision in the countries of the Community. In Britain, we have a national health service free at the point of use—*[Interruption.]* It is free at the point of use, and it is the envy of Europe. Only one other European country is in a position to say that.

We have a benefits safety net that puts many European socialist Governments to shame, and the issue before us is whether social policy should be dictated by Brussels or determined in this country. We have long accepted that there should be a social dimension to the activities of the Community. It makes sense, for example, to ensure that common standards of health and safety at work are observed. There are already agreed Community measures in the social area covering freedom of movement, collective redundancy arrangements and equal treatment for men and women in pay and social security.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: Not at the moment, if the hon. Lady will forgive me.

They all help to make a reality of people's freedom to seek a job anywhere in the Community, widening the opportunities open to all our citizens.

We have not only agreed those measures; unlike some of our partners, we have implemented them. With Germany, we are the only member state that has implemented all the 18 directives so far adopted by the Community. We have made it clear that we will adopt and implement the majority of the proposals in the Community's existing social action programme. Nineteen of the 33 measures so far published have been agreed by the Council of Ministers, and the United Kingdom has not blocked a single one of them. We have played a full part in the social dimensions of the Community, and no one has gone further.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Prime Minister make clear to the House and, perhaps therefore, the country something that is not understood? How is it that countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain could put their names to the social chapter but the United Kingdom could not? Does the Prime Minister really want to be the leader of the "little boys up chimneys" party?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had been patient, I would have turned from the social dimension to the social chapter about which he is talking.

The social dimension exists under present Community competence. It is a matter in which we have been fully involved, and I have listed many of the areas of legislation that we have accepted, with a better record than anyone else in the Community.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Prime Minister: The social chapter covers the point raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), and the point that others may have wished to raise. We have refused to accept that, in addition, the Community should intrude into aspects of social policy best decided nationally.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady will let me finish my argument, she may not have to intervene.

The Government will not support proposals that would destroy jobs by imposing damaging costs on British industry. Companies know best how much they can afford in relation to their competitors, not the social affairs directorate in Brussels. That is why we are resisting the proposed working time directive, which would cost British employers up to £5 billion in the first year alone. There is also the part-time working directive, which would require up to 1·75 millon part-time workers to pay national insurance contributions. The effect of that directive would be to impose extra costs on those workers at modest levels of earnings whose contributions burden the House lightened as recently as 1989.

That single illustration gives the lie to the absurd notion that all proposals from Brussels are socially enlightened, and all resistance to them is from the dark ages. Who in this House wants higher national insurance contributions on low-paid workers? That is what the directive proposes. If the Opposition support that, let them say so. If they do not want to do so, let them support us in resisting its imposition.

Those are directives that the European Commission is endeavouring to make, even under its existing competence. That makes it abundantly clear why I was not prepared to accept a further massive extension of competence in this field.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The Prime Minister is telling the House that he totally misunderstands the social charter and the social chapter. Europeans regard the social dimension, the social chapter and the social charter as one and the same. Will the Prime Minister tell me and the House how he will feel when he signs the treaty, and the protocol that deals with the social charter? He will not sign, but will exclude Britain from the institutions of the Community, from all its mechanisms and from every aspect of this policy. How will he feel when he does not sign that page?

The Prime Minister: The protocol is not in the treaty; it is adjacent to the treaty, but it is not in it. The protocol will not apply to us. It will not impose damaging costs on British industry and workers. I feel, as so many employers

[The Prime Minister]

in this country and abroad feel, that it will give a competitive advantage to this country, not a competitive disadvantage.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I have given way twice, so, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall now make progress.

The social chapter would have implied that laws could have been imposed on the United Kingdom, by a qualified majority vote of member states, on working conditions, rights of information and consultation—including that of unions to block essential business decisions—and any action related to the provision of jobs for unemployed people. These would have ceased to be a matter for decision by this House and by British employers and employees, according to the needs of this country.

The Community's ambitions would not have ended with those matters: social security and protection, union rights to representation of workers, union involvement in company management and the conditions of employment of non-resident workers from outside the Community would all have been explicit Community responsibilities. That, without a shred of doubt, would have been a recipe for a centralised Community social policy, which could not possibly have taken account of wide variations in traditional practice, culture and experience. It is clear that it would have enabled costly laws to be imposed, irrespective of the needs of our economy and our jobs, and I was not prepared to accept that.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the Prime Minister confirm that Britain has the lowest maternity pay of any country in the Community and, in the context of the remarks that he has just made, is he satisfied with that state of affairs?

The Prime Minister: Britain has the longest maternity leave, as the hon. Lady may know, of any country in Europe: this House decided that, and the hon. Lady has to recognise that point. It is for the House to determine that.

Let me turn to article 118b in the agreement of the 11, of which the Opposition are so fond. Let me explain to the House what the agreement that I rejected says about the role of collective agreements at Community level, rather than what some have led us to believe in recent days. It provides for such agreements between Community-level representatives of management and labour. That means, principally, the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederations of Europe and the European Trades Union Congress—a body whose combined membership is no more than one in four employees in the Community. It provides that such agreements shall be implemented in member states in one of two ways.

The first is to require such agreements to be implemented directly in member states according to their own procedures. Such agreements could cover any matter, including pay, the right to join a union and the right to strike. The only exclusions from those provisions are what Community-led employers and unions fail to agree on.

The second way is to require the Council, at the request of these employers and unions, to implement these agreements through Community law, enforceable through the European Court. In this case all the matters within the huge range of Community competence that I have described could come within the scope of such agreements. Only pay, the right to join a union and the right to strike would be excluded.

The Opposition told us the exclusions, but they failed to mention the list of inclusions. The matters included run to union law as well as the laws affecting individuals—rights of recognition and negotiation, the right to block company decisions—and nowhere in the proposals tabled are collective rights excluded from action, and laws could be imposed on this country without the agreement not only of its Government but without the agreement of its Government, its employers and its employees. That is not acceptable.

The Opposition cannot credibly claim that such extraordinary provisions would not recreate precisely the kind of national bargaining—but now at a Community level—which created what was called the "British disease" of the 1960s and 1970s, so I rejected those proposals.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

I shall not turn back the clock to the failure of the corporatism of the 1960s and 1970s. I do not believe that the British people want to see Europe trying as national Governments tried in the 1960s and 1970s——

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): Will the Prime Minister confirm that, in relation to the first way that he mentioned, the declaration attached to article 118 states that none of the agreements can impose

"any obligation to amend national legislation in order to facilitate their implementation."?

Will he also confirm that, in relation to the second way, they are all covered by article 118b, which specifically exempts the right to strike and union legislation?

The Prime Minister: The hon Gentleman is wrong on his second point. There is the possibility, the probability and even the certainty of supranational agreements being imposed on this country as a result of these agreements. I am not prepared to accept that on behalf of this country. Neither—on the basis of the experience of what is happening under the existing social provisions—was I prepared to trust the Commission not to stretch the new definitions of the proposed social chapter. We have seen what the Commission is doing with the working time directive under the health and safety article—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down.

The Prime Minister: We have seen what the Commission is doing in terms of the present health and safety article, and I am not prepared to take the risk of that happening again, with the Commission stretching its responsibilities.

Finally, I am not prepared to envisage a situation in which labour regulation——

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall continue.

I am not prepared to envisage a situation in which labour regulation could be imposed on the United Kingdom even if the Government of the United Kingdom, the Confederation of British Industry in the United

Kingdom and the Trades Union Congress in the United Kingdom had all voted against it, yet that is what the Opposition wish to support.

Mr. Rees *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I told the House on 20 November —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are many people outside the House who are very interested in the debate and who want to know what the Prime Minister has to say. I ask the House to settle down.

Mr. Rees: On such an important issue, on which the Prime Minister went three ways, would it not be a good idea if he were to ask the learned Attorney-General to give his view to the House?

The Prime Minister: The learned Attorney-General's view is that which I have expressed to the House.

The proposal is unacceptable, and that is why we rejected it. It is also the view of British industry and commerce and of other people all around Europe that we have made the right decision. Perhaps the Opposition would be interested to hear what the rest of the world says. The Environment Commissioner, Mr. Carlo Ripa di Meana, said that the agreements that we have reached would make Britain

"the most attractive country for foreign investment."

The Japanese equivalent of the CBI has expressed concern about the consequences of the social chapter on labour flexibility and wage costs—we know how proud the Leader of the Opposition is of the Japanese investment in his constituency.

The director general of the CBI has said that the agreement has achieved "exactly what business needs". The director general of the Institute of Directors has described the outcome as

"a triumph for British business".

The chairman of British Petroleum has said that he is "delighted", and the chairman of ICI that this is probably as good an outcome as could have been hoped for.

All those people with direct experience of industry are right, and the Opposition are wrong.

I told the House——

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin) *rose*——

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentlemen who are seeking to intervene are Front-Bench spokesmen and know from their own experience that, if the Prime Minister does not give way, they must sit down.

The Prime Minister: I told the House on 20 November that, on economic and monetary union, there must be a provision to allow this country to decide whether—not just when—to join a single currency. That is what we have achieved—precisely, and in legally binding form. As a result, we are uniquely well placed to make a sensible judgment on this important question at the right time. If we do not wish to join, we are in no way obliged to do so. If we wish to join a single currency, it will be open to Parliament to decide to do so at exactly the same time as any of our partners.

Let there be no doubt: Britain is among those who will meet the strict convergence conditions. We took the lead in setting them and will continue to be involved at every stage leading up to the decision whether to launch a single currency.

Mr. Frank Cook *rose*——

The Prime Minister: There are some who argue that the treaty creates such a strong momentum towards a single currency that, whatever our doubts, we shall be compelled by economic pressure to join when the time comes. I do not believe that. The balance of economic advantage will depend heavily on the circumstances in which a single currency is created—how many member states are involved, and whether the Community has met the convergence conditions. No one can judge now what the situation will be in five or six years' time. No economic pressure could compel this country to join a single currency if Parliament judged the political disadvantages to be too great.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it has been right for this country to maintain, as we have done, a two-way option—to go in if we judge it right to do so, but to stay out if we judge it right to do so.

The debate about the European Community is littered——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does the Prime Minister believe that the existence of the two-way option will help Britain to attract the central bank to the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I think that it will do no harm whatever to our prospects. Many other countries believe that we are wise to have this option. We have all the advantages of determining the conditions up to entry and —uniquely—the right to go in or not, depending on whether it is right for our country.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I have already given way nine or 10 times. The hon. Gentleman must let me make progress.

The debate about the European Community is littered with labels for people—anti-European, pro-European, Euro-fanatic, Euro-sceptic or Europhobe. Those labels are echoes of a healthy debate, but they should not destroy our sense of purpose.

No country has a greater capacity than ours to commit itself to a cause that it believes to be right—the history of this century clearly shows that. Many people in this country have committed themselves to membership of the Community with a similar sense of dedication. They made a commitment to an organisation which they believed would be a powerful force for good. I believe that they were right to do so.

It was right to join, not just for the opportunities that the Community offers as a common market, not even for the economic strength of the Community collectively, but for the collective power of the European democracies to improve the general weight, politically and economically, of European opinion throughout the world. Nothing that has happened in the almost 20 years of our membership causes me to doubt the rightness of the original decision to join the Community.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the Prime Minister please, please, please give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please sit down?

The Prime Minister: I have given way on nine or possibly even 10 occasions. I suspect that there are more than 600 hon. Members to whom I have not given way, and the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) is one of them.

As I said earlier, we attach great importance to the principle of subsidiarity. It is not only a defence of our national freedom of action but a statement of our willingness to co-operate. Such co-operation does not mean compromising our national traditions or institutions —far from it. It means not allowing sentiment to stand in the way of real interests. It is right to be hard-headed in our dealings with Europe, and that was our approach in the negotiations.

At Maastricht, we ensured a safer Europe, and we reaffirmed the primacy of NATO. We set the framework of a stronger and more coherent European foreign policy, in which our national independence of action is assured. We strengthened the rule of law in the Community. We established more efficient and more effective institutions, with stronger arrangements for budgetary control.

We gave the European Parliament a greater role in monitoring the Commission. We obliged the Community to respond more directly to the needs of the citizen. We equipped ourselves to fight international crime, terrorism and drug trafficking. We secured provisions that will be good for British industry, and a Community that will be open to the rest of the world.

Our role consistently has been to ensure that the Community does not become self-regardng, inward-looking and over-regulatory. Brussels is a means to an end; it is not the end itself—*[Interruption.]* From their policies and comments, Opposition Members clearly feel differently. In their view, if Brussels says it, it must be right irrespective of the national interest.

There is one critical agreement among the Twelve, which is outside the treaty but in the presidency conclusions, and which I believe is vital for the future of Europe. As we reach the end of the century, it becomes even clearer that the Community does not end with the Twelve. I do not accept—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are not matters of hilarity, as many people outside would agree.

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the conflict, which is often referred to, between deepening the Community and widening it. If the Community ignores what is happening beyond its boundaries and simply concentrates on internal development, it will not become deeper; it will just become shallower. We must broaden it and open its doors.

It would be a tragedy if historians could look back and say that the Community had been sleepwalking through a year of revolutions elsewhere. That tragedy would be compounded if historians were to look back and say that, if only the Community had reached out to the fragile democracies of the east, disasters in those democracies could have been averted.

At Maastricht, the Community committed itself to further enlargement. It did so at Britain's initiative. That commitment will be seen as one of the most significant of the agreements to which we signed up last week. In six months' time, Britain will hold the presidency of the Community. In that six months, we hope to start negotiations leading to membership of the Community for Austria and Sweden, and other European Free Trade Association countries. We shall start to pave the way for the eventual membership of the countries of eastern Europe. We shall put in place the last measures needed to complete the single market—a single market that will extend way beyond the borders of the Twelve, even before the new member states join.

In the treaty of Rome, the free countries of Europe wove their own lifeline. We now have a responsibility to the other countries of Europe to throw that same lifeline to those countries now embarking on a perilous journey towards stability and democracy. If we were to fail in that endeavour, we should put at risk all the achievements of post-war Europe. The prize if we succeed in that endeavour is enormous.

I see the main task of our presidency next year as being to ensure that the Community matches up to this, its greatest challenge and opportunity—the achievement of a Community open to all the democratic countries of Europe and reducing, perhaps even eliminating, the risk of conflict within the whole of our continent from one end to the other.

That was the kind of Community that we fought for at Maastricht. That is the kind of Community that we wish to build. We can take pride in achieving our goals in this negotiation, and I commend the outcome to the House.

4.20 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): The Prime Minister and I are obviously in agreement about the fact that the European Council at Maastricht was historic. We are obviously agreed that the decisions constitute a beginning, not an end, and that, as a result of those decisions, the European Community will continue to develop economically, politically, socially and culturally. It is also clear that it is our shared hope that the Community will not only enlarge itself but will use its relative prosperity and its democracy to improve its collective efforts to assist in the development of the economies and new democracies of central and eastern Europe. On those, and on other matters on which consensus was reached in the Community, there is broad agreement here.

But the Government have returned from the Maastricht Council with a pair of opt-outs on the most vital matters of economic and monetary union and the social chapter. Their duty was to exert maximum influence on those fundamental issues. That required involvement; they have chosen isolation.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: Later.

The Government's duty was to resist the development of a two-speed Community. Instead, they have contrived to get a two-speed Community, and they have put Britain in the slow lane. A Prime Minister who said that he wanted Britain at the heart of Europe spent his whole time at the Council getting two escape clauses. That is not the action

of a Prime Minister who wants to be at the heart of Europe but the action of a Prime Minister who wants Britain at the tail of Europe.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: Later.

On monetary union, the Prime Minister is proud, as he said again today, of the arrangements which he told us last Wednesday ensure that

"unlike other Governments, we have not bound ourselves to join regardless of whether it makes economic or political sense."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 859.]

That is the Prime Minister's justification for the opt-out. The core of the Government's argument is that, while leaders of other countries are taking their people in a gathering stampede to union, our Prime Minister alone stands aloof and unbound with his opt-out.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: Let me develop my speech a little further; then I shall give way.

Is any country in the Community "bound"—I use the Prime Minister's word—regardless of economic sense? That is an important question and one that is best answered by examining the treaty procedure for moving to monetary union. In 1996, the Commission and the European Monetary Institute will report to the European Council on whether the third stage of economic and monetary union—the creation of a single currency—can begin. That is not automatic. It depends entirely, as the treaty clearly specifies, on whether the strict conditions for convergence relating to inflation, budget deficits, long-term interest rates and currency stability have been met. The Council must then decide whether to proceed to monetary union. Such a decision can be taken only if a majority of states meet the criteria for convergence. If that convergence is not achieved, the next key date is the end of 1997. If, by then, no date has been set, monetary union will not go ahead, because a majority of states will not have passed the test of convergence.

The treaty then specifies that monetary union will begin on 1 January 1999. However, it will obviously begin only for those countries that have achieved the convergence conditions. It is clear that at every stage of that stringent process nothing will be done—and nothing can be done—"regardless", to use the Prime Minister's words "of economic sense". On the contrary, whether it is done at all depends entirely on economic sense and on the test of practical economics—whether or not the conditions for economic convergence are met. Every country will have to face that.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): In view of the right hon. Gentleman's passion for European unity, will he explain to the House and the country why he voted against the Single European Act?

Mr. Kinnock: The reason is straightforward and if the hon. Gentleman examined the proceedings in respect of that legislation, he would very easily discover the answer. There was absolutely no commitment on behalf of the Government to the strength of social dimension that we want for the British people.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Many of the hon. Members who are trying to intervene want to participate in the debate. Trying to intervene now may not be very happy for them later.

Mr. Kinnock: As I was making clear——

Sir Anthony Grant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Kinnock: I will give way in due course.

I was making it clear that every country must face that basic test which ensures that they must make economic sense in terms of convergence. No one can act regardless of that consideration.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Adley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: I have said that I will give way in due course.

The position of the Tory party and of the Prime Minister is unique, because even if the terms of convergence are satisfied, and even if monetary union goes ahead, they are still prepared, they tell us, to opt Britain out of monetary union. The consequences of such a decision would be very severe for the United Kingdom. They would be so severe that they would inflict great disadvantage on our country and on our people. That is why we believe that it would be wrong for Britain to opt out if the convergence conditions were achieved.

Mr. Adley: The right hon. Gentleman seems to have enunciated an interesting new doctrine that no cake is better than half a cake. I want to ask the right hon. Gentleman a straightforward question: will he name one specific proposal from Brussels that he finds unacceptable?

Mr. Kinnock: There are several. For example, the very long dated and hitherto insufficiently reformed proposal from Brussels—the common agricultural policy in its present form—is totally unacceptable. *[Interruption.]* The thing to do is not to opt out, but to stay in and fight one's corner.

Mr. Budgen: Give way.

Mr. Kinnock: I will give way in due course. I have been speaking for only a few moments and I have already given way twice. I have given undertakings that I will give way and I will do that in due course.

I was beginning to tell the House why it would be very disadvantageous for our country to use the Prime Minister's opt-out clause at the point of formation of union and given that convergence conditions had been satisfied. First, if the opt-out was exercised, our country would certainly stand to lose inward investment. Inevitably—*[Interruption.]* He is at his mother-in-law's funeral. Will you stop that stupid nonsense? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: Our country would certainly stand to lose inward investment because investors inevitably would choose to put their resources in the countries that were part of the monetary union rather than in one that was outside it and subject to continual currency risks. Secondly, of course, the United Kingdom would stand to lose British investment, because to gain access to the European single market with a single currency and no foreign exchange costs serviced, British companies would choose to invest in the monetary union countries. Thirdly, if the Prime Minister opted out, the City of London could not maintain its pre-eminence. A banking centre such as Frankfurt that was inside the monetary union would become the European financial capital, with all the obvious consequences for finance, earnings and employment in Britain.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): As the right hon. Gentleman has already said, the agreement at Maastricht imposes strict disciplines on Governments, on the amount that they can borrow in order to finance their public expenditure. As he supports that so wholeheartedly, what calculation has the right hon. Gentleman made of the extent to which taxes would have to be raised under a Labour Government to pay for their expenditure programme?

Mr. Kinnock: The current Government are running, on their own estimates, toward a £20 billion public service borrowing requirement. They have raised taxes to the point at which they levy the highest tax burden on the citizens of this country of any Government in history. They have sensibly got extra flexibility into the fiscal deficit requirements in the Maastricht treaty, and that is extremely useful, but monetary disciplines are, of course, essential. What is important is that the domestic and the Community policies of all of the countries in the Community operate in such a way as to ensure that we do not arrive at the situation that we in Britain are in at present, where by perpetual deflation the Government have lower inflation, but at the cost of raising the fiscal deficit. Why does not the hon. Gentleman learn the lessons?

Mr. Budgen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: I will give way in due course.

Despite those disadvantages in terms of inward investment, in terms of domestic investment and in terms of the City of London, the Prime Minister would still think that all that was worth paying as a necessary price, as he put it three weeks ago, to keep control of monetary policy. But if there was monetary union, what real control of monetary policy would there be? If our neighbours formed a single currency area within which we had free capital movement and with which we did 60 per cent. of our trade, what control of monetary policy would exist in reality? None is the truthful answer to that question. The United Kingdom would be a satellite of the monetary union, exerting no pull, no power and no leverage. Our country would drag alongside the monetary union, pinioned to it by economic realities.

Mr. Budgen: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that many influential people in Europe believe that coherence or convergence can be achieved only by very considerable increases in expenditure on regional and social funds and upon the cohesion fund? Will he be good enough to give the House some idea of what sort of expenditure will be in place or whether, perhaps, it would be funded by an increase in VAT or by a general increase in taxation? We would like to know what the cost of the pre-conditions of monetary union would be.

Mr. Kinnock: As we make clear in our policy documents, we consider that funding of the common agricultural policy is so large and misapplied in terms of the needs of the European Community that it must be the major source of reorientated finance for the development of cohesion in the Community. That must be so. If the Government really had in mind the welfare of the whole United Kingdom and, indeed, a proper contribution to the development of the Community, that is what they would have battled for not only at Maastricht but on all previous occasions.

As we know that Britain will have the possibility of opting out at the time of monetary union, given its convergence with the performance of the remainder of the Community, the practical question that must be asked is: what would be the meaning of the Prime Minister's opt-out clause at that point? Indeed, what is its validity now? Either the clause means that even if we achieved convergence the Prime Minister would still opt out for some reason, despite the huge disadvantages to industry, investment, finance and jobs, or it means that, because the convergence conditions had been met and the practical penalties of staying out were obvious, the opt-out clause would be redundant. We would be in exactly the same position as every other Community country capable of joining the monetary union.

The Prime Minister should tell us now what could be the reason, other than failure to achieve convergence, for not recommending entry to a monetary union that was being formed. He should answer that question. He would have to give a very good reason, because there is a heavy price to be paid for the Prime Minister's opt-out. That price has to be paid not at some vague date in the future but soon. First, by the end of 1992, the vital decisions on the location of the European monetary institute and the European central bank must be taken. Those decisions will clearly depend directly on whether the country where the bodies are located will continue to be part of the union process. A country that had opted out could not and would not even be considered.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: I know that the hon. Gentleman wants Scotland to opt out of everything, even the real world.

So long as the Prime Minister's approach on opt-out prevails, neither the institute nor the bank will be located here, despite the risks that will result for Britain's financial services industry, which earns £14 billion every year for Britain.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): The significance of the opt-in clause— *[Interruption.]* The significance of the clause is that we believe that it is right in principle that Parliament should be able to make the decision. The right hon. Gentleman has said that he does not like the arrangements for the central bank: it is too powerful, too independent and he does not like it. If that is his view, why is he prepared to say now that so long as convergence is achieved—that is

what he is saying—he will give the commitment now irreversibly to join a single currency? Why does he not want Parliament to have the right to decide?

Mr. Kinnock: Opt-in, opt-out, shake it all about. It is obviously the hokey-cokey clause. On the Chancellor's first point, I repeat what I said in the previous debate that we had on this subject. Of course, barely a month and certainly not a Council will go by without Parliament being consulted and certainly no basic decision about our well-being in the Community will be taken without the assent of Parliament. That is the fact of the matter.

Secondly, on the European central bank, we have repeatedly proposed—as the right hon. Gentleman may have heard, some of his colleagues in the Community support our proposal—a relationship between ECOFIN—the representative body—and the independent central bank closely modelled on the German system that has developed with such success. Indeed, we want to bring the proposals that are before the Community now closer to that German system. I would have hoped that the Chancellor would campaign for that. I would have hoped that he would see the sense of it.

I would have thought that, as Chancellor, the right hon. Gentleman would seek to ensure that the general requirements on the proposed European central bank to conform to the general economic policies of the Community would be taken seriously and applied literally.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman is wrong about the bank. The arrangements in the treaty and the treaty amendments are precisely those which the Germans wanted and precisely those modelled on the Bundesbank. That is the whole point of it. Why does not the right hon. Gentleman answer the question? Why is he not prepared to admit that he is committing his party irrevocably to move to a single currency?

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer going to stand at the Dispatch Box and tell the world of finance and industry that there are circumstances in which, despite the achievements of convergence, despite the establishment of monetary union by our neighbours, he would come to the House and recommend that we still stayed out?

Several Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Lamont: We believe that it should be decided by this House of Commons.

Mr. Kinnock: What would the right hon. Gentleman do?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman may remember that his own shadow Chancellor said that he did not believe that that matter should be decided until 1997, and that Parliament should be involved. That is what we say and that is the view which commands the support of the country.

Mr. Kinnock: For the second time in two weeks a member of the Cabinet has grossly misrepresented my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Let me read what my right hon. and learned Friend said, instead of the contorted version produced by the Prime Minister, dishonourably, last week —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would the right hon. Gentleman withdraw "dishonourably", please?

Mr. Kinnock: I meant, of course, Mr. Speaker, inaccurately.

The Prime Minister said, exactly as the Chancellor just has, that my right hon. and learned Friend said that we should not commit ourselves in advance of 1997 to enter into a single currency. That is the point of agreement that all sensible people will have.

What my right hon. and learned Friend said on the Walden programme was:

"We should not commit ourselves now, in advance of 1997, to enter a single currency irrespective of what the state of the economy was—*[Interruption.]*—

irrespective, clearly, of whether convergence had been achieved or not.

No one is being asked anywhere in the European Community to take such a decision and make such a step —indeed they cannot—unless convergence has been achieved. So I hope that the Chancellor will still feel able to answer candidly the question that I asked him: in the circumstances of convergence being achieved and the union going ahead, what would he say to the House? Would he recommend that we did not join that union? Yes or no? Come on.

Several Hon. Members: Answer. Come on.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I shall give way in a moment. I must get on—*[Interruption.]*

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition has given way a good deal. I think that he should get on.

Mr. Kinnock: I was drawing the attention of the House to the first price of the policy being followed by the Government—if their policies were to prevail, which thankfully they will not—which is to put in the gravest jeopardy the possibility of the European central bank being located in Britain. There is a second price——

Sir Peter Tapsell *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: No, I shall give way in a moment. I think that you would be the first to agree, Mr. Speaker, that there have been a number of responses, but there have also been prolonged distractions, and I had better get on. I shall give way later on if I may first develop this argument.

The second price of the opt-out strategy—if it can be called that—is uncertainty. If international or British companies are doubtful about whether Britain will opt out, is it not obvious that they would be less, rather than more, likely to make their investment here? It has to be asked whether Britain's best interests can ever be served by a Government whose policies create that doubt among those planning their future investment for the next five, seven or 10 years.

Of course, it was not Britain's best interests which guided the Prime Minister at Maastricht, but the desire to hold the Conservative party together. The European monetary union opt-out was part of the price for that. The social chapter opt-out was the rest of the fee. Together those opt-outs are the Danegeld, paid by the Prime Minister to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

[Mr. Kinnock]

The social chapter opt-out deserts the interests of employees in Britain. It was a declaration by the Government that they want a down-market economy at the fringe of Europe. Every other Government in the Community accepts the idea that, as trade barriers come down and monetary co-operation increases, there should be a development of basic social rights and common employment standards throughout the Community.

All the Prime Minister's fellow Conservative Heads of Government in the Community take the view that, as Herr Kohl put it:

"Our community is not only an Economic Community, it is a Social Community too."

For the Government to be against those social protections and minimum employment conditions as a matter of principle is to be not just outside the mainstream of the Community, but outside the mainstream of conservatism in the Community.

The Government have advanced a number of claims —the Prime Minister did so again this afternoon—to try to justify their opposition to giving the British people the same rights and minimum standards as those awarded to people in other countries of the Community. The Prime Minister repeatedly claimed——

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I shall give way at the conclusion of this passage.

Last week the Prime Minister repeatedly claimed that acceptance of the social chapter would mean accepting "militancy", and "strike-torn days" and much more in the same vein. We heard it again this afternoon. It just is not true.

The social protocol explicitly states that it

"shall not apply to pay, the right of association, the right to strike, or the right to impose lock-outs".

Community legislation in those areas is effectively not possible.

When asked why other countries, such as Germany, could accept the social protocol while he could not, the Prime Minister has repeatedly said that other countries have a

"different structure of labour laws".

But he said that knowing that the social protocol specifically lays down the requirement that

"the Community and its Member States shall implement measures which take account of the diverse forms of national practices".

So there is no proof of imposition.

We have heard the Prime Minister repeatedly assert that support for the social protocol would mean

"accepting new trade union powers . . . handing over government to trade unions abroad"

and that it would mean

"the imposition of damaging labour laws".

That is not true either.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: I shall not give way for the moment.

The Prime Minister must know that the section of the social protocol dealing with collective agreements between trade unions and employers' organisations could not result in the alteration of British industrial relations legislation —good, bad or indifferent. The declaration attached to the section, which has the same force, clearly states:

"this arrangement implies no obligation on the Member States to apply the agreements directly or to work out rules for their transposition, nor any obligation to amend national legislation in force to facilitate their implementation."

So there is no power of imposition there.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that the declaration to which he has referred refers only to the first method of compelling those collective agreements to be implemented and not to the second, and that it is absolutely clear that the effect of article 118b is to enable collective agreements to be reached at European level, to which British employers, employees and the British Government do not agree, but which would have the force of law in this country?

Mr. Kinnock: Methinks the right hon. and learned Gentleman doth protest too much. He knows very well that both on the first and on the second there are belt and braces arrangements in the protocol to ensure that there shall be no imposition.

Mr. Howard: The text of the declaration to which the right hon. Gentleman referred reads:

"The High Contracting parties declare that the first of the arrangements for application of the agreements"

will be limited in the way that he suggested. That does not apply to the second of those arrangements.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows very well that all of the provision to which he has referred falls under the requirements of unanimity, and each Government can exercise their veto.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman simply confirms the extent to which his understanding of this vital agreement is inadequate and inaccurate. The decisions of the Council of Ministers that provide the second way to implement those agreements will be taken on the basis of qualified majority voting. The right hon. Gentleman does not understand what he is talking about. He would have committed this country to the most damaging obligations without the faintest understanding of what they mean.

Mr. Kinnock: As he speaks, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is depriving himself of any excuse for opting out of the social chapter, for the simple reason that clause 6 of article 118 says:

"The provision of this Article shall not apply to pay, the right of association, the right to strike or the right to impose lock-outs."

I am certain that we shall return to this subject, and that we shall return to it——

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a Committee stage.

Mr. Kinnock: We shall return to this subject with great relish. Meanwhile, I must resist the efforts of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, because I rather suspect that what

he is doing now is what, in his home town of Llanelli, would be called attempting some spoiling play. We shall have to come back to this on another occasion.

One after another, the Prime Minister's misrepresentations about the social chapter are negated by the provisions of the protocol. He made great play of the fact that the social chapter included provision to ensure imposition of other people's directions in a number of areas, including, not least, social security and collective agreements. The only section of the social protocol that relates to the collective defence of the interests of workers and employers is subject to veto. Therefore, it cannot be imposed.

So if it is the case, as it so clearly is, that in every single one of the areas where the Prime Minister has made allegations his claims have turned out to be false and he has misrepresented the social charter, I have to ask him whether he was misinformed or whether he knew that he was repeatedly being misleading. The only parts of the protocol that are the subject of qualified majority voting and would therefore be capable of being extended to Britain against the wishes of a British Government refer to individual employees' rights. They do not refer to collective or trade union rights.

Those individual rights are very basic, not to say rudimentary. They provide for improvement in health and safety provisions, in working conditions, in the information and consultation of workers, equality of opportunity between men and women, and the integration into the labour force of the long-term unemployed, including disabled workers. Every other Government in the Community can accept those provisions, but they are rejected by our Government because, they say, the provision of such basic rights to British workers would make Britain uncompetitive.

Would improvements in health and safety make us uncompetitive? Do the Government not accept the fundamental truth of industrial practice—that industrial accidents and disasters are not only tragic but are monumentally expensive? Did they not see the report of their own Health and Safety Executive last week, Maastricht week, which estimated that the real cost of industrial accidents and diseases could be up to £15 billion a year? Do the Government not know that the executive estimates that work-related accidents and ill-health are probably costing 30 million days off work a year—10 times as many as are lost through strikes? Do they not heed the director general of the executive, who said:

"incidents that are usually preventable could be costing" companies "well over 10 per cent. of" their "operating margins".

Mr. Howard: Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that these important health and safety provisions are included in the present treaty and are covered by qualified majority voting as a result of legislation against which the Labour party voted?

Mr. Kinnock: So why cannot the Government accept the social charter?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is taking a lot of time.

Mr. Kinnock: Improved conditions for health and safety in the working environment do not diminish competitiveness; they add to efficiency and reduce costs and they are part of competitiveness. The Government consider that the improvement in the arrangements for information and consultation of workers provided for in the social chapter would make Britain uncompetitive. How could that be when the message of all managers worth their salt—certainly the managers of successful enterprises, both British and foreign owned—is that good information and consultation procedures are an asset, a source of efficiency and essential to team effort?

When the Government resist the social chapter because of its references to the integration of long-term unemployed, it is easy to see why. There are now 654,000 people in Britain who have been unemployed for more than a year. The number has increased by 146,000—30 per cent.—in the past 12 months as a result of the Government's policies. When that scale of unemployment costs nearly £4 billion, it does not do much for competitiveness.

Perhaps it is the provision in the social chapter for equality between men and women in labour market opportunities and in treatment at work that persuades the Government that acceptance of this chapter would be ruinous. Did we not hear somone who described himself as a major employer of women saying two months ago how essential it was to

"remove the barriers that make it harder for women to realise their full potential"?

Did not that employer ask, in ringing progressive tones,

"Why should half our population go through life like a hobbled horse in a steeplechase"?

If the employer in question, the Prime Minister, thought it essential to take account of what he called

"the social revolution in the role of women"

when he spoke at the launch of Opportunity 2000 in October, why is he denying basic rights to women by opting out of the social chapter?

There can be only one reason for the Prime Minister's attitude. It is that the commitment that he made to widening opportunities is for occasional grand display, but his commitment to bad conditions, inequality and unfairness is for daily use. The Prime Minister's message of aspiration and opportunity for women is for public consumption. For low-paid women workers, for part-time women workers, for women working in lousy conditions, the message is put up with it and shut up about it.

The Prime Minister: Will the right hon. Gentleman join us in opposing the part-time working directive that would impose national insurance contributions on low-paid women and men, or will he continue to support it?

Mr. Kinnock: There is no obligation to pay national insurance—the matter deals with entitlements. Many women in part-time work are supremely conscious of the fact that, because they are not part of the national insurance arrangements, their rights to sick pay, to maternity pay and so on are greatly diminished.

The Prime Minister: My question was quite straightforward. Will the right hon. Gentleman now answer it? Will he support us in opposing the part-time working directive, which would impose national insurance contributions on low-paid workers, many of them women? Yes or no?

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister should get a grip on the facts—there is no obligation, except where there is the same social security entitlement as for full-time employees. The Prime Minister should check the directive.

The Prime Minister is so frightened of the pressures, so ready to depart from the undertakings he gave in his Opportunity 2000 speech, that he will not accept the social chapter relating to equal treatment of women in work. The Government insist that the British economy depends on resisting decent minimum conditions and employment rights for British workers. They have spent 12 years following that dogma and taking away even basic protections. At the end of that 12 years, Britain is a country with high and rising unemployment, with the balance of payments in deficit—even in a recession—and with negative growth, reduced investment, spreading poverty, rundown public services, a housing crisis and record bankruptcies. Whatever else cuts in provisions and rights do, they certainly do not produce economic success, and they never will.

Modern competitiveness depends on competing in quality—competing up-market. It depends on a highly educated, well-trained work force—*[Laughter.]* I know why Conservative Members are laughing—they want a sweatshop in Britain. Economic success depends on a well-informed work force, with highly motivated men and women. Modern Governments have a duty to contribute towards that by making the proper investment and by insisting on good conditions. In 12 years, the Government have never done that and they never will. That is why, after 12 years, we have economic recession and underperformance.

The Government have compounded that failure with the "turn your back" policy that they adopted at Maastricht. That policy might be relatively harmless if the other countries in the Community were standing still, but they are not. They are getting on, as full participants, with the monetary union process and with building one community. British influence over both has now diminished; the gap has widened. After the passage of stage 2, Britain will be faced with a structure that others have fashioned. That cannot be in British interests. This Government are not only allowing that to happen, they are causing it to happen. Such a Government are no longer fit to lead Britain. The British people know that and, come the election, they will show it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We do not have clapping here.

5.3 pm

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): Having listened to the speech of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), I came to two conclusions about the debate and about the agreement at Maastricht last week. First, the right hon. Gentleman does not understand the agreement. Indeed, I can summarise his speech as all wind and no substance. The second conclusion is that, because of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's statesmanship and the leadership that he gave last week—together with my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—he has returned with an agreement that is not only in Europe's interest, but equally in Britain's interests. He should be warmly congratulated on his statesmanship during the past few days.

When I voted in favour of joining the European Community in 1972, like so many other hon. Members I felt that, first, it was the only way to ensure that we would never again have to fight a world war in Europe. Secondly, I felt that it was the best means to create economic prosperity for all the members of the European Community. Thirdly, I felt that it was the best way to underpin democracy, and therefore stability, in Europe.

I envisaged a Europe that would be free of socialism and free of central direction; a Europe that would be outward-looking—something on which we need to focus our minds in this debate; a Europe that would be diverse in its strength, both at national and regional levels. I envisaged that Scotland, Bavaria and Catalonia, for example, would be as important a part of the Community as would co-operation at international level. I envisaged a community that would build closer co-operation brick by brick and step by step.

I exercised my right to vote in favour of the Community almost 20 years ago. Against the background that I have outlined, we should warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Government on taking constructive steps forward at Maastricht last week. After all, there may be, as there should be, plenty of argument within the Community—there was at Maastricht—but arguing is far better than fighting, as we have done twice this century. The Government's approach was pragmatic and constructive, and that is badly needed in the Community.

The other aspects of the agreement should also be warmly welcomed. The Commission is to become more accountable and democratic—previously a failure in it that came about largely because Britain was not a member of the Community when the Commission was created. Now, we are taking steps to put that right. There are to be important new procedures for intergovernmental co-operation on law and order, crime, foreign policy and defence. Those are vital steps towards good progress within the Community.

With Britain's record, like that of Denmark, being good and effective on the implementation of agreements, the crucial decision was taken to introduce procedures to impose fines on those Governments who fail to implement them. The Community cannot develop effectively unless there is some understanding along those lines.

The Government demonstrated last week that we are fully committed partners in Europe. The old saying of Dean Acheson in the 1960s that we had lost our empire but not yet found a role has been reversed: we are part of the Community, and it would be unacceptable to think in any other terms.

The one issue on which I wish to speak is the international aspects of what happened at Maastricht. The lessons of the traumatic events of the last few months and years in central and eastern Europe and in other parts of the world show that we cannot impose unions, federations or more centralisation unless that is done democratically, peacefully and in a way that is acceptable to the people of the countries concerned. That is one quite clear lesson that we must learn. We know perfectly well that, when the lid comes off an imposed centralised regime or federation, it explodes, as witness Yugoslavia and many other parts of eastern Europe. Even in the western world, countries such as Belgium and Canada are under intense pressure. The process must be democratic and peaceful.

The lessons for the Community are that we must bring about the evolution of more co-operation by consent, pragmatic discussion and democratic progress. That is why the role of this Parliament is so crucial.

The second lesson to be learned from international events is that, in an unstable world, the Community must be outward-looking. It must be constructive in its foreign policy; and one way in which we can become more outward looking and helpful to the rest of the world would be to do away with some of the protectionism in the Community. Few things could be more important than the GATT talks, because if the world moves towards more protectionism, there will be dire consequences. The Community should take a lead, and one of the areas in which to do so is the common agricultural policy.

I welcome most warmly the emphasis that my right hon. Friend placed on the importance of enlarging the Community. The Government—it will be a Conservative Government—will have the presidency next year and will focus on the need to enlarge the Community and on the implications of such an enlargement. After all, the members of the Community do not constitute an island that can afford to turn its back on the outside world. We do that at our peril.

In a vulnerable world, we are secure within our boundaries while mayhem reigns in many parts of Europe. The best way to contribute to stability is for the European Community to adopt a positive policy towards eastern and central Europe so as to achieve a measure of stability for those countries through collaboration in trade and aid and by their eventually joining the Community on conditions acceptable to the Community.

Another priority for the Community is to focus on how, during the 1990s, other members can join—for instance, members of the European Free Trade Association that want to join and Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. We must decide at what speed that should happen and what its implications for the Community will be. By the end of this decade, it is probable that at least 24 countries will be members of the European Community—a radical change.

We must always remember the lessons of that day in 1938 when a former Prime Minister said that Czechoslovakia was a far-off country of which we knew little. We paid a heavy price for that, and the most important aspect of our work now is to embrace these countries as quickly as we can, at a measured speed, so as to contribute to stability in central Europe and——

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): I share my right hon. Friend's view on enlargement. Does he think that the creation of a single currency among some or all of the existing Twelve would facilitate or make more difficult the process of enlargement?

Sir Richard Luce: We do not have to take a clear view on that at this stage. We can await developments in the next few years, when we have the freedom to decide what to do. We must accept that, if the Community is to grow, there will be different speeds and tiers of co-operation. That is why I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to take the lead in working out the implications of such a move.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister believes that closer collaboration between the Community and central and eastern Europe is essential for the stability of Europe. We cannot escape that fact, and it should be the Government's mission to take a lead in helping to enlarge the Community and to assess the implications of doing just that. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the statesmanship that he has shown. This is the right Government to lead Britain through to the next stage of the development of the Community.

5.14 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'whilst welcoming the fact that the United Kingdom became a signatory at Maastricht to an agreement which represents an historic step towards a federal Europe, regrets that the Prime Minister, by insisting on opt-out arrangements for the United Kingdom on Economic and Monetary Union and the Social Chapter, rather than negotiating improvements, has left Britain semi-detached from Europe, obliged every citizen to pay a price for the divisions within the Conservative Party and damaged the prospects for Britain's long-term economic and political success.'.

Although I am delighted that it is our amendment that will be called tomorrow, it is extraordinary that the Labour party has not been able to move an amendment to the motion. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) who is sitting in front of me has revealed the reason—it is the only course of action that can unite Labour Members in the Lobbies as they are as divided on this as the Government have been revealed to be.

Mr. Skinner: I am interested in the amendment moved by the leader of the Liberal Democrats as it mentions the Government's views on the social chapter. I heard the right hon. Gentleman on the "Walden" show a fortnight ago, when he instructed the Prime Minister to vote against the social chapter. Today he has tabled an amendment which states the opposite. No wonder they call him Paddy Backdown.

Mr. Ashdown: I assure the hon. Gentleman, whose intervention I know was made in a spirit of good will, that I shall come to that later in my speech—*[Laughter.]* I certainly will. He will then know precisely what we objected to in some elements of the social chapter. I do not wish to betray any confidences, but the hon. Member for Bolsover told us earlier that this fix among Labour Members was his work. He called himself the Earl of Warwick in this context—a strange earl indeed—but things have come to a pretty pass when cohesion in the Labour party has to be arranged by the hon. Member for Bolsover——

Mr. Skinner: I have done it many a time.

Mr. Ashdown: For the European Community, Maastricht marks a decisive and irreversible step towards integration and unity. It could have been a decisive moment for Britain, too: the moment when Britain decided to end 40 years of indecision and ambivalence—aspects which have dogged our policy towards Europe and done so much damage to our success as a nation. Maastricht could have been the moment when we learned the lessons of our past mistakes: first staying out of Europe, then having to join later, and ending up submitting to institutions and policies which had been shaped without us.

I was fascinated to hear the Prime Minister mention the need to reform the common agricultural policy. It certainly needs reform, and one of the reasons is that when it was drawn up we had opted out. Now we have to deal with the consequences.

[Mr. Ashdown]

Maastricht could have been the moment when Britain declared without qualification, once and for all, that our future belongs to a united and dynamic Europe. It could have been an historic week for Britain as well as for Europe, but it was not.

The most interesting part of the Prime Minister's speech was the unscripted portion, following the fascinating question by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) about his agreement with the concept of a commonwealth in Europe. His only slightly qualified agreement with that model of Europe gave us an insight into the Prime Minister's mind, which for the past six months he has denied us in order to hold his party together. Now the Prime Minister's real vision—if that word is not too offensive to him—of the future stands revealed. In that moment he opened up the division between his view of Europe and that of the Foreign Secretary, who clearly does not feel the same way. He also showed his isolation from every other leader throughout Europe. That is his vision. But no other nation at Maastricht shared that vision. It is a classic example of the isolation into which the Prime Minister now wants to lead our country.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): If that is so, why was the draft treaty text put forward by the Dutch—sporting what one might call "the other vision"—rejected by 10 of the 12 member states?

Mr. Ashdown: I know that the Minister has a different view from that which the Prime Minister has expressed on such matters. I invite him to read the Prime Minister's response to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, which was far and away the most interesting part of the debate —*[Interruption.]* Amended text or not, it reveals the muddle to which the other 11 nations of Europe do not subscribe. It is a model towards which they are moving away from——

Mr. Skinner: What does that mean?

Mr. Ashdown: It is a model away from which they are now moving. They are moving towards increasing integration and increasing unity. That part of the Prime Minister's speech will be studied carefully because it reveals his intentions, although I do not believe that they are shared by the Minister.

The Prime Minister declared again today that Maastricht was a good deal. Maybe it was a good deal for the Conservative party, but it was a very bad deal for this country. Every citizen in Britain in due course—in my judgment, it will be sooner rather than later—will pay a real, direct and personal price for what the Prime Minister negotiated at Maastricht. People will pay first in higher mortgages, lost jobs and diminished economic opportunities because of the uncertainty caused by the opt-out clause on the single currency. That uncertainty means higher interest rates if the pound comes under pressure and has to be supported again. It means more doubtful inward investment. Whatever comments were made in the heat of the negotiations at Maastricht, there can be no doubt that those who wish to invest in Europe will want to invest in countries that will be part of the economic and monetary union and not in countries outside it. It will mean more doubtful inward investment at the very moment when this country needs such investment most, as we come out of the recession. It means the end of any realistic possibility of bringing the new European central bank to London. It means that London's position as Europe's main financial centre has been weakened and that that of Frankfurt has been strengthened.

Mrs. Currie: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman has read last week's edition of *The Economist*, which investigated which European Community countries conformed with the convergence conditions set in the treaty. The right hon. Gentleman is worried about uncertainty, but is he aware that the United Kingdom is already included in four of the five lists of items which create convergence and that only the fifth—the narrow band of the ERM—separates us? We are a lot closer than Germany, Italy and the vast majority of the Community. Where is the uncertainty in that?

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful to the hon. Lady because she makes the point that I was coming to. In those circumstances, why on earth stay out? The hon. Lady is right—the tragedy is that Britain is one of the few member states which could have met the convergence conditions of the EMU almost immediately. This country has paid a high price for that in lost jobs, lost homes and bankrupt businesses because of the effects of the Government's economic policy. The Government now risk throwing it all away because of the conditions to which the hon. Lady referred. Instead of playing a leading role in the new monetary union, we shall be semi-detached from it—robbed of our full chance to shape its institutions, suffering economically because of the uncertainty, and condemned always to follow monetary union, never to lead it. That is what the uncertainty created by the Prime Minister's opt-out will cost us.

That uncertainty would continue under Labour. We have studied the Labour party's recent pronouncements and we now know that Labour proposes to renegotiate the whole deal. In last Friday's edition of *The Times*, the shadow Foreign Secretary stated that Labour would "review" the

> "role and powers . . . of the European Commission . . . work for conditions to make . . . the single currency . . . possible and attractive".

By the by, those conditions are wholly unacceptable to our partners and would destroy the whole purpose and form of a central bank. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) also said that Labour would "negotiate . . . for revision" of the social protocol. Come back Harold Wilson—all is forgiven. The Tories would like to repeat the mistakes of the 1950s, while Labour are determinted to repeat the mistake of renegotiation in the 1970s.

The second way in which Britian will pay for the deal is in lost influence in Europe. At Maastricht the Prime Minister reinforced Britain's wretched reputation as the chief roadblock of Europe. We are not the partners who must be consulted—we are now the obstacle around which the rest of Europe must find a way. Other member states bypassed us on the single currency by giving us an opt-out, for which the Prime Minister had to pay at Maastricht —and for which the British people will have to pay even more in the months ahead—and they bypassed us on the social chapter by simply going ahead without us.

The rest of Europe will now construct the social institutions of Europe with Britain excluded—but we shall not be excluded from being influenced by what they do in the short term. No doubt we shall, once again, want to join them in the end. Britain proves yet again that those who will not learn the lesson of history are condemned to repeat the mistakes of history. That is exactly what we have done twice before in this half century.

As is well known—the hon. Member for Bolsover has referred to this—the Liberal Democrat party was not content with all the provisions in the social chapter of the Maastricht drafts. For the benefit of Mr. Ian Aitken and *The Guardian*, and others, our objection was not to the social charter which was, of course, not even under discussion at Maastricht—although the Leader of the Opposition did not seem to know that. Our objection was to elements of the social chapter in the treaty——

Mr. Skinner: That is not what the right hon. Gentleman said to Walden.

Mr. Ashdown: That is exactly what I said both then and subsequently. Article 118/3 of the social chapter opens the way, as the Prime Minister said, to European-wide collective bargaining. In Britain, we have moved away from such arrangements. They are wrong for this country's future and contrary to this party's belief in decentralised wage bargaining. Again, the Leader of the Opposition seemed not to grasp the fact that, in article 118B, the social chapter provided for circumstances in which, if European businesses and trade unions agreed, they could take Europe-wide action through the Council without reference to the European Parliament, let alone this one. That is simply inimical to this party's commitment to a democratic, powerful and responsible European Parliament. Fortunately, both those clauses enjoy the protection of unanimous voting or could be changed when they came to practical application into law. However, we would have wished to see those clauses altered. Indeed, they could have been altered if the Government had not wasted their bargaining power in attempts to defend the indefensible, attack the trivial and obtain the illusory.

Therefore, when it came to the social charter, when we really would have liked to influence events, Britain was left with no negotiating power, few friends and only one course of action—to opt out of the social dimension altogether. That was not game, set and match for Britain; it was a lousy piece of negotiation which left Britain on the sidelines of Europe.

Perhaps more regrettable is the fact that a real opportunity has been missed. If there is one area in which Britain is ahead of Europe, it is in the liberalisation of our markets and the dismantling of the systems of the corporate state. At present, our partners in Europe tend to follow an old-fashioned prescriptive approach to social policy. That is very familiar to the Labour party. Labour Members like the idea that one can formulate the blueprint in Brussels and hand it down to be followed in every corner of the Community. That is the kind of approach that they would like to have again at Westminster. It is, however, an approach that failed in the 1970s, and one that will not work in the 1990s. It is too inflexible, too costly, and too rigid.

We need not a "blueprint" approach but an "entitlements" approach to rights at work and in society. Europe should be built around the concept of European citizenship, with each citizen entitled to certain defined basic rights—political rights, rights of ownership, rights at work and social entitlements. It is for the European institutions to define those "floor-level" rights, but it is not for Brussels to say how they will be observed. It is up to each individual state and each individual workplace to decide that for itself—subject, ultimately, to the decisions of the courts.

Incidentally, if our Government really believed in the principle of subsidiarity, they would have ensured that decision-making would be decentralised within the United Kingdom as well as within the Community. The new treaty tells us that decisions will be

"taken as closely as possible to the citizens".

I say "Yes, please—and why not start in Scotland and Wales?"

The third great deficiency of the Maastricht treaty—again one that Britain, to its discredit, helped to create—is its entirely inadequate response to the democratic deficit in Europe. Here is the Government's big lie: the claim that an increase in the power of the European Parliament would mean a decrease in the power of the Westminster Parliament. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that in European affairs it would be difficult to diminish further the power of this Parliament.

Our Parliament does not hold the Commission to account. We do not even hold our own Ministers to account. We do not scrutinise European legislation properly; indeed, we allow the Executive to carry on very much as it pleases. That is the democratic deficit. We need the European Parliament to repair it, but in that regard the Maastricht treaty has comprehensively failed.

The European Parliament remains far too weak. In the end, it will have to be strengthened to play a full democratic part in the Community. In the end, we shall have to ensure that all laws passed by the Council must also be passed by the Parliament. That is what co-decision, democracy and accountability actually mean.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I agree that it is important for our Parliament to examine EC legislation closely. The House has two very effective European Committees, but there seems to be an astonishing dearth of Liberal Democrats prepared to sit on them, although they have the right to do so.

Mr. Ashdown: That is a perfectly reasonable point. I will explain the position. As there are only 20 Liberal Democrats in the House—although we are supported by 23 per cent. of the electorate—it is impossible for my colleagues and me to involve ourselves in all the work of the House.

Until the European Parliament is strengthened, the events about which the Government and the European separatists most like to complain—those brought about by an interfering and inappropriate Brussels—are likely to continue, because the Government missed the opportunity to make the Community more democratic and accountable. Perhaps that is what they want, but it is not good for either Britain or Europe.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I think that I have already given way a reasonable number of times.

Fortunately, we in this Parliament have never seen Maastricht as an end. We have always seen it as a

[Mr. Ashdown]

milestone on the road to closer integration and closer unity. There are those in the House who pretend that that is not so. The Prime Minister, to appease members of his own party, pretends to be one of them, but he knows the truth. He knows that, although Maastricht may mark a watershed in the process of integration, it does not mark the end of the process. With or without Britain, the rest of Europe will continue along the road.

Of course, we cannot be certain that Europe will succeed. There are huge problems—economic, historical and social. Perhaps those problems will ultimately prove too great. Perhaps Europe's leadership will prove too weak. Perhaps the essential task of bringing in the new democracies of eastern Europe will founder on economic collapse, ethnic unrest and social upheaval. I am certain of one thing, however: we must do all in our power to ensure that none of that happens.

Europe cannot stand still. There is no refuge for us in simply maintaining the level of integration at which we have now arrived. If Europe does not go forward, it will start to go back—back to a Europe given to confrontation and not co-operation, back to a Europe where Germany exploits its economic power and its position as broker between east and west, and back to a Europe where instability in the east is matched by impotence and indecision in the west. That cannot be in any of our interests, especially at this time.

Ministers pride themselves on their attention to detail, but I ask them to lift their eyes and survey a broader picture. They should look at the Europe that will exist in five or 10 years' time, at a Community with 18 or 20 members and perhaps even more, and at the interests that we have in common—security, defence, foreign policy, the environment, prosperity and peace in the world. That Europe must be more united, more effective and more far-sighted. It will view the events of Maastricht as important, but as yesterday's agenda, and it will marvel at the failure of countries and their leaders to grasp the opportunities for progress.

I am certain of something else, too. It is in Britain's interest for us to be at the heart of that Europe—where the Prime Minister said that he wanted us, but where he signally failed to put us at Maastricht. We should be helping to shape the democratic institutions on which Europe will depend. We should be providing leadership in the new economic institutions that Europe will need. We should be making available our experience of world affairs, which will be essential to the outward-looking Europe that we must create.

That was the opportunity that Maastricht could have given us. The Prime Minister failed to grasp that opportunity. He put the short-term interests of the Conservative party before the long-term interests of this country. Sadly, Maastricht represents the third occasion in half a century on which Britain has been given the chance to face its European future and, I regret to say, the third occasion in that time on which we have chosen to seek refuge in the past. For that failure the country will, in due course, pay a heavy price.

5.37 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I pay warm tribute to the Leader of the Opposition for his fine debating speech. His debating technique, however, disguised some fatal flaws and internal contradictions in Labour policy. Not the least of those was highlighted capably by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), who pointed out that, if the right hon. Gentleman was to achieve any of his aims in regard to European monetary union and convergence, he would be required to support policies that would inevitably increase the country's tax burden considerably.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, presented what appeared to be a coherent policy on Europe. He has adhered to that policy consistently for several years. I feel, however, that it takes insufficient account of the natural caution and pragmatism of the British people, which was admirably reflected in the negotiating approach of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues in the Cabinet.

I congratulate my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor on their negotiations leading up to Maastricht and at the conference itself. Their approach was in great contrast to what might have been the position had the official Opposition been in government. In case the House doubts the substance behind that view, it has only to consider a Gallup opinion poll that appeared recently in *The Daily Telegraph*. It showed that by a ratio of 2:1 the electorate preferred to have my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in charge of the policy than the Leader of the Opposition. Liberal Democrat supporters shared that view by about 4:1. Clearly, the British people know when the policy is in safe hands.

Looking back, we can see that the Maastricht summit was the culmination of a long process—a significant stage in the development of the European Community. It was the stage at which the 12 member states did a good deal more to clarify their long-term goals. I am referring particularly to European monetary union with a social dimension, coupled with aspirations towards European political union which, as can be seen from the debates that we have had in the House and those on the continent, means many different things to many different people. It was also the stage at which the Twelve addressed the critical questions of structure and procedure for the future development of Europe: whether the Community and Europe as a whole wish its design to be more or less monolithic, whether it wants to be more or less supranational, whether it wants to have more or less qualified majority voting and more or less jurisdiction for the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the pillared structure that has been negotiated by our right hon. Friends is more likely to provide the sort of flexibility that the institutions will need, bearing in mind that Europe is standing, to some extent, on shifting sands and that none of the situations extant in the 1950s, at the birth of the Community, remains the same today? It may be that there will have to be extensive changes in those institutions in the years to come.

Mr. Forman: I agree with my hon. Friend, but I go further. The 1990s provide a great opportunity for Her Majesty's Government to demonstrate to our Community partners the validity of the new hybrid approach that the Government have pioneered.

It is interesting to note that, in attempting to answer the questions at Maastricht, most of our Community partners said that they wanted to go faster and further forward. The Government correctly understood and successfully argued that in most of the new areas of competence the approach should be largely intergovernmental—as was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames)—thus introducing a greater element of flexibility into the future institutional arrangements of the Community. That must make sense in the policy areas to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred—foreign policy, security and home affairs. We now have the opportunity to demonstrate in practice that our more hybrid approach is better suited to the needs of the next decade.

The new methods of European co-operation will prove increasingly relevant and useful in the enlargement of the Community, which will carry on apace from about the mid-1990s and—this has not yet been mentioned in the debate—in the awakening of public opinion in France and Germany where they are beginning to realise some of the implications of what their political leaders have signed. On the eve of 1992, we must encourage our partners to focus in sensible ways on the real challenges of the coming 10 years. What do I mean by that?

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the intergovernmental co-operation which was a characteristic of the European Free Trade Association was not successful? To suggest that that is the way forward for the future must be objected to by the fact that Sweden, Austria and the EFTA countries now want to join the supranational Community.

Mr. Forman: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I understand his point from an historical perspective. However, the Community has always had variable depth in its integration—in some areas it has been deeply integrated and in others there has been shallower integration. It is appropriate that the areas of policy now being pushed forward on an intergovernmental basis should be done in that way because that is how we carry with us consent in our national Parliaments and public opinion.

The programme for the next 10 years should be based on a clear recognition of the need for an early enlargement to include the aspiring EFTA countries, to which the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) referred, and the three central European countries—Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia—to the east of the Community. That would make irreversible the shift to democracy, market economics and social pluralism in the former communist states. In its wisdom, the Community felt able to do that for the Iberian peninsula a few years ago and it would be right and proper for it to do something analogous for the central European countries.

I hope that the Community will concentrate on providing within its borders only those things that it does best—a common legal framework for a large liberal market economy with a social dimension. That is the formula and it is what I believe will prove most successful. In so far as it is necessary to have new political institutions, the Community should cherish rather than threaten the rich diversity of nations and regions within it.

On external relationships, we must use all our influence within the Community to see that it is not just a magnet for new members, which it clearly is already, but an influence for global free trade and payments. If the Community can take constructive and urgent action, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) said, to bring the Uruguay round of the GATT negotiations to a successful conclusion, it will have done something of value for its members and the global economy generally. Assisting with the creation of a viable payments union in the area that used to be described as the Soviet Union would be the single most important contribution that the Twelve could make to that unstable and dangerous part of the world. By stabilising that part of the world, we would be making our contribution as a building block to better world monetary arrangements which will be important once the ecu is a means of exchange and a currency that can look the yen and the dollar in the face.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said many times, we should work as hard as we can in the heart of Europe to lead our partners away from the cause of Euro-dirigism and Euro-protectionism, which if allowed to develop under the influence of Madame Cresson and such people would render the entire Community less competitive in global markets and blight the prospects of the developing countries to the south and east of the existing Community.

Once we have incorporated the Maastricht treaty into our law—presumably, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, in the first Session of the new Parliament—we must press on in the second half of 1992, when we have the presidency of the Community, to set out more clearly our vision of a common European future. In this brief speech, it is not appropriate for me to attempt that task but I shall give the House three examples of the sort of arrangements for which the Government should press in the second half of 1992 when we have an opportunity to carry them forward.

We should encourage a growing body of Community practice that builds upon the excellent subsidiarity article 3b in the Maastricht treaty. That is critical and I am delighted that it has found its way into the treaty with powerful German support. At a future review conference—such conferences will occur every few years in the Community—it might be desirable to go even further and press for a clause in the Community body of law that makes it crystal clear that all powers that are not specifically allocated to the Community should remain as of right with the member states, as is the case in the American constitution.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his counterparts ably negotiated amendments in the documents on economic and monetary union. I should like to see Her Majesty's Government using all their influence in an attempt to ensure that article 104A is implemented to the letter. For hon. Members who are not conversant with every last article, that is the guarantee of a no-bail-out rule, which is important if we are to contain the development of economic and monetary union to sensible proportions. It will be vital if we are to ensure our objective of developing a European monetary union while

[Mr. Forman]

retaining the bulk of fiscal powers unadulterated in national hands—in the hands of national Governments and Parliaments, where they should remain.

I was struck by the words of Graham Bishop of Salomon Brothers in a recent publication on the importance of the no-bail-out rule. He said:

"The purpose of the rule is clear: It is the circuit breaker between monetary union and the back-door creation of a 'United States of Europe', where a centralised government takes control over domestic public expenditure as the price of a bail-out. If the rule is credible, EMU should involve only the lightest fiscal interference when budgetary policies are sound, because the debt of EMU members will be of the highest grade."

If we achieved such development of economic monetary union, we would be doing it on a sound basis.

I strongly welcome the text that was negotiated at Maastricht on the European system of central banks in stage 2 and the European bank in stage 3. Article 2 stresses the primary objective of price stability and article 7 enshrines the guaranteed independence of the European central bank. The full benefits of price stability and statutory independence for the European central bank, and indeed for the Bank of England—that must be a necessary institutional corollary—will be enjoyed only if a future Government and Parliament agree in good time to adopt a single European currency. In today's European capital markets, the freedom of exchange rates, to which some of my hon. Friends are so attached, means only the freedom to devalue—a course of action that would prove to be as futile as it is nugatory in modern conditions.

In a recent article in the *Financial Times*, Sam Brittan pointed out quite succinctly:

"At present the UK already has, as a member of the hard ERM, most of the obligations of a single currency without all the advantages. There would be little to be lost from going the whole hog."

I agree with him, and there would be much to be gained at the appropriate time. The full benefits of a single currency will come through, which will benefit Britain and the entire Community.

I hope that the Government will draw the logical conclusions and lessons from their earlier correct decisions and lead this country forward, at the appropriate time, to a single currency and ever-closer union of the peoples of Europe.

5.51 pm

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): People have short memories, and it may be useful to remind the House that in 1972 President Pompidou announced on French television that there would be a European common currency by 31 December 1980. The Werner plan, from which that prediction was drawn, was wrecked by events outside Europe—the Nixon shocks and partly the effects of the OPEC increase in the oil price—but no hon. Member seems able to recall that it ever existed.

Maastricht could suffer the same fate. I agree with hon. Members who have said that it may prove to be a major step towards the valuable goal of greater unity in Europe, but let us face the fact that it changes nothing in today's world. The summit did not even attempt to close any of the yawning gaps in the single market, which must come into effect at the end of next year. It simply agreed a timetable for producing a single currency by, at the latest, 1999—with or without Britain. Even in this area, nothing significant will change in the real world until phase 2 of European monetary union takes effect in 1994—more than two years from now.

I want to start by asking what are the risks that the Delors plan—the origin of European economic and monetary union—will suffer the same fate as the Werner plan did 20 years ago. Let us remind ourselves, as the Prime Minister wisely did in his opening speech, that the Maastricht treaty does not come into force for more than 12 months—at the beginning of 1993—and only if every one of the 12 Governments who initialled it get it ratified by their Parliaments. The real debate is only beginning. As the Prime Minister said, only the British and Danish Parliaments have considered European monetary union, as it is now defined, or European political union.

If we look at the initial response to Maastricht, the omens are not wholly encouraging. There is growing opposition in Germany to giving up the deutschmark without any real return in political union, which Chancellor Kohl had said was a precondition of moving to a single currency. I see from today's *Financial Times* that a leading member of the board of the Bundesbank said yesterday that the Maastricht summit was a failure and might prove to be "a suicidal failure"—serious words from a key member of the body that drew up the detailed proposals for European economic and monetary union.

I cannot resist the feeling that the Government's extraordinary surrender yesterday to German bullying over the recognition of Croatia had something to do with the need to appease German public opinion, which is turning nasty on the whole process—or perhaps it was just sucking up to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who has succeeded in abandoning her resistance to German blandishments and has formed a common front with Chancellor Kohl in demanding the immediate and unconditional recognition of Croatia. But then, it is, of course, a funny old world.

French ratification is little more certain, because the extreme right, under Le Pen, is campaigning hard against what it inelegantly calls the "federasts" of the European movement. Le Pen may succeed in winning allies on this issue from the more moderate right wing, as he already has on the issue of immigration and race in France, which is a depressing prospect.

The ratification of the Mediterranean countries is no more certain. The Spanish Prime Minister has already said —it was said also by the Portugese at Maastricht—that their ratification will depend on more money for what is called cohesion and structural funds. They are talking of sums far higher than France, Germany or Britain seem prepared to provide. I am interested to see that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with his deep knowledge of the Spanish people and countryside, seems to agree with me on that.

But the biggest challenges to Maastricht will come, as they came to the Werner plan, in developments outside the European Community. It is clear that almost all the European Free Trade Association countries, except perhaps Iceland, will want to join the Community. They will probably all be members well before 1996, which is the earliest date for phase 3 of EMU. That will mean an enormous shift in the centre of gravity in Europe towards the north—something that we in Britain should heartily

welcome, because on many issues, our approach, or at least, that of Labour Members, has much in common with the countries of northern Europe.

If things go well, it seems that, certainly by the end of the century if not by the earlier date of 1997, it may be possible to form a single currency to which Germany, France, the Benelux countries, Denmark and the EFTA countries will belong. In such a case, it seems inconceivable and well nigh insane to imagine that Britain would stand out. All of us must have been deeply disturbed by the Chancellor's refusal to answer the question this afternoon —yes, we agree that Parliament must take the final decision, but what decision will he recommend in those circumstances?

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): He does not know.

Mr. Healey: He knows very well, because he is against a single currency in principle, like his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), who clearly expressed his views—which, I think, are shared by the present Chancellor—in an article in one of the tabloid newspapers. I believe it was the *Evening Standard*.

Mr. Radice: My right hon. Friend referred to the Chancellor's views but, when we asked him that question in the Select Committee, it became clear that he was not so much against it in principle as uncertain in his own mind what he should do.

Mr. Tony Banks: Sounds like a Liberal.

Mr. Healey: He does sound like a Liberal, but I do not like to explore the murky recesses of the Chancellor's mind. However, I must confess that his failure to give an answer—even that answer—to the question this afternoon was very significant.

The EFTA countries are not alone. I agree with all the right hon. and hon. Members who said—I think that almost all who have spoken so far made this point—that it is very important to give Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland the prospect of joining the Community at least by the end of the decade, and to give them every possible assistance in meeting the economic and political conditions for membership as soon as possible.

Of course, that will mean a big shift of gravity inside the Community to the east. By the end of the decade, power will have shifted to central and north-east Europe from its present location, which I suppose is somewhere between London, France and Rome.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): And Berlin.

Mr. Healey: I accept that, although I gather that even the German Parliament is deeply divided on how much of it and how much of the Government should move from Bonn to Berlin.

I think that the biggest challenges to the Maastricht process will come, as they did before, from outside Europe. The United States is clearly already becoming much more self-centred. If, partly because of Europe's obduracy over the common agricultural policy, the GATT talks break down, the process of disengagement from external responsibilities may move very much faster than anyone expects or hopes, both from Europe and from the west Pacific area.

The most important single factor is the disappearance of the Soviet Union from the world stage. Lenin, who does not often get a kind word these days, was right in at least one of his prophecies. He prophesied that the triumph of communism would lead to the withering away of the state. I do not think that anyone has ever seen a state wither away quite as fast as the Soviet state has in recent weeks.

However, the disappearance of the Soviet Union will have very disturbing consequences. It has been replaced by a commonwealth of independent states. If, as I believe, NATO is a biological monstrosity because it is an organ without a function, the commonwealth of independent states is a political nightmare because it is a function without an organ. It has, at the moment, absolutely no institutions through which to express itself.

It is worth remembering the lessons—even the recent lessons—of history. The disintegration of the European empires after the last war was followed by 45 years of armed conflict in the ex-colonies, in which 20 million people died in the far east, in the Indian subcontinent, in the middle east, in Africa and even in the Caribbean. All those factors are likely to be at work now that the Soviet empire has disintegrated.

Even worse, the European empires at least left behind them working administrative structures and moderately healthy economies, which meant that most of the ex-colonial countries have managed to maintain stable states and thriving economies—although, of course, not thriving as fast as ours in the west—but the Soviet empire is leaving no administration at all, only economic catastrophe.

It is often said that it is not very easy to turn an omelette back into eggs. Since the perestroika process began, the Soviet economy has followed a steady course downwards, and there seems no prospect at the moment of it reversing that process. We shall all be watching the success of Mr. Yeltsin's programme to form a judgment on it, if it is introduced in January.

If economic catastrophe is added to the political disintegration, the consequences for Europe could be dire, not only in terms of the millions of refugees who are already predicted, but possibly through the sale of nuclear weapons to any body of people or any Government in the third world or elsewhere who have the hard currency to pay for them.

I do not believe in a nuclear civil war in the Soviet Union—I think that Nazarbaev and Krawczuk want to hang on to their nuclear weapons as a defence against a Russian attack. I do not think that they have any intention of using them—nor have the Russians—but the risk that, as the system disintegrates, people may simply sell off the smaller nuclear weapons is a real one. I was glad that that was recognised by Mr. Baker on his recent visit to the Soviet Union. They pose enormous threats to western Europe and more immediate threats to eastern Europe, but there is still no obvious way in which the west can help to avoid the consequences until there is at least some clarity about where authority lies in the Soviet Union.

I agree with the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) that by far the most useful thing that we could do in the short run would be to fund a payments union among the commonwealth of independent states so that they could at least have a currency in which to trade with one another.

Against that background—I doubt whether many hon. Members would dispute the dangers that I have outlined —the argument about who won at Maastricht is pitifully irrelevant. Maastricht was not a triumph for any Government, although each of the Governments present

[Mr. Healey]

claimed it as one. Least of all was it a triumph for the British Prime Minister. I was interested to see that the *Financial Times* and *The Spectator* picked the same phrase —they described it as a "pyrrhic victory".

The Prime Minister has, of course, produced some novel marriages, some very strange bedfellows. The previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley, said that she was "thrilled" by the Prime Minister's success at Maastricht. My dear friend—if I may so describe him—the previous Foreign Secretary, who resigned from the right hon. Lady's Government over Europe, was equally thrilled, although he did not express himself—he never does—in quite such colourful language. To complete that glorious trinity, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) joined the throng during the debate.

I do not think that there is much for us to be proud about in the fact that the Prime Minister has relegated Britain to a second division of countries that can survive only by having low pay because they have low skills. Obviously, he sees Britain as the sweatshop of the world —he almost said as much—and, if we are unlucky enough to find him in office for more than a few more months, we may find ourselves taking the place previously occupied by the Soviet Union, as Upper Volta with rockets.

The only significant critic—I use the word "significant" with meaning—is the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) who, in spite of everything that the Whips can say to him, apparently still intends to vote against the Government tomorrow. The right hon. Gentleman glares, or rather stares impassively, at me. He certainly did not shake his head, but then, as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said, he is a "ghastly man."

Perhaps more worrying for the Government is the attitude of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who was reported by a most reliable gossip columnist called Peterborough in that impeccably Conservative newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* as saying that it would have been better if there had been no deal at all. I suspect that the Prime Minister and the other Ministers would agree with our great national poet, William Shakespeare, that

"Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

The time has come for the Prime Minister to stop playing Conservative party politics with the issues and to rise to the real level of the challenges that confront us in Britain, everyone in Europe and, indeed, every inhabitant of the planet.

I realise that, if someone is driving a car, and sitting behind him is a lady with a handbag and a man with fangs, he may feel it wiser to drive in the slow lane. My advice is that he should pull into a lay-by, turf the others out and then hand the wheel over to firmer and safer hands.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Hugh Dykes.

6.13 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Such was the ringing applause for the speech of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) that I did not hear you call my name, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am grateful to you, and also to the right hon. Member for Leeds, East. The applause rang through the House. The right hon. Gentleman gave his usual vintage performance, with many justified facts and views, and it was warmly received in all parts of the House, not only for its humour but for some of his more sombre comments about the present ominous geophysical appearance of Europe.

That, too, reinforces the lesson and message of the significance of the Maastricht summit—that greater cohesion and unity of the European Community is even more indispensable for solving its own internal economic, social and political problems and those of the rest of Europe as well.

As chairman of the European Movement in Britain, I am gratified to observe that a treaty which I would describe as extensive and profound has at long last been signed.

Members of Parliament and the British press have, understandably, been preoccupied with the matters about which the Government decided—with some justification, although that is a matter for debate—that there should be hesitation. The two key areas were final acceptance of the European monetary union agreement and the Government's resistance to many of the suggestions in the social programme of the additional treaty—those were not the original social suggestions in the social action programme.

However, the press in the other European member states rightly concentrated on the long list of measures that were agreed and signed in the Maastricht treaty. There has been less debate on those here, and I guess that over the two days of the debate there will still be less. Paradoxically, I shall share that omission, refraining deliberately from referring to those many matters in order to keep my speech short. Nevertheless, they represent a considerable achievement by all the member states.

The Bundestag had a debate on those matters last Friday. Although I have read only a summary of the one-day debate and not the full text of all the speeches, I believe that my impression is correct that the British hesitation over the two key areas was hardly referred to at all. The House of Commons, understandably—again, with some justification but not with total justification—will assume that for the other member states the double hesitation by the United Kingdom was the crucial aspect of the agreements at Maastricht, but it was not. For the Community as a whole, the Maastricht agreement and all its areas—including the social provisions, which the others will accept outside the treaty on the basis of a separate protocol to be agreed in a few months' time—were the significant aspect.

Given the Community's capacity to help other European countries—not only the successful ones who now wish to join, and are already beginning to apply, but the east European countries, with all their problems—it is extraordinary and perverse to suggest that there should be greater disunity in the Community at the very moment when greater aid and support is called for.

I was impressed by the way in which our Cabinet colleagues and other members of the team—the distinguished presence of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), prompts me to add his name—negotiated successfully on behalf of the United Kingdom. I suppose that this is a small matter to mention, but allowing for a slight extension to the 24 hours of the second day, the negotiation was completed more or less in

the time allotted—a remarkable feat and a testimony to the profound drafting and negotiating skills of many of the member states and many of the governmental teams. We should also pay tribute to the Dutch presidency.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend agree that when such councils involve constitutional amendments to the treaty as well as, as always, substantial business for the Heads of Government to transact, some new formula should be produced whereby meetings could be scheduled for a longer period? The agenda was in every respect unreasonable for the time allowed and it is remarkable that what was achieved was possible at all.

Mr. Dykes: That is a good point, and I agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, an original idea suggested informally by several people a long time ago was that there could be a two-day preliminary meeting, and then a two-day summit of the European Council. My hon. Friend was correct, too, in the implication of his remarks, in that due to lack of time or the natural delegation of functions, the European Council, the Council of Ministers and various other councils more and more frequently ask for Commission reports and proposals on matters. As a result, the Commission—still with 8,000 officials, who may be well paid but are nevertheless overworked—is dealing with more and more material not only initiated by itself in its legislative function of making proposals, but increasingly at the request of the politicians in the European Council. It is a double problem, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) has rightly referred.

Although many keen Europeans in this country and a significant and growing number of people outside, not only the younger generation, will naturally be disappointed that the Government chose to refrain from full commitment in two key areas, the long list of developments that were agreed is immensely encouraging. Although it may not seem much in terms of substance, part two of the treaty which deals with European citizenship raises the intriguing idea that in the one member state in which there is not a written constitution we now gain access to the treaty additions and to the written constitution which already exists in the Community. We also gain access to all the protections that will flow from that. There is also the future possibility of building some of the elements of the European convention on human rights into specific treaty additions of the European Community.

An antediluvian handful of hon. Members, many of them retiring at the next election, are not keen on these matters, but they are a diminishing and insignificant number. There is a substantial consensus in the House for deepening the European Community, which came from the Maastricht agreements. *[Interruption.]* I was not referring to my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark). I know that he is retiring, but he need not be too sensitive. I was referring to other more prominent hon. Members. My right hon. Friend has always had his views on the matter, whereas other colleagues have changed their minds more frequently. I respect my right hon. Friend's views on these matters.

The direction towards a true and profound European union is welcome and inexorable. It is inescapable because——

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dykes: I will not give way at the moment, although I may later.

Mr. Favell: My intervention may be helpful.

Mr. Dykes: I will not give way, although it is tempting to do so.

The whole process is inescapable precisely because more and more people want it to be so. We may say, "Eat your heart out" to Norman, to Peter, to William, to Austin and to others, if I may use just first names. A growing number of the population, not just the younger generation and not only because of the superficial conversion of the Labour party, want that process. They want Europe to become one entity and they will rapidly reject the national frontiers of the European member countries, which are now losing their residual relevance. Socially, economically and in human terms, the citizens of the Community are coming together. That is the unstoppable reality.

Mr. Marlow: Never mind the detail.

Mr. Dykes: If I had time to go into detail, as my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) urges, my speech would be far longer and other colleagues would not be able to speak later.

The pre-economic and monetary union full convergence measures are more severe in their final outturn than was anticipated several years ago when the whole debate began. We must be realistic about that. As time goes on, many of the economic and financial conditions may change significantly and the final stage of the agreement will need to be—[HON. MEMBERS: "Fudged."]—not fudged, but agreed in concrete terms on a rather different basis.

Although the United States economy is embraced by a single currency, and although many harmonised conditions conceal the differences, one wonders how much real internal convergence there is between the economies of Illinois, Texas and North Dakota—probably far less than there seems. The internal rates of inflation of the different states are far greater than we think, but there is no way of measuring that because of the existence of a single currency. The same will happen in Europe as stage 2 of the European monetary system gets going.

Nothing less than the aim of a full conglomeration of the living and working conditions of all European Community citizens—who will remain patriotic citizens of their own member states—will satisfy most citizens and electors in the various countries as their own national elections occur and as the European Parliament elections occur. I do not share the view that there has been a limited addition to the powers of the European Parliament. I believe that the extra powers will evolve into a significant additional step.

Mr. Favell: My hon. Friend paints a vision that does not exactly fill me with glee. There will be another conference in 1996. Will my hon. Friend crystal ball gaze and tell us what he expects will happen there?

Mr. Dykes: To which aspect of the conference in 1996 does my hon. Friend refer?

Mr. Favell: Presumably we shall go further towards the vision that my hon. Friend has. Where does he expect us to be after the 1996 conference?

Mr. Dykes: It will be best if my hon. Friend succeeds in catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that he can deal with those matters himself.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dykes: I will not because I am aware of the time and I wish to be fair to other hon. Members. Although our debate today will continue until 2 am, there is a long list of hon. Members who wish to speak and I promised to be brief.

The difference between pre-Maastricht and post-Maastricht is potentially profound, exciting and striking. Until the treaty was concluded last week—it will be signed at the end of February—the provisions of the treaty of Rome had remained creaking, distorted and hard to fulfil. All that is now transformed. The new machine of European union has inexorably started to run. It will not be long before the circumstances in this country—I do not refer to a change of Government at the next election, which I profoundly do not wish to see—allow us to catch up in the two key areas which were subjected to further delay on this occasion. It will be a matter of catching up.

As the social provisions begin to come off the production line as individual items to be separately concluded in the protocol outside the Maastricht treaty, there will be enormous debate and discussion in the press in this country about the desirability of us, after all, accepting some—I emphasise "some"—of those individual proposals. That will be an interesting stage to see, either before or after the election. It will be interesting to see the reaction of people in all parties, including the party which still fundamentally believes in one nation and in basic elements of worker protection which have nothing to do with the illicit and undesirable resuscitation of trade union rights.

In the meantime, it is not that we are hesitating fundamentally. The Government are fully committed to the next stage of monetary union. As chairman of the European Movement in Britain, I am entitled to say that the European movement from all countries marched at Maastricht. The parades, including the gallant band from Britain, and the torchlight processions—which were not reminiscent of torchlight processions in the past, I hasten to add, in case my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North gets excited—were not in vain. I anticipate that there will be a lively and profound European Movement campaign in Britain in 1992 to persuade us to abandon some of the more hesitant stances that we have shown so far and to perceive ourselves as full exponents of European union.

6.27 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): After the deliciously witty and perceptive speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and after the truly formidable and memorable speech by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—[HON. MEMBERS: "Crawler."] People have said many things about me, but I have never before been called a crawler. As one who was among the 69 Labour Members who failed to crawl and who voted to go into Europe, I am delighted with party policy.

I turn to another aspect of Maastricht. The final communiqúe says:

"Recalling the declaration issued by the Community and its member States on 2 December, the European Council takes a most serious view of accusations against Libyan nationals in connection with the bombings of flight Pan Am 103 in December 1988 and of flight UTA 722 in September 1989. The European Council reaffirms its condemnation of all acts of terrorism wherever and by whomever committed.

The European Council has noted the demands made of the Libyan authorities by the Governments of France, the United Kingdom and the United States on 27 November.

It fully endorses these demands and calls on the Libyans to comply promptly and in full".

Like a number of my colleagues who, a month ago, went to visit Libya and who have taken a long-standing interest in Arab affairs, I am deeply worried about this matter. What happens if the Libyans do not comply? And, to put it bluntly, I think that it is whistling in the wind to suppose that they will.

Are we first of all to have sanctions, because if we have sanctions, the first people who will be hit by them are the 5,500 British engineers and other workers dependent on air links, who are earning our bread and butter and theirs in Libya at present.

If the Government do not believe me about that, they should have a word with Dick Morris, the chairman of Brown and Root, one of the 36 British companies involved out there. I may say, for the benefit of my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), that Mr. Morris is also the chairman of Nirex and cannot be counted on as a particular political friend of ours. I think that the Government ought to talk to him and talk to those responsible to the British nationals in Libya. It is not good enough simply to say, "They went knowing the risks and deserve anything that happens. It is up to them." We cannot behave like that.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should not we bear in mind the fact that 250 people died as a result of this act of terrorism? Is my hon. Friend arguing that we should do nothing because British nationals may be the subject of retaliation if sanctions work? Such retaliation can always be used as blackmail by criminal dictatorships. Is my hon. Friend seriously suggesting that no action should be taken to bring these people to justice?

Mr. Dalyell: I will not be lectured by anyone on what happened at Lockerbie. I went to Lockerbie; it is relatively near to my constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) knows, the Lothian police had to clear it up. I talked to Rev. Kirk, the Minister of Lochmaben, and to Father Keegan, who lives in Sherwood crescent, and they do not want vengeance.

Mr. Winnick: Not vengeance, justice.

Mr. Dalyell: Justice is another thing; it is a very difficult situation. We must bear in mind the fact that there are many British expatriates involved.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): The hon. Gentleman will be on to the Belgrano next.

Mr. Dalyell: I can say to the Member who interrupted that, in 1986, when, as a result of what happened in La Belle discotheque, Berlin, there was an attack on Tripoli by aircraft based in this country by the Americans, the terrorist attack in Germany turned out not to have been Libyan inspired at all, but to have been inspired by Syrian and Iranian groups. It is uncharacteristic of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Dykes) to make such interventions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not Dykes, Tebbit."] The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was a

member of the Government responsible, and they got the wrong people. The bombing of the residential centre of Benghazi on the basis of false information has created an atmosphere in the Arab world that we fail to understand. British expatriates think well of their Libyan colleagues. When one talks to them out of their Libyan colleagues' earshot, that is the general view that they express. It may surprise the House to learn that they also pointed out that the Libyan Government were, as they understood it, pretty uncorrupt, and were not feathering their own nests.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Feathering coffins.

Mr. Dalyell: Would the Minister of State care to intervene?

Mr. Garel-Jones: Naturally, I accept that the hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct in raising this matter because it was referred to in the European Council transcript. I intervened to say that the Government of Libya may not be feathering their own nests but that they seem to be feathering other people's coffins.

Mr. Dalyell: We had better get the evidence a bit clearer. The Minister knows a lot about Europe. Does he believe that the Italians would actually implement sanctions? Bluntly, I do not believe that, whatever Mr. Andreotti may or may not sign—and it may be a question of "may not sign"—given the Italian interest in the Libyans and their connections, there would be meaningful sanctions. We are talking about people who have the largest engineering project in the western world—the great man-made river project. Vast amounts of money and numerous contracts, particularly with Italy, are involved.

If sanctions do not work, what will we be reduced to? Frankly, we will be reduced to the possibility of another air strike. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), gave me a polite interview this afternoon and I have no personal criticism of him. He reiterated once again that the Foreign Secretary had said that an air strike was not ruled out. The House often accepts that personal experience is relevant. I can only say that my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) asked ex-ambassador Khaduri, who was the engineer in charge of the northern section of the great man-made river project, whether in 1986 there was any attack on that project, and he said no. He said quietly that the attack was not on the engineering project or on military installations but on people's homes, people's old people, people's children and people's houses. That was the feeling that prevailed in the place.

Like Jim Swire, I was greatly moved by my visit to the museum which was once Colonel Gaddafi's house. On the first floor is the bedroom of the three-year-old daughter killed in the attack. Her toys are scattered around the room and there are pictures of the operation during which she died. I do not wonder that Jim Swire gave a moving account of how he and Colonel Gaddafi held hands with the pictures of their two daughters. It is a very emotional situation. Before we go any further down the road, we must ask whether we are seriously thinking about any kind of air strike, because it would be a catastrophe for us in the Arab world.

Last Friday, the Lord Advocate gave me a 50-minute interview. I choose my words carefully. As the longest serving Scottish Member of Parliament and the son-in-law of a previous Lord Advocate, I think that I can say that I have a healthy respect for the law, and his office. The Lord Advocate was impeccably courteous, but I do not have complete confidence in the Lord Advocate or the Crown Office—the Lothian police, those on my Front Bench and the Law Society know why. I do not take what the Lord Advocate says as gospel, but I urge that some legal authorities should at least meet the Libyan judge in Switzerland or elsewhere, because the Libyans say that they simply do not have the information for which they have been asking for a long time in relation to the Al Megrahi and Khalifa Fhimah. Would any country surrender its own nationals, as we are asking the Libyans to do, without any diplomatic relations? I think that we would not, unless we had a great deal more information than the Libyans have been given.

Colonel Al-Dabari, the head of intelligence, said that

"The two Libyan persons linked by the American and British Judiciary for the Pan American plane bombing in 1988 are in custody. The real criminal is now free."

I do not underrate the awfulness of Lockerbie or the awfulness of modern war. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has said, we must do everything to achieve justice in the matter. As I said to Mr. Richard Prentice, the Foreign Secretary's private secretary, and as I repeated to the Minister of State this afternoon, it is high time that the Government talked seriously to the British ophthalmologist, whose name and telephone number I have given to the Government, who regularly treats Colonel Gaddafi. It is high time that there was some understanding of what happens in that country, which is rather deeper than what appears in the tabloid press.

Colonel Al-Dabari has said:

"There is no law which says a country has to hand over its citizens for investigation in another country."

Is that true? If not, what is the law or legal basis upon which the Government are making their demand? I have the first question for the Attorney-General at his next oral Question Time and it is on that very subject.

Colonel Al-Dabari is quoted as saying:

"There is no legal basis for saying that the investigation has to take place where the incident happened."

Is that right? If not, what is the legal basis? I hope that the Minister who replies to this debate at 1.45 am will answer those points.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham, has said:

"if it is a form of state crime, you really cannot expect the victims to accept that the state responsible should be playing a significant part in investigating or in trying those that we charged with the events."

That is one point of view. However, Professor Turner of the University of Kent wrote a letter to *The Guardian* on 19 November in which he stated:

"There is a long list of similar questions that could be asked. Would the US have acceded to a request by the Hung Seng government in Cambodia to hand over for trial the US officials responsible for the completely illegal in both US and international law bombing of Cambodia in the seventies that cost more than 100,000 Cambodian lives? Will the US pay compensation to the relatives of 50,000 Chileans who lost their lives in the military coup in 1972, a coup organised and financed by the CIA to overthrow a democratically elected government, in violation of every significant principle in international law?"

[Mr. Dalyell]

[HON. MEMBERS: "What has this got to do with Maastricht?"] The issue is referred to in the communiqué, so I am entitled to raise it tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley knows about the Chilean situation.

Professor Turner asked:

"Will the US now hand over to Libya the officials for the illegal bombing of Tripoli in 1986."

Even I would not have been in favour of the handing over of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) for trial in Tripoli.

With regard to the victims to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North, referred, Jim Swire, on behalf of most of the victims, claims that he is against retaliation. That view is shared by other people involved in that tragic loss. Do the Government believe that reprisals might alienate the Arab world? What is the Government's assessment of the likely impact of action on the middle east peace process?

The semi-official Cairo press reflects unmistakable alarm. Mahfouz al-Ansari, the editor of al-Gomhuriya and close to Mr. Mubarak's chief political adviser, warned President Bush that any shots fired at Colonel Gaddafi would ricochet against America's Arab allies. He said:

"You delivered your blow in the Gulf war, liberated Kuwait, and maintained legitimacy. Everyone stood behind you and with you, although the punishment was directed against a dear and brotherly country. However, this time around if you try to strike a blow or hand out punishment to another brother, to Libya, believe me, you will then be punishing friends, your friends, more than you will be punishing the colonel."

A great deal more could be asked about this. For example, why did a former Transport Minister, the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), in a press briefing, make it quite clear a few months after Lockerbie that the police had done a marvellous job and knew that the people who had perpetrated the crime were from Syria or Iran? Why are the suspects now entirely different from those leaked by the right hon. Member for Southend, West to the press when he was a Minister? Those serious questions must be answered.

If it is said that I have no friends in believing that the Libyans might not be wholly responsible, I need simply refer to many reports and in particular *The Guardian* of 19 November in which, under the headline

"Israel stands by Syrian link to Lockerbie",

the Israelis are quoted as saying:

"'We have never said that we knew the last link in the chain—the hand that actually planted the bomb' said Yigal Carmon, the adviser on counter-terrorism to the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir."

He went on to say that they believed that others were involved.

I make no apology for having raised this issue today. By the end of the Christmas recess, we may be sucked into action that will have a serious effect on this country, for many of our fellow countrymen and on our relations with the Arab world. The matter was properly raised in Maastricht. Whenever, around 2 am, the Minister replies, I will be here, and I hope that I will receive a response to my questions.

6.47 pm

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): I am sure that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) believes that those issues are more important than any other issue that we might debate today. I believe that the most compelling part of his speech was his suggestion that an Italian Government might not stand by a sanctions policy even if they agreed to one. Many of us might believe that, and the Euro-sceptics believe that that illuminates certain of the commitments into which the Government may enter.

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tebbit: No, I will not give way.

For the benefit of those who are more interested in the way in which I will vote than in what I will say, I must state that I will vote for the policies of the Government who were elected in 1987 under the prime ministership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) when I was chairman of the Conservative party. I am a little too old or perhaps too consistent to execute the nimble footwork required for a 180 deg change of tack. I shall vote against the outcome of the Maastricht conference.

I say that sadly, because the Prime Minister has every right to be proud of the skill and determination with which he negotiated at Maastricht. The outcome might indeed have been very much worse. Indeed, had Britain been represented by a Labour Government, it undoubtedly would have been very much worse, not least because, as we were shown again today, although the Leader of the Opposition has many sterling qualities, mastery of the detail of complex documents is not among them.

There was a great deal of talk at times at Maastricht about Waterloo, but, of course, Maastricht was not a Waterloo. Waterloo was a decisive victory—one which put back the time, if it ever comes, of monetary, economic and political union by a very long time. Maastricht was not an offensive battle of that kind. It was a limited battle—a defensive battle—and one in which Her Majesty's Government sought to minimise the damage which would be caused not just to this kingdom but to the European Community by the federalist follies if they had been allowed to go unchecked.

None the less, there was established at Maastricht a series of bridgeheads into our constitution, into the powers of this House, and into the lives of individuals and businesses in this country. However, I believe that, despite the extremely well orchestrated eulogies over the outcome of Maastricht, or perhaps even because of them, far too little credit has been given to the Prime Minister for the skill with which he has created a new structure for co-operation at intergovernmental level which is distanced, above all, from the Commission.

Unhappily, I doubt whether that structure is watertight or will remain so. In some areas, the European Parliament has involvement, in others the Commission, but none the less the structure which has been created has the possibility of becoming a non-federal road to the closer co-operation between the European nations which I and many others wish to see.

Of course, in the excitement of Maastricht, the Prime Minister declared that he had won game, set and match. With another conference scheduled for 1996, the game is

not yet over, let alone the set or the match. Let me quote from the official journal of the Community of 12 December. It refers to the treaty creating

"the European Union covering the Community's existing and increased responsibilities".

It states:

"These are . . . the creation of the common foreign and security policy covering the formulation in the longer term of a common defence policy, which may in time lead to a common defence; an increase in the role of the European Parliament . . . the appointment of an ombudsman plus an improvement in the Parliament's legislative powers by the introduction of the co-decision procedure; redefinition or extension of Community competence in education, training, cohesion, research and development, environment, trans-european networks, industry, health, culture, consumer protection and development cooperation".

That is not an insignificant list, followed, by the way, by the creation of a citizenship of the union—the union which begins to sound more and more like a state in many of its aspects. I oppose all of that, so I could hardly go along with the outcome. The draft treaty sets out specific objects, and among them is the promotion of the establishment of a single currency and economic union, as well as the strengthening of social cohesion through a new line of public expenditure. It also asserts the intention to implement a common foreign security and, eventually, defence policy.

Opt-out clauses or no opt-out clauses, within those structures, Her Majesty's Government, by signing the treaty, will be committed to working for the attainment of those policies. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took particular pride today in recollecting how President Eisenhower commented that, when the British sign up to something, they intend to honour it. Perhaps that is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was uncharacteristically unable to say clearly whether, if the treaty conditions of convergence were met, there could be a case for Britain remaining outside the single currency. It seems to me that, unless there is in the Government's mind a clear possibility of that, the opt-out clause is nonsense.

Moreover, why the opt-out clause if we are committing ourselves and Her Majesty's Government to work for the attainment of a single currency? That clearly implies that Her Majesty's Government have no objections in principle to the creation of a single currency, and that their objections must be solely on possible grounds of practicality at the time. That is an extremely worrying aspect.

We—Her Majesty's Government—have agreed, as I have said, that the union and its member states shall—I emphasise the word "shall"; it is not "may"—

"define and implement common foreign and security policy."

What is more, it is declared—I checked today the wording in the current draft—that

"Member states will, with regard to Council decisions requiring unanimity, to the extent possible avoid to prevent a unanimous decision where a qualified majority exists in favour of that decision."

Setting aside the rather unfortunate translation, it seems to me that Her Majesty's Government have bound themselves to use their best endeavours not to veto an understanding on foreign policy which may emerge by a qualified majority. If it does not mean that, perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister will tell me what it does mean. I presume that my understanding of the matter is correct.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am happy to answer my right hon. Friend now. The position is clear. No decision by qualified majority voting can be taken, or no subject can be brought up for qualified majority voting, unless that is agreed by unanimity. I think that that is clear.

Mr. Tebbit: I am not at all sure that that is what the section says. Even allowing for the excruciating English, it seems to me to be an undertaking on the part of Her Majesty's Government that, where a decision might arise by a qualified majority, Her Majesty's Government will use every endeavour not to torpedo it by insisting on making it a question of unanimity. That is what it seems to me to mean.

I do not have the advice of the Law Officers, but presumably the Government do, so perhaps I could be as helpful as I can to my right hon. Friends and suggest that they may come back later tonight with a very clear explanation of what that clause means. I hope that they will be able to clear it with our partners in the meantime, because it sounds very much to me as though it was in operation yesterday, when my right hon. Friend left the shores of Britain totally opposed to the recognition of Croatia and Serbia and came back totally convinced that they should be recognised. Whether that decision on recognition is right or good is not the point that I argue. It seems that, within a comparatively short trip, a substantial change in the Government's position was achieved.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Perhaps I could help my right hon. Friend a little further. A decision to recognise Croatia has already been taken by both the United Kingdom and other members of the Community. It was the timing of recognition that was under discussion yesterday. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that my right hon. Friend wishes to hear my reply, even if Opposition Members do not. It was agreed yesterday that if, in the opinion of the arbitration committee under Lord Carrington, certain conditions had been met, recognition would take place. If those conditions are not met, Her Majesty's Government, and, indeed, their partners in the Community, will be free to take their own decision.

Mr. Tebbit: I am happy to have my hon. Friend's explanation, because I am sure that it comes as a great illumination not only to me but to the assembled corps of press and television journalists and everyone else who has been writing about the matter.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): And Chancellor Kohl.

Mr. Tebbit: And, indeed, Chancellor Kohl, as my hon. Friend says.

Clearly, we had all got the wrong end of the stick. But I am glad that we have all been disillusioned and told that we had it completely wrong, and that the Government had a covert, unknown policy which they were too shy to explain to the world at large.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tebbit: I am always eager to accept a little help from the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Kaufman: I am afraid I am not able to provide any help to the right hon. Gentleman. I fear that I must disillusion him. What the Minister of State has just told

[Mr. Kaufman]

him was not what the Foreign Secretary told the House at Question Time today. The Foreign Secretary gave an entirely different set of criteria for the possible recognition of the Yugoslav republics by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Tebbit: I am not sure whether that was helpful or not. It seemed to me to show that many of us were confused about the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

I notice that the treaty also requires that the presidency will represent the union—this new creation—in matters which come within common foreign and security policy. It will

"be responsible for the implementation of common measures; in that capacity it shall in principle express the position of the Union in international organisations and international conferences".

Exactly what does that mean? Is the United Nations Security Council an international organisation or conference? If the union has a common policy on matters which are to be discussed within the Security Council, will it be represented by the presidency? Will the United Kingdom be represented by the presidency? As my right hon. Friend knows, there are two nations within the union which hold a veto in the Security Council.

I understand that the matters which I raise are difficult, but it should not be necessary for my hon. Friend the Minister to look too far into the documents to say whether the policy that appears to be set out here—that the presidency shall represent the union for matters which come within common foreign and security policy—will make any difference to the way in which Britain is represented in the United Nations.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am happy to set my right hon. Friend's mind at rest. The position of the United Kingdom and the Republic of France as members of the Security Council is specifically safeguarded in the treaty.

Mr. Tebbit: I am grateful to hear that. But what about other aspects of the United Nations? In which intergovernmental conferences and organisations will we be represented by the presidency? It is a pretty unclear piece of work. Or, indeed, it was pretty clear until my hon. Friend the Minister began to explain it.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tebbit: No.

While I realise that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister feels that he has hedged around the bridgeheads established by the Community and the union with good defensive positions, all experience within the Community suggests that it will expand from any bridgehead which it has been given.

Mr. Favell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Tebbit: No, if my hon. Friend will excuse me.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has suggested, it would not be honourable for Britain to sign up to those aims and objectives without sincerely intending to implement them.

So now there are many other European dimensions. The treaty refers to a European dimension in education and says:

"The Community shall implement a vocational training policy."

Then, under a protocol on economic and social cohesion, all 12 nations have agreed that a cohesion fund will be set up which will support

"member states with a per capita GNP of less than 90 per cent. of Community average".

It sounds as if there will be many beneficiaries of the fund, but not too many payers-in.

I am glad to hear the words of my old friend Otto Lambsdorff in Germany. He questions how long people in Germany will be willing to bear the excessive costs of supporting poorer areas. I do not share the optimism of the Leader of the Opposition that all the money required could come out of the funding of the common agricultural policy. That could happen only over the dead bodies of the French, the Italians, the Bavarians, the Irish, and one or two others who would constitute something like a blocking majority.

The treaty commits us to further policies. No one could object to being committed to ensuring prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources. Presumably it is within that envelope that the Environment Commissioner will campaign for the much-talked-about tax on hydrocarbons, while his friend the Energy Commissioner proposes to subsidise coal mining. Those two policies seem slightly incompatible, but I understand the needs of social cohesion between the German miners and the Federal Government, which coughs up an illegal subsidy of £14 billion a year to its coal-mining industry.

The treaty also contains a definition of subsidiarity. Oh, subsidiarity is a marvellous thing. Presumably it is under the doctrine of subsidiarity that we are not to fix our own speed limits for lorries and motor coaches on our roads. They will be fixed "at the appropriate level". The appropriate level will presumably be the union, the federal or the Brussels level. How on earth can that happen under the new definition of subsidiarity? It seems to me that subsidiarity means whatever I say it should mean.

We also find in the treaty a new commitment that

"the Community shall contribute to the establishment and development of trans-European networks in the areas of transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructures"

The Council may, by qualified majority, establish guidelines

"covering the objectives, priorities and broad lines of measures envisaged in the sphere of trans-European networks".

I ask myself whether every right hon. and hon. Member in the House knows in this context what a trans-European network is. I would love to go round the House asking hon. Members whether they have checked the definition and whether they are happy that the guidelines should be binding on us and should be reached by qualified majority voting. In order to encourage hon. Members to peruse the treaty with great care, I shall let them all go and read the relevant section—indeed, find it themselves—to discover what a trans-national network is.

Lastly, I turn to monetary union. As I have said before, it is possible to argue that a single currency either would be of economic benefit to the Community or would not. I happen to take the second view, and to believe that, until convergence—not the measurements for the economists but real convergence, in terms of living standards and gross domestic product—is achieved, a single currency would be a disaster. It would lock into everlasting poverty in the Community those who are already in poverty. It would require the movement of massive sources of funds and of millions of people. They would both bring about

the resentments which are already fuelling the march of the Nazis and neo-Nazis in Germany, the National Front in France, the Lombardy Front, the Vlaams Blok and others. Those forces will be unleashed and will destroy the European Community, which has achieved so much good for Europe in the past 40 years.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The Standing Order must now be applied and speeches must last no longer than 10 minutes.

7.10 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) mentioned the role of the central bank, which is what I wish to talk about most. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was right to try to circumscribe the work that it would do. The proposed central bank needs to be dealt with in that way.

One tradition is common to all parties of the left and centre—there has always been a deep suspicion of banks and bankers. That suspicion has not extended merely to the socialist parties, but also to the Democratic party in America, the centre parties in Europe and social democrats elsewhere, who have all regarded the power of such banks with awe and apprehension—the literature is abundant and the cartoons remain for ever in our minds.

The reason for that is the power of banks and bankers. If they have not been regulated, they have always been able to close companies, to withdraw support from Governments and to dominate economies. Additionally, they naturally want a high exchange rate, which provides strength for their international operations, and high interest rates to add to their profitability, which is not always in the best interests of the country concerned. That is why the nationalisation of the Bank of England received such wide support in 1945. Even Tories voted for it.

Those people who call for independence must ask themselves why the measure to nationalise the Bank of England gained such acceptance. Those who look to the Bundesbank as a model for Britain and the Community must ask themselves how it makes its decisions. Is it always unanimous? If it makes decisions in that way, we must ask what they are. What level of inflation does it want to achieve? Is it 3 per cent., 2 per cent., 1 per cent. or zero? Do the members of the Bundesbank always come to the same conclusion, and who decides? Such matters are largely political and at a time of crisis they become even more political.

Why has the Bundesbank been so successful? We must question whether it has been all that successful. The Bundesbank did not create the German economic miracle —it was made by companies such as Volkswagen, Bayer-Hoechst and Siemens. They owe little to the Bundesbank, but it owes everything to the success of Germany industry. Out of the devastation, the expertise and skills of the work force remained. Whatever is destroyed can be recreated and improved if the people remain. Our own greatest wasted assets are the liabilities and skills in the hands and minds of our people. Germany exploited them and we did not. That also happened in Japan. The economic miracle was not a miracle of brilliant minds within the Government or the central bank—it came from manufacturing industry. So when we consider such matters—creating research teams and design offices —we must remember that it was German industry rather than the bank which produced the miracle.

People who call for an independent central bank and for a Eurobank must look to a future in which it might have to deal not merely with a recession like the one that we have just experienced, but with slump and depression. We must not assume that we have finally eliminated all those problems which occurred so often in previous decades and centuries. It is easy to abandon Government intervention at a time of prosperity, but we must take into account the less happy situations which have been experienced in every century and which we may have to deal with again. At such times, Government intervention is required. Measures taken in the 1930s, such as Franklin Roosevelt's new deal, which was hated by bankers, could come into their own. There could be a time when Governments have to take charge of economies for the sake of their citizens, whom only they can represent.

I used to hold the opinion that an international depression was not possible because Governments would overcome their differences when faced with such a catastrophe. I cannot be sure that they would do that and with a Eurobank I shall be even less sure.

What do we mean when we talk about control of the central bank? The controllers would be a body of 12 Finance Ministers seeking to control the immense financial power of the Eurobank, faced with all the difficulties of language and communication. The power of the bank would rival that of national Governments. That is the monster that we could be creating.

If all Governments, or even only the major Governments, were agreed and exercised their powers it might just work, but there could be differences of view. In a crisis, one or more of the major countries might find the situation acceptable. If there were such a division of view —one would need to be a great optimist to rule that out —those who pressed for inaction would be most likely to win. Without a decisive political viewpoint, the bankers' view would almost certainly prevail.

It is hard to overemphasise the power of the head of the Eurobank. The day-to-day decision making provides enormous power, which to a large extent would have to be conceded. At a time of crisis, faced with a part-time group of Finance Ministers, invariably holding different viewpoints and anxious to return to their own countries, the head of the Eurobank would be almost unchallengeable.

The right hon. Member for Chingford mentioned the problems of convergence and there are also problems of regional development. Those will always be difficult to reconcile with problems of growth. As the right hon. Gentleman said, convergence is what it is all about and there are few pointers as to how it will be achieved.

However, all of that is subordinate to the haste with which these monumental changes are being rushed forward. The Community seems to be intent on preparing a blueprint which we are called upon to accept. There seems little place for organic growth, for co-operation leading to trust, for greater confidence leading to changes in the light of experience rather than as a result of a brainstorm. The Community should be trying to restore that process. There are enthusiasts who want to change the entire working of the Community, in contrast with the clearly nonsensical common agricultural policy, which is

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

removed from any sensible reform. What a statement of priorities: if we cannot change the CAP, let us concentrate instead on a constitutional revolution.

Greater confidence in the workings of the Community is required. Before giving it greater powers and losing some of our own, we should examine how the existing arrangements are being administered. That is where I feel that changes need to be made.

Let us look at the report of the Court of Auditors and the strictures that it makes. The reports which illustrate implementation of Community policies are also important. The Public Accounts Committee report on external trade measures for agricultural produce states that West Germany had 583 irregularities, the United Kingdom had 130 and Greece had two. In another report Britain had 11, Germany had 28 and Italy had none. Those figures do not stretch one's credulity because they are obvious nonsense. The auditors' report needs teeth to bring about changes. Countries which tend to abide by the laws must not be disadvantaged by those who have a more relaxed or even a corrupt approach to Community regulations. If we are to grow together, we must have a minimum of trust in the administrative competence and will of member Governments.

I look forward to a number of actions which need to be taken. First, the Community's published accounts and financial and performance information need to be presented in a clear form. Many people who are best fitted to query financial matters cannot be expected to undertake an investigation to discover where the money went. The figures must be properly set out in the way that the National Audit Office has done so successfully.

Secondly, there must be more effective ways to hold the Commission to account for its expenditure. Personal accountability is important. In Britain we have that. We have accounting officers who carry the responsibility. If one wants a job for the European Parliament, let us forget some of the nonsensical views which have been put forward and let the extra powers be used to investigate areas of expenditure which are clearly fraudulent. There are already some links between the National Audit Office and the Commission and I hope that these will be extended.

What saddens me most is that the problems that I have outlined should have been appreciated by many other countries in the Community. They include the difficulties of convergence, the power of the Eurobank and the difficulties in getting control over such a body. The question before the Community is whether it has the ability and the political will to bring about the essential changes in a moving and not invariably crisis-free world.

I want a solution. I voted for entry against a three-line Whip, and I would do it again. I do not want to be locked out, but the main debate should be about the way the Community meets the basic needs of its members, providing wider opportunities and improving prosperity, establishing greater trust between countries, encouraging compatibility while respecting distinctiveness. That is what should concern us most. We should turn our attention in that direction. Mr. Delors has been too clever by half. It is time for the realists to take control.

7.21 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): When the then Conservative Prime Minister returned from the Congress of Berlin with the plaudits of the world ringing in his ears, after helpful interventions by the German Chancellor Bismarck, he arrived by train at Victoria station. He was met by the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times*, who asked, "Lord Beaconsfield, how does it feel to hear the cheers of the world ringing in your ears?" Dizzy, after a pause, replied, "The whole world? There is no one left." What it is generally thought that he meant was that his mother, his wife and his sister were all by then dead, but it was also a reflection of a great statesman aware of the highly ephemeral nature of human achievement.

Our present Prime Minister has come back from another conference, again with the plaudits of the world, and certainly those of almost the whole of the Conservative party, ringing in his ears. I join in these cheers. He, together with his team—the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office—did a brilliant negotiating job. In a difficult situation, they brought back a result that was much better than the one that I expected and feared. However, I do not share, and have never shared, the enthusiasm of those who wish to rush forward into a federal Europe.

In the 32 years that I have been a Member of Parliament, I have always voted the pro-European ticket. I voted in favour of the original application to join the Common Market in 1961 by the then Harold Macmillan, which started our negotiations for entry. I have continued to vote the pro-European ticket at every point. The nature of the case that we have to put to our constituents has altered a great deal during my time in the House. I voted against the referendum proposal because I am against referendums in principle, but when the referendum was held in 1975, I campaigned actively in favour of Europe, making 35 speeches. In every one of those speeches, I gave the people whom I was addressing, including those in my constituency in Lincolnshire, a categorical assurance that Britain could never be forced to do anything of vital national importance to which it had not consented. I said that we would always have the right to veto anything against our fundamental national security and social desires. I meant that at the time, as did all my colleagues who campaigned along similar lines in the run up to the referendum, from the leader of my party downwards.

A different situation has now arisen, and we must apply our minds to it. I shall confine my remarks entirely to the single currency, which is what I know most about anyway from my commercial experience, but also because it is by far the most important aspect of the matters under discussion. There are two aspects to the single currency —accountability and practicality. One of the things that astonish me about the parliamentary Labour party is that it hardly seems to worry about accountability. It is surely the case that if we have a single currency for the whole of Europe and a single central bank, we in the House of Commons will lose control over many of the key matters that so much affect our national life.

The Labour party is making a great and understandable fuss about mortgages, but mortgages, as we all know, are intimately linked to the current rate of interest. Once

there is a single currency and a single central bank, the rate of interest will not be decided by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England.

Mr. Budgen: It is not now.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I will not go into the issue of the exchange rate mechanism, because I was not in favour of joining it in the first place. The United States is also in a serious recession, but has interest rates of 4·5 per cent. compared to ours of 10·5 per cent. Were we not members of the exchange rate mechanism, I have no doubt that our interest rates and therefore our mortgage rates would be lower. However, I do not want to get drawn into that wider argument, although it underlines the point that I am making. Just this first step—joining the ERM—has limited our economic room for manoeuvre and the further steps towards monetary union that are suggested will take it away altogether.

The question is whether we are prepared to give up what the House has existed for 800 years to defend and for which our predecessors have fought—control of the economy and the distribution of money, and the control of taxation which stems from that. That will disappear if we become members of a single European currency. It is extraordinary that the parliamentary Labour party, which has always been critical of the European concept, has gone overboard on this. As far as one can understand from the speech of the Leader of the Opposition earlier today, he would sign, straight away, now, a commitment to join the single European currency in 1997, irrespective of the economic situation of this country, of Europe or of the world at that time. As Labour Governments have never been able to foresee what was going to happen to the economy even six weeks ahead, I do not know how the Labour party can be so confident about the situation in six years' time.

The second aspect is practicality. I rather agree with the fear expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), that unless there is an extraordinary economic and social convergence and a convergence of standards of living throughout Europe—by then it may stretch not just from the Atlantic to the Urals but from the Baltic to the Black sea—there will be tremendous unemployment and discontent in foreign regions.

I know that part of the scheme is an immense transfer of wealth from the richer to the poorer countries, but we all know from our constituency experience that even such a modest scheme as the rate support grant, which was introduced by Winston Churchill in the 1920s to help the poorer parts of England by transferring to them rate income from the richer areas, caused tremendous difficulties. In my constituency, throughout my time in the House, I have always heard complaints in the shire counties that people have to pay more in rates to support the industrial poor of the north. Already, criticism is building up in Germany of this concept that huge sums of German taxpayers' money will be transferred elsewhere. The burden that the five new länder impose on west Germany is only a first example of the burden that will fall on the German taxpayer in order to fulfil those obligations. I am doubtful whether they will long be prepared to meet them.

We should recognise that the French have been able to stay inside the exchange rate mechanism only by devaluing their currency seven times. When the French have a single currency and cannot devalue, what will they do? We all know what they will do. I know because I have a French wife—they will go out into the streets and fight. Let us not put Britain and modern Europe into a position where the fate of our continent will be determined, as has been the case so often in the past, by the hurling of paving stones around the Champs Elysees.

7.31 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It was rather wretched of the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) to criticise my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who today gave a bravura performance. It contrasted with the Prime Minister's downbeat effort. Quite frankly, he gave us a vision of the future, and it yawns. It is obvious that he now realises that the deal that he brought back from Maastricht will not stick either in the country or with Conservative Members.

I accept that the Prime Minister enjoyed some success at Maastricht, but it was a party political success. It was not a national success; it was not a success for Britain. As is usually the case, the interests of the Tory party were put before the interests of the country. The Prime Minister set out to get the best deal that he could for the Tory party, not for Britain. He failed to get a deal for Britain that is worth the paper on which it is written.

Initially—and this is interesting—the right hon. Gentleman threw dust in the eyes of his party's right wing, especially the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). As we have heard, she was thrilled by the outcome at Maastricht. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) gave an excellent party-pooper speech: he was more appalled than thrilled by the outcome. I know that one should not repeat private conversations, but when he was on his way to the Library, I heard him say, "I am just off to read the small print in the treaty." He obviously went to the Library and read the small print to good effect because he has revealed matters to Conservative Members that I do not think they previously knew. Certainly, the right hon. Member for Finchley did not know. She knows as little about the consequences and implications of the Maastricht treaty as she knew about the likely consequences of the Single European Act. She has revealed her ignorance on two separate occasions.

Mr. Tebbit: In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), when she made that remark she was referring to the Prime Minister's performance in the House of Commons earlier that day—and it was an excellent performance.

Mr. Banks: I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says. I think that, perhaps, there is a little clever rewriting of history. When the right hon. Lady said that she was thrilled by Maastricht, I thought that her social life must be very down at the moment if she could be thrilled by that.

The double opt-out of the single currency and the social chapter represents a sticking plaster that the Prime Minister has tried to put over Tory party divisions. It will not hold—it is already breaking up. I have time for the Prime Minister; I like him as an individual. However, he gave a terrible performance today. I think that it was

[Mr. Banks]

because he realises that he has brought back a bum deal that will not stick in the country or in the Conservative party.

The opt-out of the single currency is politically and economically unrealistic. The right hon. Member for Chingford revealed that. Either there will not be sufficient convergence and the single currency will be delayed by the other countries, or there will be sufficient convergence and it would be economic suicide for Britain to try to opt out of the agreement to move towards a single currency.

I thought it degrading that this country alone should not sign the social chapter. After 12 years of Thatcherism, British workers will be denied the rights of workers in Spain, Greece and Portugal. The Prime Minister said that the social chapter would destroy our competitive advantage. Does he really mean that we need a low-wage, long-hours, short-holidays, sweated-labour economy in order to be competitive in Europe and the world? If so, what an indictment that is of 12 years of Thatcherism.

Does anyone really believe that the Germans, the French, the Dutch, the Italians, and all the others really want to destroy their competitiveness? I cannot understand it. That is a simple question and I am a simple fellow. How can 11 countries sign, and one country not? That is all I want to know. I cannot believe that there is a collective death wish among the 11 countries that are our partners in Europe. Those countries contain some of the most successful economies in the world. It was ideology and party political considerations that motivated the Prime Minister's attitude towards the social chapter—it certainly was not economic factors. He revealed himself as a Thatcherite with a grin.

Despite the fact of the double opt-out—and again I agree with the right hon. Member for Chingford—we are still inexorably and irresistibly moving towards ever closer union in Europe—or ecu, to use the right term. Chingford has spotted it, and I welcome it very much. Although the word "federal" was omitted from the final treaty, what is in a word? We are still moving towards a federal Europe. This is an issue on which I disagree violently with my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) —as violently as one could disagree with him. I hope that that happens and, indeed, that we go a great deal further. I want a United States of Europe, with our own independent foreign and defence policies. Of course, it must be a democratic federal Europe, and the enormous democratic deficit must be filled. It does not mean that we will be overruled by faceless bureaucrats in Brussels. We have to make sure that the Commissioners are accountable to an enlarged and empowered European Parliament.

With all the democratic traditions of this country, have we no confidence that we can make a federal Europe as democratic as what we have achieved in this country? What is so wonderful about the nation state? Its days are numbered. It has been an interesting contrast to watch western Europe moving closer together while eastern Europe breaks up. The difference is that in eastern Europe an empire is being broken—an empire based on force and coercion. The west has mature democracies, and they are coming together voluntarily because, through their collective strength, they can achieve a great deal both individually and collectively.

I like what is happening and I want the process to continue. It is true that I now have a different attitude —I have managed to do a 180 deg. turn, something that the right hon. Member for Chingford said that he could not do. I have done it because circumstances have changed dramatically in eastern Europe—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but politicians should be able to explain why they have changed their views. It is a foolish politician who pretends that he was right then, is right now, and allows no change. "I have never changed my mind," some politicians say, "I never apologise, never explain." That is the death knell of politics. We must always explain and, if necessary, apologise. Of course, I am not apologising—I am saying that my position has changed because of the momentous events in eastern Europe.

The opportunity being presented to our generation of politicians is one of involvement in the peaceful redrawing of the map of Europe, for the first time ever. There is the possibility of a Europe that stretches from the Atlantic to the Urals. There could be a new federal structure that would take on board not just the EFTA countries—that would be easy—but the emerging democracies of eastern Europe. That is the future for this country, that is the future for Europe, and I welcome it. The right hon. Member for Chingford deplores much of what happened at Maastricht; I welcome it. However, I believe that the Prime Minister tried to do a deal for his party, not for his country.

7.39 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): There is a great debate to be held on the Maastricht summit, although not the debate launched by the leader of the Labour party and his associates this afternoon. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), with an uncharacteristic touch of sycophancy, referred to the speech by the Leader of the Opposition as a bravura performance. I must say that it was the best speech that the Leader of the Opposition has made this year, but to those of us who have had to listen to all the others in the past 12 months that is hardly the ultimate accolade.

What staggers me about the Leader of the Opposition is that when he chooses his weapons for a great debate he manages to pick boomerangs, and I am sure that his speech today will boomerang against him and his party. The cheers that he received from his Back Benchers this afternoon will end, I predict, in the jeers of the electorate because, by his ardent advocacy of the social chapter, he is going to lose the votes of 5·5 million part-time workers whose jobs will be threatened when they have to pay national insurance and whose employers will have to pay them full-time rates, as the social chapter demands. He will also lose the votes of 2·5 million overtime workers, many of whom would be denied the right to earn their overtime by the restrictions of the social chapter.

Above all, it is extraordinary that the whole Labour party suddenly wants to embrace the social chapter and leave social affairs to Europe—one thinks of all that guff about the Health and Safety Executive. Surely, if there is one thing that this House can do well—and should, under the principle of subsidiarity—it is to devise health and safety legislation here. When we last debated the issue on 27 October 1989, when there were only four Labour Members present, they all agreed that health and safety

legislation in this country was superior to that proposed by Europe. I am amazed, therefore, that Opposition Members have led us off on this wild goose chase—turning the social chapter into the great issue on which they will fight the Prime Minister's stewardship at Maastricht.

No; the debate that we ought to have is the one opened up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Do these treaties as they have been negotiated set us ever more inexorably down the road to a European federal super-state, or do they offer Britain and other member states the chance to build the Europe of the future with greater flexibility, more emphasis on co-operation outside the treaty of Rome and the retention of adequate powers for national Parliaments and Governments? That is really the crucial question, and I should like to try to answer it from the viewpoint of a longstanding Euro-sceptic—one who, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford, is not usually in the business of doing 180 deg. turns.

Those of us who have followed the European debate for the past 10 or 15 years know that the European Community, despite British protests, has been moving steadily in a federal direction. Those who drafted the Maastricht treaty were quite right to include that phrase in the preamble, or chapeau. It was a pleasant surprise that it was taken out as a result of British pressure. From 1972 to 1986 we moved in this federal direction with, in the Fabian phrase, the inevitability of gradualness; but from 1986 onwards, hastened on by the Single European Act, passed through this House under a guillotine, we stopped travelling with the inevitability of gradualness and started to travel down the federal road with the inevitability and rapidity of a train grande vitesse, with Mr. Delors as the engine driver. One of the most significant results of Maastricht may be that the runaway Delors train, destination United States of Europe on a one-track line, may have been slowed down. But we have certainly been offered some alternative routes and destinations. These alternative routes and destinations may become much more attractive to the other passengers in Europe as time goes by.

Here I want to pick up a point made in the serious part of his entertaining speech by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). He highlighted the fact that ours is the only national legislature so far to have debated this issue seriously. As other national legislators in member states start to debate the Maastricht treaty there are already signs that opinion may be shifting. I do not say that closer union will not take place, but it will happen differently as a result of the German Parliament waking up to what is occurring. Other national Parliaments will also become aware of it and French political pressures may come into play—all leading to changes.

For the first time there is a chance that these changes may turn out to be different from the original blueprint. The treaty of Rome augmented by the Single European Act was a conveyor belt to federalism. Unanimity was its watchword, the European Court was its watchdog and the Commission its driving force. But the treaties of Maastricht have allowed some different thinking to emerge. There are pillars of co-operation outside the treaty now. Subsidiarity has been defined, although somewhat imperfectly. The jurisdiction of the European Court is now severely limited and opt-outs and opt-ins have, if not been blessed, at least been introduced and allowed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford asks the vital question: is this structure watertight? I do not know the answer, although I do not believe that it is as waterlogged as he seems to think it is. There is at least some basis for saying that new structures have become possible. If these pillars of co-operation work well there will be some stirrings towards a different sort of Europe, a Europe which would not follow these blueprints which have caused us such anguish in the past few years.

Will this system work? What has been negotiated? Will the Western European Union start to be a significant force? Will law and order co-operation under the pillar outside the treaty of Rome start to function? Let us not forget the importance of the European-Atlantic alliance. The special relationship between Britain and the United States has been the cornerstone of our democratic values and suddenly to start, as the federalists want, to throw that out of the window is quite wrong. I am glad that that was stopped—at least I hope it was—by the continual references in the treaty to NATO and the Atlantic alliance.

Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford, I shall go through the lobbies in support of the Government, for the following reasons. The first is common ground between us—the Prime Minister and his colleagues delivered a negotiating triumph, in the sense that they brought back more than they promised——

Mr. Tebbit: Less than was threatened.

Mr. Aitken: Indeed. It was a tactical success and a considerable achievement. Certain qualities of steel were required beside mere negotiating skills. Like Horatius, the Prime Minister held the bridge.

Was Maastricht a strategic success as well? On that, the jury is still out; time alone will tell. What is certain is that the federalists will fight back, having suffered a reverse, not a defeat. The next phase of the battle in Europe as we approach the future of the common agricultural policy and of the budget will be between centralising federalists and flexible co-operators. At the moment, the flexible co-operating party is led by a party of one: Britain. It should not worry us that Britain stands alone; we have a long and proud history of standing alone in Europe and of being proved right afterwards. There are signs, picked up by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, that sentiment in Europe is changing. I can see a Europe with more co-operation between member states, less domination by the Commission, more à la carte dishes and more flexibility. None of these things seemed possible under the treaty of Rome and the Single European Act.

I am waiting for events to unfold, but if Europe goes the way that I have described this evening, as I think it may because of enlargement, and because of outside events such as Soviet developments, history will be grateful to the Horatius who held the bridge for long enough so that alternative plans and schemes could evolve. The ranks of Tuscany will cheer him then. This Euro-sceptic has enough faith in him to cheer him and to vote for him tonight.

7.49 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I want to use my 10 minutes to explain why I am one of those who voted firmly against our remaining members of the Common Market when we had the referendum, but now believe strongly that Britain's future lies in Europe and that we should try to shape the future of Europe. I do not

[Ms. Clare Short]

do so for reasons of self-justification, but because much of the debate in this country has been full of confused language, misunderstandings of history and of post-imperial delusions of nationhood from the Tory party. That has confused the debate about what is really being constructed now—democratic and political institutions that are new in the history of the world.

My vote at the time of the referendum was fairly expensively well-informed because I was working in Whitehall and spent a week in Brussels being briefed about the institutions of the Common Market. As a civil servant, I behaved non-politically, although I have always held the political views that I hold today. I have, of course, modified the way in which I think that they should be applied in the light of the movement of history. However, as a socialist, I believe that it is our job to civilise the behaviour of wealth and capital so that it can be used to improve the quality of people's lives throughout the world. That is the job of politics. It is not to rip people's lives and countries apart, but to use democracy and politics to civilise the behaviour of wealth.

When I scrutinised the institutions of the Common Market at the time of the referendum, I saw that they were fixed for free marketeering. They excluded social regulation and entrenched the free market. Therefore, because I have always believed in the need for social regulation, I cast my vote in that referendum firmly and clearly against Britain's entry. I accept the consequence of that vote in which I held the minority view. As we live in a democratic nation, one cannot insist on a vote being retaken simply because one has lost. Those, however, were my reasons. I understood them and knew why I had taken that view.

I take a different view now because history has moved on. The confusion about Thatcherism, Reaganism and New Right monetarist projects is that they were part of that moving on of history and of the new movement of capital, but their proponents do not seem to understand their political consequences.

Under the right hon. Members for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), the Tory party pressed forward with deregulation so that capital could flow across the world as it wished. The nation state lost its economic sovereignty. There was a massive, historic era shift. We are talking about a change in history that is as big as the shift from feudalism to the nation state. Given their record, I am sure that those right hon. Members would have fought today for feudalism. Funnily enough, however, they were part of the project that diminished the capacity of the nation state to be the unit of democratic organisation in the world by which humanity can try to civilise the behaviour of capital.

I now believe that the people of the world need political institutions that go beyond nation states to strengthen the behaviour of capital as it moves beyond the nation states. That is what is going on—not only in Europe, but in America, Canada and Mexico. Our sister party in Canada, which opposed the free market, has said, "We'll go with it, but with a social charter." It has said no to the free movement of capital without any regulation to take account of people, but has added, "Yes, we can see capital reorganising like that and, if there can be a political dimension of regulation for people, we'll go along with it." The same things are happening on the Pacific rim. That is where we are in history—we are in a new era.

I believe that I am representative of my party in holding those views and very much go along with the explanation that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition gave of our shift of view on this question—*[Laughter.]* No, in my view this is a matter of the history of the world. We are in a new era and silly little men—*[Interruption.]* Who is that silly little man?

Mr. Tony Banks: It is the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes).

Ms. Short: The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is giggling, but giggling about party-political matters is not to rise to the challenge of a shift in history. The hon. Gentleman simply wants to play silly little party-political games, which is what the leader of his party is doing, instead of talking seriously about what is happening to our nation, our future, our people and the people of Europe and of the world. I despise the tone that many, but not all, Tory Members have brought to the debate.

Like the leader of my party, I have changed my stance, because Europe has changed and allowed in the social dimension. It therefore reconnects to my original politics in that I want to regulate the behaviour of capital and to civilise it for people, and I believe that the nation state has lost the capacity to do that job. That is why I now say that we must embrace Europe. The social charter or the social chapter is at the heart of this issue for me, because, without it, we have only the free rip of capital.

Following our last appearance on "Question Time", the right hon. Member for Chingford and I had a conversation about this matter in which he said that he had changed his view for exactly the same reasons that I have changed mine. He was in favour of Europe in the days of the referendum because he believes in unregulated free markets and in the chance for capital to rip. He voted for Europe then, but is against it now because of social regulation. We agreed that both our views were consistent and that the reasons that I was against Community membership then but I am in favour of it now are exactly his reasons for holding the opposite view. I must advise the hon. Member for Harrow, West that this is not a matter of silly party-political games. It is about my serious political understanding of the way in which history is moving.

I am ashamed of our country advertising itself in Europe as the sweatshop of Europe. I am ashamed that that is the only level of civilisation to which we can aspire. I am angry because of what that offers my constituents for the future in terms of their quality of life and level of income. Members of the British Tory party are saying, "Mr. Delors has said that Japan will dump its capital in Britain because our labour will be cheap." But that means that our people will live badly, have low incomes and be less well educated and trained. That is the future that the British Tory party is offering the people of Britain. If I am ashamed, they should be deeply and utterly ashamed.

Furthermore, that view will not work, because a modern successful economy must have high levels of education, training and investment, and a co-operative and flexible work force. That is how we shall define the

successful economies of the future. Sweatshop Britain is not only undesirable to live in; it will fail economically, yet that is what the Tory party is offering the British people.

I share some of the fears of those who have been criticising some of the detailed terms of the treaty on economic and monetary union. In mainland Europe, there is a desperation about the destabilisation of Europe that we do not fully share. There is fear about Germany's economic might and about a reunited Germany. We must bear in mind the memories of those who were occupied by Germany during the second world war. There is also fear about instability in eastern Europe and about the possibility of Germany turning from western Europe and starting to look to eastern Europe for its political alliances. There is, therefore, a desperation about political union and about the need to tie in Germany.

The desperation about building a stable western Europe in the face of massive and dangerous instability in eastern Europe has led to a willingness to move towards economic and monetary union with such speed that it could be politically destructive. On that, I share the view of the right hon. Member for Chingford. If we opt for the stringent, deflationary conditions that are built into the Maastricht agreement, which allow room for flexibility in negotiations in the future, we could see a further rise in unemployment across Europe, and further rises in racist and fascist movements, making for a dangerous future.

Therefore, although my underlying analysis is that we should go with it and that further union is inevitable, it is a joke for the Tory party to play the game of pretending that it would opt out. If economic and monetary union is to happen—and for the reasons that I have tried briefly to adumbrate, I think that it might go more slowly than is being predicted—Britain must be in or sterling and the City of London will be destroyed; but Britain will be going in without being able to influence the shape of that union. Yet again, the Tory party is doing something that is massively destructive of the future of the British nation. Britain will take such union because we shall have to—otherwise our economy will go even further down the tubes than it has in the past 12 years.

I wish that we could elevate this debate in our country beyond party politics, because we are talking about the movement of history and about the quality of life of the people of our country and of the rest of Europe. We are talking about how Europe can use its influence to shape the future of the world. We are not talking only about eastern Europe. We must remember all the poverty on the toe of Europe, in north Africa, and that horrible mounting famine.

I hope that this will be a progressive Europe, which can take a progressive view of the debt crisis and the international movement of capital. Let me tell the hon. Member for Harrow, West that that is what we are talking about: we are not talking about silly party-political games.

7.59 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): It is refreshing to hear the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) make a virtue of the necessity of backing the new, expanding Europe, in the cause of more checks and balances.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has emerged from the Maastricht negotiations as a dominant rather than a subordinate statesman, manifestly capable of shaping and correcting the Community's future course. I do not mean that as a conventional piece of Back-Bench party piety; I am trying to emphasise the importance of strong national performances—or innings—by such people as my right hon. Friend. Europe is now evolving rapidly, and the British population are beginning to wonder just what their destiny is. In that context, my right hon. Friend's performance must have been immensely reassuring.

Perhaps for the first time, large sections of our population are beginning to realise how fundamental and far reaching were the changes in their destiny that were ushered in when we acceded to the Community treaties in 1972. Perhaps one of the most vivid demonstrations of the dawning realisation of what we have let ourselves in for is provided by something utterly prosaic, but almost universally experienced: Sunday opening by shops. I am sorry to move from the sublime to the almost ridiculous.

The Shops Bill, introduced in 1986 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), provided for the complete deregulation of Sunday retail trading. The House, on the whole, did not care for the Bill, and—in one of the most vivid recent demonstrations of parliamentary sovereignty and supremacy—we threw it out. None the less, deregulation has now crept in, almost by a side wind; ironically, it has done so along the lines originally proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley. The alleged sovereignty and supremacy of Parliament has gone, not with a bang but with a whimper.

The reason lies in a combination of sections 2 and 30 of the European Communities Act, to which Britain acceded in 1972. That Act enshrined a principle described by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General last month, when he said:

"since 1972, directly enforceable Community law has taken precedence over domestic provisions and forms part of English law."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 914.]

Sunday trading has brought home to people the shape of the revolutionary new framework of life that is emerging from those earlier decisions. I, for one, do not complain about the changes; nor, I suspect, will the millions of shoppers who, this Sunday, will quietly bless the European Court for their new-found freedom. Paradoxically, the further millions who, like me, regret the unregulated arrival of Sunday trading will look to the same European Court—perhaps by way of a different section of the legislation—to tighten Sunday trading regulations in the future.

What emerges from the rather muddled Sunday-trading scene is the way in which public perception of the Community will develop. Provided that we maintain a tolerable degree of national identity and decision-making, the establishment of an external source of authority in the form of the European institutions to which we have voluntarily acceded—in particular, the European Court—will enhance the liberty of British subjects, and will increasingly be seen to do so.

This is, in fact, a form of the separation of powers. That principle has always been one of the great avenues through which human freedom has advanced. To see the European institutions as alien, oppressive invaders, threatening our national rights and liberties, is to misrepresent them in a very superficial way. In truth, they have the potential to increase those rights and liberties. I believe, indeed, that popular perception is already moving firmly in that

[Mr. Michael Alison]

direction. The ready and instinctive way in which our constituents reach out for rulings from the European Court illustrates the way in which the man in the street benefits from the principle of the separation of powers, of which the Community treaties are a manifestation.

Mr. Spearing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alison: I am afraid not; I have only 10 minutes in which to speak.

The principle of the separation of powers, which is enshrined in what we are currently negotiating, gives real scope for not less but greater freedom. The key is to maintain a reasonable balance in the evolving pattern of the separation of powers between national and supranational institutions.

Personally, I am not haunted by the spectre of federalism—although mapping out a coherent pattern of identified and separated powers between a central and a peripheral body is precisely what federations must do. Clearly, the national spirit that still exists strongly in the ancient nation states of Europe will be a solid and effective counterweight to the powers that we voluntarily confer on the Commission. As many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have pointed out, the essence of the Prime Minister's triumph at Maastricht was the refinement of that notion of the separation of powers, in the explicit recognition and entrenching of the role of intergovernmental co-operative action as one of the two or three pillars on which the whole edifice of the European Community will be sustained.

I am entirely persuaded that the principle of the separation of powers which we now see emerging in Europe will enhance the liberty of the subject. I believe that the notion of a federal future—sometimes it is labelled "the United States of Europe"—is grossly misleading and unrealistic. We have nothing to fear.

"The United States of Europe" conjures up a picture of the United States of America. The point about the federal system that exists there is the way in which, originally, a congeries of small, weak states combined to resist the depredations of a world suprapower, the British. Now, a dozen or so suprapowers—as the world outside may view the European states—are coming together to try to find a way not to erect more acres of white wooden crosses on the fields of Flanders; and one way of doing that is to produce acres of prints and documents.

The coming together of great powers will not produce a counterpart of the United States of America. It will produce an entirely different animal. As the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) made clear in his eloquent speech, there are many heavy players in the team, who will not turn themselves into mere subordinates of an overriding Brussels bureaucracy. We have before us the prospect of a productive separation of powers, and of increased liberties for our people.

8.9 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): The voices that I have heard in the House today and in public in recent weeks opposing the evolution towards what I regard as inevitable—European unity—strike me as the voices of 19th century nationalism, and I do not think that history will be too kind to 19th century nationalism, which fuelled not only imperialism but two world wars. Few of the voices seem to draw attention to the Europe that European union is replacing. We should remember that the process began as far back as 1957, just after the second world war, with the first treaty of Rome.

To look at the Europe that is being replaced, let us cast our minds back to 50 years ago this very night—18 December 1941—when millions of people across Europe were being slaughtered for the second time in a century. If anyone had stood up in the House then and said that in 50 years' time we would be discussing European union with the Germans still being German, the French still being French and the English still being English, that person might have been locked up. Yet it has happened, and it is worth considering why it has happened, particularly for those of us who have to face conflict on our own streets. The reason is quite simple. We decided at last that the answer to difference is not conflict, confrontation or war, but respect and accommodation. Europe has built institutions which respect diversity and work on the common ground of economics: sweat has been spilt, not blood. Europe has grown steadily at its own speed over the past 20 years in the natural and inevitable process of European union.

One would imagine that anybody in the House would agree that it is worth paying a price for the rejection of the Europe of the past—the Europe of slaughter. Yet we do not have to pay a price because what we are doing is economically inevitable. We are interdependent and the world is a much smaller place today that it was 50, 100 or 200 years ago. Once upon a time we had city states, then we had nation states, and now we are moving inevitably towards a continental state. That inevitability is such that we should not be following the movement but leading it. We should want to be not just in the heart of it but at the head of it. We should be shaping it because it is such a powerful answer. Integration is economically essential if we are to survive in today's world.

Everybody knows, if he is being truthful, that we cannot have a single market without a single currency. The harmonisation process for the single currency has been going on since we joined the Common Market. Decimalisation was the first step in the harmonisation process. We then had economic and monetary union and now the move towards a single currency. Imagine what would happen if one of the most powerful states in the United States decided that it wanted to separate from the dollar and have its own currency. What would happen to the economy? It is inevitable that we shall join the single currency and I am disturbed by the fact that it is being held up by an internal party squabble. I have no doubt that after the next election the Government, whoever they may be, will commit us to joining the single currency. Let us be truthful.

The voices that oppose evolution towards European union also express worry about loss of identity. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) boasted recently about the strength of his Essexness. Is he any less an Essex man because he is an Englishman? Will he be any less an Englishman because he is a European? It sounds like a contradiction but the essence of unity is, as we have all discovered, the acceptance of diversity. There is no stable, peaceful, democratic society in the world which does not accept diversity. The moment one refuses to accept diversity and pushes difference to the point of division, one

is in straightforward conflict. The acceptance of diversity should reassure us all because the day that that principle is not accepted things will fall apart.

We should be asking about the best way, politically and democratically, to give expression to that principle. To my mind, there is no better way than a federal way. By federalism Europeans mean a Europe of the regions. The first sign of that is already in the Maastricht treaty, and some people did not even notice. It set up a committee of the regions. I predict that that committee will evolve in strength and influence and the federalism that will emerge will be a Europe of the regions.

I wish to deal with some of the practical points. Cohesion is a code word for equalising living standards between the richer and poorer regions. I am delighted that the structural funds are not only to continue but to be increased and that there will not only be fixed percentages from the centre to the poorer regions but that it will be modulated. The fact that fewer matching funds will be required should help the poorer regions to raise their living standards. From what I read, the cohesion fund, which is tied to transportation and the environment, will go to member states whose GNP is less than 90 per cent. of the Community average. Does the fund apply to the member states or to the regions? If It applies to the member states, it means that an objective No. 1 region such as Northern Ireland or some of the poorer regions of Britain such as the north-east and Scotland would not be included in the fund. That issue needs to be examined carefully. It is an important issue if cohesion is to have any meaning.

I see a positive sign for the last remaining area of conflict within western Europe—the area that I represent. "Remember 1690" is the great slogan of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), and it is one of the most long-lasting slogans in the politics of Northern Ireland. People tend to forget that the battle fought in 1690 was a European battle. The battle of the Boyne involved the Dutch and the Danes. The French were there on both sides, the Irish were on both sides and the English were there as well. The plantation of Ulster was England's reaction to the Irish chieftains' links with Spain. The Act of Union between England and Ireland in 1800 was England's reaction to the French invasion of Ireland in 1795 to link up with Irish republicans. In other words, the British presence in Ireland was a response to the fear that Ireland would be a back door for its European enemies. To this day, those who use guns and bombs on our streets say that their reason for doing so is that the British are in Ireland defending their own interests.

All that has been changed by what is happening in Europe. Issues such as sovereignty and independence have changed their meaning. It is now pooled sovereignty and interdependence. Therefore, the reasons used by those people are now gone and we should never cease to tell them. There is a legacy which is that we have a divided people. Let us approach that division using the same principles as the peoples of Europe who slaughtered one another for centuries. Let us accept our differences. Let us not seek victory one over another but accommodate our differences and build institutions which respect the diversity in Ireland while allowing us to work on common ground. When the channel tunnel is built, the common ground—economics—will intensify because we shall be the only part of the new Europe without a land link with the rest. Let us work together. Let us spill our sweat and not our blood and grow together towards a new Ireland, in the same way as the Europeans grew together.

8.19 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). He said that the spirit of interdependence that underlay the formation of the European Community in the 1950s and 1960s is needed today to reduce conflict between countries and within communities. I had much sympathy with the human point that he made.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome the agreement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister succeeded in achieving at Maastricht. There is no doubt that the summit was a success for the Prime Minister and his team. That is recognised in the House and in the country at large.

There is not time—and anyway I am not qualified—to talk about the small print of the draft agreement. That is not my intention, but it is important to recognise that there are issues that we shall not have time to discuss this evening, such as more co-operation in Europe on research and on education and training. We might be able to debate those important issues in more detail another time.

There is an important point that is worth making: the success that was achieved in the negotiations at Maastricht was a success for a Conservative Administration, and one of a series of successes for Conservative Administrations throughout the history of our dealings with the European Community.

I have been involved in active politics since the 1960s and early 1970s. I hope that this will not be regarded as a petty party-political point, but I find Labour's position on Europe totally extraordinary. We heard a good explanation of it from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), to whom I listened with much interest. She put the point well and explained Labour's conversion. I fully understand and appreciate the reasoning behind it and if there is time I shall refer to that again later, but surely it is a matter of fact and of record that if the Labour party had won the 1983 election—I first fought Norwich, North in 1983—it would have taken us out of the European Community and we would not have been negotiating at Maastricht. It is important to put that on the record, even though it has admitted that it has changed its mind.

Many of us who favour co-operation with the European Community welcome that change, but there is no way in which we can hide Labour's history. Nor can we hide the fact that it has changed its mind six times or more on its Community policy. Those facts are worth putting on the record.

I am trying to make the positive point that under a Conservative Government we signed the treaty of Rome, which I strongly supported at the time and still support, that under the Conservative Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) we signed the Single European Act, and that under a Conservative Government we reached agreement at Maastricht. We should not hide that strong point in favour of this Administration.

Our attitudes to Europe are shaped by our personal experiences. I was brought up during the war and one's experience in war time is bound to influence one's attitudes to the continent of Europe and general events. I remember

[Mr. Patrick Thompson]

my first visit to Paris when I was 11 and doing my national service in Germany in my early twenties. During my time in Germany, I became convinced that the future of this country was bound with the future of Europe. Having listened to this evening's debate and the debate before the Maastricht negotiations, there is no doubt in my mind that that is the general view of the House, although it may not have been so strong about a year ago.

I was in Germany in 1957 when the discussion of Europe's future was at its height. I recall reading a book, which was published in 1966, written by Lord Gladwyn, in which he dealt with the problem that Britain had in the late 1950s and early 1960s of finding its identity. I shall quote briefly from what he said:

"The fact was, we were much more exhausted by our death struggle than we knew. The abrupt ending of Lend Lease in 1945 had shown up the extent of our economic weakness and the drain on our reserves that we had been obliged to make in order to keep ourselves alive. Our very victory too had been in some ways a disadvantage in that it did not compel us to reconstruct our factories, write off our debt, work like beavers and start again (as the Germans did) from scratch. The old habits therefore persisted. We tended to think that we had done so well—as we had—in the war that the world more or less owed us a living. This particular feeling was enhanced by the mere existence of the Commonwealth and Empire which Mr. Churchill said he had not been appointed the King's First Minister to liquidate. Yet this is what we had to do."

That shows why Europe is important to Britain's future and why I am delighted that the Prime Minister returned from Maastricht with a positive agreement. I am also delighted that there is more unanimity across the Floor of the Chamber on the future of Europe than there has been for some time. To that extent, despite what I said earlier, I welcome the apparent conversion of the Opposition on Europe.

I should like to conclude by referring to points more concerned with East Anglia. Some time ago, I had the opportunity to read an article in "Anglia Business and Industry" written by Ron Carney. A survey was recently conducted of 1,000 companies in the United Kingdom and their attitude to Europe. Those companies could be divided into three groups—those that saw Europe as a challenge, those that saw it as a disaster and those that saw it as a non-event. I agree with the author of the article that the business men who fall into the last two categories are in for a great shock. The only way of regarding our future in Europe is as a challenge. That is the spirit in which the Government have approached Europe and the spirit in which the House is approaching it this evening.

About a year ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley opened a European information centre for East Anglia in the building of the Norwich and Norfolk chamber of commerce. I am told that inquiries from local business people in Norwich and Norfolk about the opportunities in Europe are increasing and that there is an ever-increasing list of opportunities for them to select from.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thompson: No, there is not time for me to give way. Without the time limit, I would have been glad to give way to my colleague from Norwich, South. I must respect the time constraint.

Europe is an opportunity. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was right to set out his intention to negotiate at the heart of Europe. I understand that the Government achieved all the aims that they set out in the debate before the negotiations. I believe that, as a result, they will have the strong support of the House and of the people as we look to our future in Europe.

8.29 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I do not share the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) for the results of the Maastricht negotiations. Indeed, for me the most remarkable and revealing fact of the whole Maastricht summit was the clear evidence that federalism is now the major issue in western Europe.

Mr. Tony Banks *indicated assent.*

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend is nodding sagaciously because he is a recent convert to federalism and is delighted that that change has taken place. What was previously largely confined to the utterances of a minority in this country and in Europe has now become the open ambition not only of Mr. Delors but of Chancellor Kohl, of Prime Minister Andreotti, of Mr. Mitterrand and, indeed, of the Prime Ministers of Belgium and Holland. They have all sensed that and I acknowledge that some members of my party have also said so. It is crucial that we face the fact that federalism is the major issue. We can no longer bluff and say that it is perhaps a Europe de patrie or a Europe going in one direction towards ever-closer union. Those phrases are no longer appropriate and we are forced to face the major issue.

The facts are that the 11 member states—other than the United Kingdom—are now out to create a federal union and that Britain alone is reluctant to join in. That is one of the great facts that we have to face and with which we must deal. The fact that we are alone and were alone in resisting the federal impulse has led to some strange and inappropriate remarks about us such as, "Britain has been marginalised", "Britain is in the slow lane", and "Britain has been left behind". I do not accept that. There are those who think that democratic self-government is a value beyond price and is indeed the first freedom of any people. The United Kingdom's refusal to join the federal camp is a matter not for reproach but for congratulation.

Unfortunately, however, the Government have not stopped the federal process—they have achieved only a British opt-out from the single currency and the European central bank which mark the third stage of economic and monetary union. For how long the opt-out will be sustained after the general election remains to be seen.

Meanwhile—and this point has not been sufficiently emphasised—the British economy is trapped by the combined effects of membership of the exchange rate mechanism and our acceptance of the first two stages of EMU. Those hon. Members—and I look especially at my Front Bench, but realise that not one of our economic spokesmen is there—who had looked for helpful changes in the final draft of the Maastricht treaty will have been disappointed. On that crucial matter—the control of so-called excessive deficits or the 3 per cent. rule which is in the treaty and which is designed to limit the borrowing power of future Governments—only a small element of flexibility has been introduced. We are now told that there

can be a little leeway if borrowing has declined substantially and continuously and remains close to the 3 per cent. limit or, alternatively, if the excess is only

"exceptional and temporary and the deficit remains close to the 3 per cent. reference value".

Perhaps the House will be glad to know that from 1 January 1994 when the second stage of EMU begins—in two years—if our deficit exceeds 3 per cent. we shall not be fined or otherwise penalised as we would be in stage 3, but we shall have only to endure the Council making public its recommendation that we should reduce our borrowing requirement. Of course, the effect of such a public rebuke would be to undermine the standing and credit of any Government vis-à-vis the financial markets and a deliberate withdrawal of a triple A rating and of the seal of approval for good economic management. The effects of that could be very serious from 1 January 1994.

As for the independence of the central bank and the hope of greater powers that would be given to the ECOFIN Council, on which many of my hon. Friends have placed so much importance, nothing has changed. The only power that ECOFIN has is to decide the exchange rate of the ecu against non-European currencies. Beyond that, the European central bank remains wholly independent of democratic control. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said so eloquently and powerfully, control of the British economy is handed over to the European bank. I do not know how any hon. Members—but I refer especially to my hon. Friends—can look at themselves in the mirror and say, "I have denationalised the Bank of England and handed over all powers of economic management" and still hope to achieve for their people those things which we as a party were formed to try to create. I fear that it will lead our country and our party into great peril.

The treaty has enshrined deflation and entrenched price stability as the principal objective of economic policy. Everything else is subordinate to it. Every country in the Community—not only Britain—will be striving to prepare for the third stage of EMU. They will be seeking to converge and in order to do that—as we know—they must, first, not break through the 3 per cent. borrowing requirement. Secondly, they must remain within the 2·5 per cent. band of ERM and, thirdly, get down their lending rates to those of the three lowest countries in the Community. All of that requires enormous constraint and further cutbacks in the economies of the European countries involved. We shall have high and continuing short-term interest rates, high unemployment and shrinking industrial output. That is the price we shall pay for being a member of the deflationary club.

That is not only my judgment but that of most economic commentators, including those as disparate in their economic thinking as William Rees-Mogg in *The Independent* on Monday and William Keegan in *The Observer* on Sunday. William Keegan wrote:

"Europe generally has high and rising unemployment yet the conditions for the approach to EMU are extremely deflationary, implying even more unemployment and possibly a lot more social unrest."

William Rees-Mogg wrote in *The Independent*:

"Maastricht is a deflationary currency agreement at a time of severe world recession that will either prove unworkable or catastrophic. It is the stupidest economic decision for the past 50 years."

The threat to European and world prosperity is, of course, the most important outcome of the Maastricht treaty. Frankly, in the scale of things, the opt-out from the social charter is of minor importance. I have every confidence that when the Labour party wins the next election within the next six months it will be able to introduce every bit of the social charter that it wishes and to introduce it about a year ahead of the coming into force of the treaty. I shall not weep for that—it is not the real heart of the matter.

The federalists have not only extended their role over the economic and social policy of the member states. They have—as the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) rightly said—established a very powerful bridgehead in the whole area of foreign policy, defence policy and home affairs with regard to immigration and asylum.

The Prime Minister sought—and I am sure that Ministers from the Foreign Office would like to do the same—to draw a sharp distinction between agreements in the treaty of Rome and those in the intergovernmental arrangements. I fear that the distinction is not too strong. For example, I fear that the Commission has the right to take initiatives and to make proposals to the Council and to the heads of state. It is given the right to have continuing consultation in all that occurs under article I, and it also has other substantial powers. So here is a major problem. It will get worse and the House should face it. There will be further intergovernmental conferences in 1996, and sooner or later we shall have to face the problem: do we go into a federal union or do we say no? I very much hope that we shall have the will to say no.

8.39 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): If anyone had said a year ago that the United Kingdom could participate fully in shaping the design for a single currency and then be free to opt out, he probably would have been laughed at. Yet that is precisely what has been achieved. It is a remarkable tribute to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer that they have achieved that. It has come not by chance, but by regular, careful, firm and friendly explanation of the United Kingdom's approach to such matters, and the exploration of the consequences of the various alternatives that have been offered.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who I believe is to reply to the debate, must also take a good deal of credit for the success of the negotiations.

I shall make three points. First, the number of detailed regulations that apply throughout Europe are increasingly inappropriate on that basis. They are unsatisfactory because they are unable to take account of diversity, or of the differences not only in tradition but in practice between one part of the European Community and another.

I agree with the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who drew attention to the problem. The number of such regulations has increased, is increasing, and should be diminished. The inappropriateness of blanket regulations will become more apparent as the Community is enlarged.

I do not need to remind the House of some of the signs of that—such as the interventions over the route of United Kingdom motorways, the classification of carrots as fruit under the jam directive, the prawn-flavoured crisps fiasco and the environmental studies on the channel tunnel, some

[Sir David Mitchell]

of which took place while I was Minister at the Department of Transport. There is even the introduction of the Euro-size condom, to which the Italians apparently object because it is too large.

Those are merely illustrations of a range of detailed interventions. There is an increasing reaction against them —not only in this country. The Länder in Germany are very much aware of the level of responsibility that they have within the German constitution for much of the detailed administration of their areas. They, too, feel that such a degree of detailed intervention from Brussels is eroding their responsibilities.

In France, we have seen the rise of Mr. Le Pen—not only on immigration issues but on what are broadly known as Poujadist issues. In rural areas of France people are becoming heartily fed up with detailed interference in the smaller business community. I do not speak of Paris —Paris is not France; it is almost a separate place—but the people who are the backbone of rural France are thoroughly fed up.

Since in many areas people object to such detailed intervention, one asks oneself why we are subjected to excessively detailed regulations. The answer, I believe, is that there is genuine work for about six Commissioners in the European Community—on cross-border trade in goods and services, finance, people, pollution, and state subsidies. The trouble is that there are 17 Commissioners, each with an office and staff, and they have to justify themselves, so they churn out regulations of one sort or another to justify their existence. We should seek to reduce the number of Commissioners whenever the opportunity arises.

A valuable part of the answer has been brought back from Maastricht by our negotiators in the form of subsidiarity, and article 36, which says:

> "In the areas which do not fall within its exclusive jurisdiction, the Community shall take action in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States".

That seems an important safeguard.

But this is only a battle won; it is not the war. I am certain that we shall have to go on grinding away month after month, with Ministers doing battle on our behalf. In this case, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, and if we do not keep that vigilance up, the nationhood of which we have every right to be proud will be at risk of being merged into a Euro-state. I urge Ministers to be alert for any infringement of article 36.

My second point concerns the social charter. The Commission's proposals would interfere in detailed working agreements on hours of work, night work, overtime, part-time work and other such matters. Many hon. Members have drawn attention to the damage that that would do to the United Kingdom, but I shall draw a different analogy. I shall draw attention to the damage that it would do to the ability of the smaller and poorer countries in Europe to raise their living standards. If they cannot do that by allowing anti-social hours, and so on, they will have to do it by subsidy and massive capital injections. Where will the money come from? Increasingly, it will come from the richest members of the Community —principally Germany.

He who pays the piper calls the tune, and in majority voting we shall find that the smaller and poorer countries within the Community will increasingly look to the Germans for guidance as to how they should vote. I say that not without some experience, having represented this country at the European Council of Transport Ministers. I would often say to my officials, "How will this go? Will we succeed in carrying our point?" The answer would often be, "It depends on the ringmaster", with a look at the German Transport Minister. One could see how the smaller countries were looking to him to find out how to vote, because they were financially beholden to the Germans in so many ways.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a matter of balance, when the hon. Gentleman considers the German and the British railway systems, which would he prefer smaller European countries to take as a model?

Sir David Mitchell: That is wholly irrelevant, as we were then concerned with the extent to which finance was available for assistance for roads and communications in one way or another. In any case, the hon. Gentleman's slight on British Rail is not justified. It runs more trains at 100 miles per hour than German railways do. However I do not want to be diverted.

My third point is that the new powers of the European Court to ensure that countries abide by what they have agreed to are vital. In the past seven years, the United Kingdom has been taken to the court 20 times, Germany 49 times, France 82 times and Italy 157 times for non-compliance with rules to which they had agreed. It is important that the Court has the power to fine. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to say when he winds up whether he believes that the fines will be sufficient to ensure that countries comply with the regulations to which they have agreed. Countries should be made to comply. The power to fine is important because it will have a "disinfectant" effect in ensuring that countries do not agree to decisions which they are not prepared to carry out.

8.49 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I have always been a passionate pro-European. Wales has been a European nation in terms of history, culture, language, religion and tradition for 2,000 years. We have European roots and we are proud of that. Many of our problems are experienced by other small nations and regions on the European mainland. In 1975, at the time of the referendum, I was the only one of the 14 Members on our Benches to vote yes in the referendum. I did so not for economic, but for political reasons. I was aware of the importance of the unity of Europe and of the political context that it offered for Wales. My arguments then are arguments that I would put forward now.

The other side of the coin of European unity must be decentralisation. Without that balance, there is a danger of us having the United Kingdom writ large on the European level. Wales has been part of one supranational entity for four centuries. We have known what it is like to have one common currency and we have seen what it is like to have a country without frontiers. That can be justified provided that one has the right mechanisms of government to defend one's own community. The danger for Europe is to grow as a centralised state on the model of the United Kingdom. From our experience in Wales—and, I suspect,

from the experience of our friends in Scotland—we warn heavily against such a state. We need a strong regional economic policy to counteract the effects of centralisation, especially the effects that will come from a centralised currency. If we support the ecu, it must be on that condition.

I have heard it argued in the House that, in the Westminster model, sovereignty came from God to the Queen, the Queen shared it with her Ministers and it came then to the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The people were somewhere down there, out of sight. That is very different from our understanding in Wales of the concept of sovereignty. If there is any meaning to sovereignty, it is that it comes from the people upwards. The people can lend their sovereignty and their authority to different tiers of decision taking for different purposes.

The concept of subsidiarity—a horrible word, but an important idea—is vital. I have heard hon. Members refer to the talks and I have studied article 3b. There is no definition of subsidiarity in that article; there is merely a reference to it. Guenther Schaefer, in his article in *Futures* in September this year, said:

"Subsidiarity is a normative recommendation, a rule for setting up institutional arrangements in such a way that decisions affecting people's lives should be taken by the lowest capable social organisation."

That does not mean that decisions have to be taken either at the European central level or at Westminster. They must be taken at the level closest to the people, whatever that level may be. More work needs to be done on that. The Prime Minister seems to believe strongly in the concept of subsidiarity in the relationship of the United Kingdom with the European Community, but when it comes to the relationship between Wales and the United Kingdom, or between Scotland and the United Kingdom, the idea of subsidiarity goes out of the window.

Article 198a deals with the committee of the regions. That is an important step forward and I regret that it has only an advisory status at present. I also very much regret the weakening of the original words. The original words —I have the French text at hand—referred to representatives having an elected mandate at regional level. Those words were knocked out at the behest of the United Kingdom Government. I should like to know whether that was done to facilitate the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for Scotland being representatives on the new regional body. That is not an acceptable model.

Welsh Members have had a letter today from the Assembly of Welsh Counties, the body which represents all county councils in Wales. The letter, calling for a Welsh Assembly, takes the view that

"if Wales is to be properly represented in Europe, it must be on a democratic basis. The representative(s) must be able to speak for Wales and not for anywhere else. A Secretary of State for Wales—however able or well-intentioned he may be —is appointed by our national government whose appropriate outlet in Brussels is through the Council of Ministers."

The draft treaty refers to that point in article 198a. It says:

"The members of the Committee may not be bound by any mandatory instructions. They shall be completely independent in the performance of their duties, in the general interest of the Community."

Can a member of the United Kingdom Cabinet, or a member of any other country's equivalent, go as a member of a committee with such terms of reference? A Cabinet Minister will inevitably have loyalties to the Cabinet. That passage must be clarified.

The question of how many seats Wales will have also needs to be clarified. There are 24 seats for the United Kingdom. Ireland, with the same population as Wales, will have nine seats and Luxembourg, with the population of Gwent, will have six seats. At the very least, we need to know what the number of seats will be and how they will be allocated.

My hope is that the committee of the regions will eventually grow into being the second chamber of the European Parliament—a chamber made up of representatives from the small nations and regions of Europe, who will represent their own directly elected Parliament. Such a chamber will act as a counter-balance to the inevitable centralisation which is implicit in the directly elected first chamber. We need that counter-balance if we are to avoid the centralisation to which a number of hon. Members have referred.

I turn to the vexed question of additionality. It does not seem to have been resolved at Maastricht, and there has been little progress made on it. There is a danger of Wales and other areas losing out because of the way in which the Treasury takes in the receipts that come from the European Community and does not pass on the money to the areas which should benefit. In today's *Western Mail*, there is a focus on the RECHAR programme. Some £20 million a year is in danger of being lost because of that policy. If the European Community is to be meaningful in its economic and regional policies, the benefits which come from it in the form of grants, such as RECHAR grants, must find their way to the areas for which they are intended and they must find their way there in a meaningful form.

The definition of gross national product for the purposes of the cohesion fund is relevant here. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) asked whether GNP will be defined on a so-called "national" basis—on member states—or on a regional basis. If it is defined on a state basis, many areas which deserve help under the cohesion fund will miss out. As we are not part of the social chapter, which I very much regret, is there a danger that people in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom will lose the opportunity to apply for grants for women, for youth, for the long-term unemployed and for disabled people, which may arise in the context of the social chapter? There are many schemes under existing provision, such as the Now scheme, the Horizon scheme and the Petra scheme, and I presume that our entitlement to those relevant to us will continue, but is there a danger of those schemes, too, being jeopardised?

Although many of us in the House are passionately pro-European—I am certainly in their midst—we need to sound a word of warning about the dangers of European chauvinism. There is a danger of racism growing on a European basis—on the basis of the idea that everyone within Europe is part of the "in" club and we should build walls against those outside. That worries me. The older generation saw the danger which came from Germany in that respect.

The way to counterbalance that is to strengthen regional government—for example, through the Länder in Germany—to strengthen European unity and to reduce the powers of Bonn and Berlin, London and Paris, Madrid and Rome. That may take years, and there may be

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

relatively few hon. Members prepared to face up to that question. I believe, however, that we shall achieve long-term stability and unity in Europe only when we put behind us the 18th and 19th-century models on which the powers of cities and Parliaments such as London, Berlin, Rome, Paris and Madrid are based and when we build on the natural communities within Europe, towards a Europe that is united in its diversity.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. It may seem a long time between now and 2 am, but a very large number of hon. Members wish to speak, so I hope that we shall maintain the momentum and that hon. Members will continue to limit their speeches to 10 minutes each on a voluntary basis.

9 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I shall endeavour to follow your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I invite the House to shout me down if my speech exceeds 10 minutes.

It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), to whom I pay tribute for his consistent support for the European ideal. Unlike many Opposition Members, he has not changed his mind over the years, but has been a persistent supporter of the European Community and the part that Wales and the United Kingdom play in it.

I, too, would claim some consistency in this regard, having tabled an early-day motion in 1978 calling for rapid moves towards economic and monetary union. That motion attracted a great deal of support among my hon. Friends, many of whom are now in the Cabinet. Although they may have kept their support quiet for many years, I am pleased to say that they are now the evangelists and advocates of the principle, in a way with which I wholly concur.

I am delighted with the agreement that the Prime Minister brought back from Maastricht. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, to the Foreign Secretary, to the Chancellor and to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the adept negotiations that they concluded, for their sensitive handling of opinions within the Conservative party and in the country as a whole, and for the way in which, in my view, they have come back with the best of all worlds. They have given us the opportunity to participate in the future development of the economic and political union of the European Community, but, at the same time, on those issues on which our interests may be prejudiced we have an opportunity, should circumstances change, not to go all the way down the road.

I thought that, in parliamentary terms, at least, the Leader of the Opposition made an extremely impressive speech. It was quite apparent to me that, underneath the party politics of the matter, a welcome degree of unity now exists among the Conservative and Labour parties and the Liberal Democrats in their approach to a single currency. It is a fact—indeed, it is a truism—that no Conservative Prime Minister would come forward with a motion proposing to the House that we join a single currency unless he intended to advocate it. That is perfectly apparent. I do not think that it was a great political achievement for the Leader of the Opposition to draw that out of the Chancellor today.

No Government would come forward with such a motion if they thought that they would be defeated on it. That is not to say, however, that we should not have an opt-in clause. The importance of that is that we cannot predict how events may change over the next few years. If, by some ill fortune, we were to have a Labour Government, economic circumstances might deterioriate so rapidly that our possibilities of convergence would be diminished and we would not be able to recommend to the House or the country that we take such a course. No Labour Government would be able to come forward with that proposition either. We have got the best of both worlds, and I believe that the case was made most effectively by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

I want to say something about the stance of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). I know that his speech reflects the view not only of some in his own party but of many other hon. Members in the House for whose intellect and experience in government we have the greatest respect. Let me put this question to the right hon. Gentleman and to others: what is devaluation other than high interest rates by another name? Throughout our history, debasement of the coinage has been one of the worst offences committed by Governments. To call for the ability to continue to devalue one's currency is to perpetrate a fraud upon the people who hold that currency. By reducing or devaluing the exchange value of one's currency one may believe that interest rates can be held down. However, people who have borrowed in that currency and pay lower interest rates must simply pay back a larger sum in real terms. If we do not face up to the problems that cause a devaluing currency and inflation, there will be a continuous problem of decline in the economic base.

Currencies and economies with high inflation must have the highest rates of interest. Those with the most stable and strongest currencies with the lowest rates of inflation also have the lowest interest rates. We all want low interest rates for our constituents, our businesses and our economy. However, that will not be delivered and lower rates of inflation will not occur as a result of policies of persistent debasement of the coinage and devaluation. Such policies would simply feed inflation further into the economy through the high cost of imported goods.

Mr. Shore: No one would claim that currency appreciation or depreciation is a panacea for economic problems. However, it is often a sine qua non for successful operation of the economy. Unless nations, as a result of their different degrees of productivity and successful economic output, can from time to time adjust their currencies one to another, there will be a massive concentration of prosperity in one part of the world and appalling suffering and deprivation elsewhere.

Mr. Nelson: I could not disagree more. Devaluation is not a sine qua non. It is a cover-up for the failure to deal with the basic problems of the economy.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House sometimes place too great an importance on a single currency or a multiplicity of currencies. After all, a currency is only a medium of exchange. Whether it is stable or inflationary, by itself it does not promote or necessarily reduce

economic growth. It should simply be a sound store of exchange on which people can plan their investments, businesses and their lives. The things that determine economic growth are quite different.

I do not believe that we will magically transform the economic prospects of this country if we have a single currency. However, if we have a single currency which is valuable, low inflationary and does not have high interest rates, together with a single market and customs union in which goods, employment and capital can circulate freely coupled with—and this is probably the most import sine qua non—free enterprise policies adopted by member states of the European Community, policies with which I associate my party, we will have a phenomenal capacity to generate growth and prosperity within the Community.

I am not starry-eyed. I am not an adventurist about what I want the Community to achieve. My objective is simply to deliver a better standard of living to my constituents and the bottom line of more prosperity in their pockets. Unless we deliver that, the political pillars will crumble and all that we are trying to erect will be regarded as a fraud.

Perhaps within the next 10 years the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney and I will face each other across the Floor of the House and consider what has happened. I predict that if we follow through the contents of the treaty and the process of convergence, low inflation, the encouragement of a single market and free enterprise and so generate that growth, we will be able to look back on a period of exciting prosperity within the Community in the interests of all those whom we seek to represent.

A phenomenon of climbing summits is that when one gets to the top there is usually a higher summit beyond. Having climbed this summit, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sees a more important but related summit beyond it. That summit is the GATT agreement. After his chairmanship of the G7 meeting, I was struck by his statement to the House in which he said that he took personal responsibility for seeking to deliver agreement on the stalled GATT negotiations by the end of this year. I thought then that it was a considerable challenge and commitment. I have since spoken to my right hon. Friend about it, and I am encouraged to believe that he will be able to forge some agreement on that matter as well.

Just as it is important within the European Community to have common standards of trading and finance, it is important for our world obligations as well as our self-interest to forge an agreement on GATT. I hope that the House will join me in supporting the Prime Minister and in hoping that he will be able to make such a breakthrough, but it will be necessary for us and for many hon. Members who represent agricultural constituencies to face up to some extremely difficult decisions. If we do not go along wholly with what MacSharry proposes, at least part of it will be necessary in order to pare back production domestically and throughout Europe. If the Prime Minister can deliver a breakthrough on the stalled GATT negotiations in addition to the extraordinary success that he has had in Maastricht, he will have a grateful nation at the general election.

The agreement provides us with a great opportunity and with a conclusion to a European summit of historic proportions which meets the best aspirations of those of us who want Europe to move forward to take a positive step in the Community in the next few years and which also provides the safeguards of national interest which many hon. Members seek. To that end, it is a great success, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend upon it.

9.10 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On this site for hundreds of years now men have been talking about power. They have done it in different groups and they have done it with different historical backings. But the reason that we are here in Westminster is that, very early on, those who sought to tax the people of this country learned that they must have representatives who would go out, gather in those taxes and deliver them to those who were in power and who would take decisions on taxation.

As the years passed, it became very clear to those people that they would no longer be able continually to take taxes from people who were unrepresented and whose views were not to be heard. Initially, the barons and the burgesses were sent out into the shires to get cash, but, bit by bit, power came to be translated in such a way that those who were taxed demanded a say in how those taxes were spent. *[Interruption.]* That is absolutely true, from mediaeval times onward. The translation of power has gone directly with the pressure of people who were taxed to have a say in what happened to the money. That has happened over many centuries, but big constitutional changes always came when the people of this country demanded a say in their affairs.

Sometimes there were violent incidents, and sometimes great changes such as wars actually gave power to an unrepresented group such as the women of this country, but always pressure from below has brought about constitutional change. However, we are talking about a major change that would actually take away from the elected representatives in the House of Commons the right to say how the taxes that have been raised in this country from those whom we seek to represent are to be spent in future.

It is a massive change. It is not a small movement away; it is not what we were told would happen at the beginning of the discussion about our application to join the Common Market. We were told that there would be some harmonisation, that an open market would be created without barriers, and that there would be a means by which the country, which based all its future on manufacturing, would be able sell its goods abroad and bring back enormous amounts—I was going to say "danegeld"—of any kind of geld that would help them to acquire a higher standard of living. With the Single European Act and now with, very specifically, the new treaties, we are seriously talking about letting the power of that direct connection slip away from us.

It is only right that we should make it clear to the people of Britain exactly what is involved. It is not a question of arguing about the small print of one clause that may somehow or other give some small advantage. It is not a question of saying that together we shall build an enormous new Europe in which everyone will have representation at regional and central level. We are talking about moving towards the creation of a centralised state. That is what a central bank will mean.

The centralised state will not be a state based on common language or common aspirations, or one in which the people of the various nations have chosen freely to

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

associate because they understand all the implications. It will be a state created by our slipping bit by bit into agreements which we find ourselves obliged to accept.

We cannot talk any more about those who are Euro-sceptics and those who are not. Those who are elected to the House of Commons should tell the people they represent that everything discussed at Maastricht will affect them. We are seriously discussing handing over powers in areas of policy where no one has discussed with the British electorate whether that is what they want. No one has asked whether people want an involvement at central level in health. No one has said, "Do you want your decisions on major industries such as transport taken by majority vote when perhaps your case has not been fully put, or has been put in a way in which it can be accepted?"

No one has discussed with the British people whether they require citizenship of a new European state, whether they want their educational policies decided on a majority vote, by qualified majority vote or even by unanimity by people whom they do not control. No one has asked the British people whether they want a civil service over which they do not have ultimate and effective political control.

The House of Commons is failing in its duty if it does not point out that the real political debate is about precisely who will control our economy. I have been disappointed that my party has not seen fit to spell out the full financial implications of union if we found ourselves in government faced with the political pressures that will undoubtedly arise if the continuing recession means that important economic decisions have to be taken to regenerate industry in Britain or even to do the job in the regions about which hon. Members have spoken tonight.

I have been saddened that my party has not chosen to say in clear terms, "Yes, we believe that we should co-operate with people, but we must do so on the basis of acceptance by the British of where they want to go and what future they want."

Some people who come from a small region of the Community believe in a centralised structure because they believe that it will give them greater flexibility and more control. They must be living in cloud cuckoo land. The institutions of the Community are failing disastrously, because they take decisions at the top and seek to push them all the way down the system.

The reason why the common agricultural policy is causing enormous problems is that it is based not on climate, political need or the food interests of the peoples of Europe but on the spurious idea that it is possible to create a common policy that will be adequate for a Mediterranean area and a temperate area as well as for those who produce other products elsewhere in the Community.

The greatest political danger—greater than all the dangers that I have mentioned—is that many of the eastern European countries which find themselves outside the magic circle will be even more discomfited when they realise that enormous barriers have been raised against them. Far from being open and outward-looking, the Community is rapidly becoming a more rigid, restrained and centrally determined organisation.

That is not in the interests of the British people, and it is certainly not in the interests of those who want the economies of eastern Europe to develop. It is not even in the interests of the African, Caribbean and Pacific nations, which are being seriously damaged by the agreements that the Community is demanding. At the same time, it is keeping large areas of the third world out of the organisation.

I hope that, when it comes to a vote, the House will bear in mind the fact that these complicated treaties, which our electorates will not see, will impinge upon their lives for many centuries. We find it difficult to get people to vote in local or parish elections or for their town councils. We ask ourselves why people will not use their precious vote for those elections while they are prepared to vote in a general election. We know instinctively that it is for one reason —because they understand that there is a connection between their vote, taxation and the Government. They clearly see that line and understand it. That is why the poll tax failed, and why such enormous political pressure was put on the Government.

People will not accept a system that they do not clearly influence. Basically, they do not want a change. We are in a dangerous position. We are seeking to pretend that the European Community at Maastricht, far from simply holding an extremely expensive, diffuse and not especially impressive meeting, produced something which many people in this country do not understand. Where they understand it, they do not accept it and where they accept it, they have grave doubts about any elected House which takes them rapidly down the road to federal organisation —by any other name—without having consulted them.

No one in the House has a mandate to commit the people of this country to a federal Europe. Those hon. Members who stand for office should bear that in mind.

9.21 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) rightly said that the basic issue at Maastricht was not the detailed clauses but democracy. She must have found it as embarrassing as I find it disturbing to watch Opposition converts behaving almost exactly as Conservatives did in 1973.

Instead of facts and policies, we are hearing day dreams and hallelujahs. We heard the Leader of the Opposition telling us how we would have freedom from injustice, new opportunities, better deals for the regions and new challenges. Sadly, with the conversion of the Labour party, we are simply getting a pile of slogans. I am sure that Labour Members believe them, but surely experience should show them how wrong they must be.

Exactly the opposite is happening in the Conservative party. Tired, hard-working Ministers—who obviously have to work round the clock and have to keep going to Brussels—are finding out what EEC life means in reality and what it does to our democracy.

For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said that we might have to ask agriculture to give up a little to ensure that the general agreement on tariffs and trade talks succeed. We all know that no such concession will be made. We know that pressure is such that the cash given in protection and subsidy comes to £127,000 per farmer per year, fully indexed.

In fact, we have heard a lot of nonsense. Therefore, we must ask ourselves about the achievements of the meeting

at Maastricht. First, I think that most people would accept that opt-out from the single currency is not a major achievement because, so long as we are stuck in the exchange rate mechanism, even if we decided to opt out, Britain's freedom would be the same as Scotland's freedom in having a Scottish pound note within the United Kingdom. We could pretend that it was a pound and that it was separate, but if it were linked under the ERM, we would have no freedom apart from the tiny margin which we are allowed.

On the other hand, because opt-out has been written into the treaty for the first time, Britain is under no obligation, and at least the debate on the validity and strength of the ERM can continue within the Conservative party. There is no doubt that a growing number of people in the Conservative party realise that the EEC is becoming, more and more, a protectionist, bureaucratic racket, which is costing our taxpayers a great deal and doing damage to our people.

The second achievement was that on the rights of workers. However, there is little value in this exemption if the Commission simply implements the social charter directives through the Single European Act. Foreign Office Ministers are well aware that, while we spent a great deal of time arguing over whether to sign the social charter, or the social chapter, that will all be irrelevant if its terms are forced through under that Act. Even the most worthy people misunderstand that.

A former Cabinet Minister, speaking in the debate earlier, said that he was horrified to find out that we were to have new Euro speed limits for buses and lorries, and thought that this was related to subsidiarity. Britain and the other countries agreed these new speed limits on 16 November because the Commission was using the powers of the Single European Act. My hope is that what the Prime Minister has achieved will encourage the Government to question in the courts whether the EEC is correct in using the Single European Act to give it powers that were not in the original treaty.

I hope that this time we have achieved something, rather than, as has happened time and again in the past, been conned or misled by the EEC. The biggest achievement for the Prime Minister is the fact that we have now switched sides in the political argument. Labour Members are now the Euro-enthusiasts, with one or two honourable and sensible exceptions. They are the ones who want to press on, to go ahead, to sign everything, to agree to everything that Mr. Delors suggests, after due consultation and by majority vote.

It is clear that Labour wants to go, wham, into Europe, with great enthusiasm. There is no doubt that Labour Members have the vision and that bright look on their faces that we see with recent converts. By comparison, the Conservative party wants to take a sensible approach to the EEC. We do not want to sign up to new policies if we think that they will end up in a mess, and new debates are starting in our party.

The increasing number of Euro-doubters must ask themselves a question. All of us in the Conservative party know that, apart from a few—I am sure honourable—exceptions, people are becoming rather fed up with the EEC, with what it is doing and with what it is spending. However, if we are not going along this road, what on earth are we going to do?

We have to ask about costs—something that has not been mentioned tonight. I asked our splendid Library to do me a paper setting out what the Government get from North sea oil, because constituents keep telling me that, with North sea oil, we should be a wealthy and successful country. On 11 December, I got a lovely letter from the Library setting out the amount that Britain gets from North sea oil, in taxes, royalties and what it calls "corporation tax (before ACT set-off)".
All that comes to £2,503 million.

What will be paid to the EEC this year as our net contribution—the cash that we hand over, which is gone and which others get? The answer is, more than £2,503 million. We are throwing away all the benefit of our oil revenues simply by giving subsidy to the EEC, and this is only part of the cost—there is much more. We also spend money on dumping food under the crazy common agricultural policy.

I appeal to the Government, in particular to our friendly Foreign Office, to tell me, the Opposition and the public what they think this agreement will cost us, given the money that will have to go on convergence, and all that is to be spent on Portugal, Greece, Italy and the rest. We know that Governments cannot always get things right, because figures change, but we should at least have an estimate, so that we can do something about it.

If the EEC wants to spend all this money, it will have to ask for more money. What are the Government's views on that? Do they think that Europe should get more money so that it can spend more money converging? We should hear about that, because it is important.

The second matter is whether the Government will try hard to attain demarcation. All the talk about federalism was nonsense, because our federal position would be a step ahead of what we have now. At least when a country is federal it knows what belongs to it and what belongs to others. Now, basically everything belongs to the EEC. Will the Government try to establish demarcation?

Where do we go from here? How do we stop the EEC constantly seizing powers? We passed the Single European Act thinking that it would be restrictive, but that did not work. We imposed financial limits, but they did not work. How will we prevent the Commission from taking more powers? How will we prevent the Councils from taking more powers? More importantly, how will we prevent the European Court from taking more powers?

I hope that the Government will think seriously about where we go from here. Is there not a case not just for seeking exemption from the silly Euro-currency but for trying to get away from the trap of the ERM, which is forcing a decent Conservative Government to cause misery in our country simply because we do not have control of interest rates? If we pretend that the pound is worth something that it is not worth, other things have to be distorted. If people think that that will change with Euro-currency, they should ask what will happen to that Euro-currency. Will it float against the dollar and the yen? Will it be linked to something like gold? We must also ask whether Britain would benefit from getting out of the common agricultural policy.

For the first time, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—I commend his splendid answer to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—has said no to some things. It means that we can stop and think. It is an encouraging position, because Labour Members are now the enthusiasts and we are the new thinkers. I hope that there will be a great deal of new thinking in the Conservative party and in the Government.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

Matters are serious. People doubt, but they do not know what to do. Perhaps, as a small gesture of gratitude and good will towards the Government for what they have done in bringing about this position, it might just be possible that, for the first time on this subject since 1973, I shall even give them my vote.

9.31 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): For what it is worth, I can claim consistency because for years I was the only member of the Tribune group who voted for membership of the EC and closer European integration. For a very long time, that was thought to be a neo-fascist aberration, but now I find myself pedalling almost comfortably in the mainstream of my party's policy. I do not like it very much, so I shall have to find some new eccentricity as soon as possible.

Over the years, the debate about our relationship with the EC has been marked by deception—or, to be charitable, self-deception—and certainly by hypocrisy. Parliament has never been allowed to take developments in Europe as seriously as it should. It has always followed the Government in believing that the EC is a club, the rules of which we can alter at will. Until recently, Ministers pretended that the so-called Luxembourg compromise would give us a veto over anything that we did not like. We then invoked subsidiarity as a principle that would limit EC interference in our internal affairs. However, the Select Committee found that the term "subsidiarity" had no meaning and could be taken to mean the accretion of powers to the central institutions or no change at all. In fact, the legal adviser—probably giving a very expensive opinion—suggested that the matter was best left undefined.

Now we have invoked opt-out clauses as though, while we are opted out, the EC would not continue to develop in a way that would make it more difficult for us to opt in at a later date. There is more than a little hypocrisy in the Government's horror at the mention of the word "federal", which is now conveniently interpreted as a highly centralising arrangement, yet we created federal institutions in our former dominions and in post-war West Germany to prevent centralisation. It is hypocritical to trumpet our parliamentary sovereignty when this is the land of the royal prerogative, Crown immunity and the massive use by Government of unamendable instruments, regulations and codes of practice.

It was especially ironic that in the pre-Maastricht debate the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) trumpeted about the "supremacy of Parliament". She headed a Parliament that guillotined 66 Bills in 10 years and produced 10,000 pages a year of unamendable instruments and regulations, some of which had a profound effect on our legislation. It ill behoves us to boast of our parliamentary democracy when we consider the autocratic power of the Executive over this legislature.

The exclusion of "federal" from the Maastricht treaty —one of the Prime Minister's victories, we are told—led to its replacement by the words "an ever closer union", interpreted throughout Europe as a move towards democratic federalism with the central institutions having competence over more and more areas of policy.

The Government conceded a number of competencies to the EC at Maastricht and they were not reported too loudly. One such area was immigration policy, to which in three years' time majority voting will apply. It will also apply to environmental issues and to education and training, and to powers of veto for the European Parliament——

Mr. Garel-Jones: It is right that article 100c of the treaty includes visa lists and the format that visas will take, but if the hon. Gentleman examines the treaty carefully he will find that all matters related to immigration policy remain firmly within the intergovernmental pillar and cannot be removed from it unless it is by unanimity and the approval of each Parliament in Europe.

Mr. Garrett: The hon. Gentleman is very sensitive about immigration. I had understood that visas were central to immigration policy and, hence, rather important. The Minister can say more about that when he winds up, if he likes.

If we adhere to the concept of a single market the logic leads inevitably to a single currency. It was the task of the Prime Minister at Maastricht to ensure that the conditions in which a single currency might be introduced would be advantageous to businesses and ordinary people in Britain. The victory of our opt-out clause on a single currency—that this Parliament will eventually decide whether to opt in or out—is a delusion, since all member countries have reserved the right to consult their national legislatures before finally agreeing to enter a single currency. Our opt-out clause will reduce our influence on the development of European monetary union, and as all other countries have said that they did not need such a clause, we are labelled firmly as second class. It is not as if we will not have to shadow the deutschmark in any case, and so closely that it might as well be our single currency. Our freedom of action in this matter is thus illusory.

It seems to me impossible to move to a truly common market and to European integration without legally binding social provisions held in common—not to mention the need to raise British standards in these areas. Unless there are measures to harmonise conditions of employment and benefits and rights to consultation, competition will be distorted by social dumping—the attraction of capital and enterprise to the parts of the Community where labour is cheap and industry unregulated. The Government hope that Britain will be the beneficiary of this, but there is no reason why our partners should let us get away with it under the competition regulation.

I find it shaming that Britain should resist improvements in the hours of work of young people, in parental leave, in the rights of part-time workers, who are mostly women, and in worker consultation. There is no reason to believe that economic efficiency is incompatible with fair employment practices.

Although we in Britain are not accustomed to the sort of declaratory statements of intent that we find in the social chapter, and earlier in the social charter, and although we may doubt the practicality of enforcement of many of these measures, they at least provide a point of reference for those affected and a set of principles against which national provision can be tested. They would help to create in Britain the general idea of having rights—an area in which we are particularly deficient.

In the course of reporting to this House on the Dublin summit in June 1989 the then Prime Minister described the Community's programme of social action as "piffling little powers". Now they are called, in the motion which we debated before Maastricht,

"intrusive Community measures in social areas".

On 16 December the *Financial Times* reported that only 10 per cent. of British businesses believed that the social charter would have any negative effect on their personnel management practices.

Similarly, concerted action is essential in environmental policy, if only because pollution does not respect national boundaries. The fact that we have not carried out any proper environmental assessments of some particularly destructive road schemes is to our discredit. It is not a matter about which we should berate the Community. The Prime Minister said in October that we had no prior notice of the Environment Commissioner's interest in the four schemes. but Friends of the Earth have shown that the Department of the Environment received and replied to letters from the Commission in October 1989, January 1990, June 1990 and March 1991 about the need for environmental impact studies before the road schemes could go ahead.

Majority voting on social and environmental matters is essential because those issues demand common action across the EC. In areas where we have already ceded competence to the Commission, democratic accountability can reside only in the European Parliament. The effective decision-making body, the Council, meets in secret, passes its laws in private and consists of Ministers who authorise legislation that cannot be challenged by the national Parliaments or judicial systems. The European Parliament should be able to veto some of the proposals from the Council. There are cases where, in the interests of raising standards, it should be able to initiate legislation also.

However, it seems to me—I do not think that this view is widely held—that Parliament itself has an independent interest in these matters, whatever political party forms the Government. Ceding powers and sovereignty to another Parliament is a parliamentary as well as a Government matter. Therefore, the resources of this Parliament should be substantially strengthened so that we can scrutinise the EC. The present means of scrutinising EC directives and decisions is inadequate. At present, the means of considering future directives or the development of policy in Europe is absolutely non-existent. This Parliament needs a research and analytical staff to keep abreast of EC developments and proposals so that we, as a legislature, can develop alternative sources of information to the information with which we are provided by the Government, which is usually distorted and always loaded in the Government's favour. We, as a Parliament, should have an office and a staff in Brussels to keep us informed. By and large, we know only what the Government choose to tell us. There is a long-term case for a European sub-committee for virtually every Department that is given a Select Committee in the House.

Powers will inexorably move from here to the EC institutions. The question is whether those institutions are democratically controlled. What we need is more honest discussion and openness from our Government—from any Government—on such issues as they develop. We also need new machinery in the House for better understanding and evaluating them. Here we have as great a democratic deficit as the institutions of Europe.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mrs. Currie.

9.42 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Mr. Speaker, you are wonderful.

I should like first to congratulate the powers that be, the usual channels, on calling a second debate on Europe. That puts into context the remarks of the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett). This House does matter. It has a role to play in our debates and discussions on Europe. Indeed, it has a larger role to play, even now, than many Parliaments in the rest of Europe. It took a lot of courage for the Government to call the previous debate —I am glad that they did—and I am pleased that we have the opportunity to speak on Europe today.

I should like also to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the team that went to Maastricht on the way in which they conducted themselves. They gave sterling service—and gave a new meaning to that term of quality. They gained admiration—albeit much of it grudging—throughout Europe. In the Netherlands, the newspaper *De Volkskrant* reported:

"The Brits stole the show in Maastricht . . . it is plain the British have revealed themselves as rock-hard negotiators."

That will stand us in good stead in all the discussions to come.

In France, the left-wing newspaper *Liberation* stated that the Prime Minister had

"demonstrated his devotion to economic liberalism."

So he did—and Conservative Members are delighted.

On 12 December, *Le Monde* pointed out that my right hon. Friend was quite right to take the approach that he did, stating:

"It would have been premature to go much further in reinforcing Community institutions since EC institutions will have to be reformed considerably to take account of the probable enlargement of the Community."

It continued by referring to the success of "realism and perseverance". Opposition Members have not referred to those opinions, but those are accurate and true quotations.

Speaking to a British newspaper—*The Daily Telegraph* —on the same day, Chancellor Kohl said

"such a conference"—

the one at Maastricht, that is—

"has by definition got to be a series of compromises".

That is what we have got, and I think that we have ended up with a first-class deal—not only for this country but for the entire European Community as it now stands, and for the nations which we hope will join before long.

Now we must consider how we are to make it all work. We face the completion of the single market fairly soon —officially by the end of 1992, although some parts may take a bit longer. We face the starting point of stage 2 of economic and monetary union on 1 January 1994. I think that we in this country should make an effort to make those developments work; not in a negative way—we should not simply be dragged along by events—but by adopting the most positive approach possible. None of that is news to my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; he has heard me say the same before.

If we are to make the new treaties function well, and gain real benefits for ourselves and for our partners, we must not only remove the obvious, visible barriers, but begin to remove the invisible ones. This country contains far too many of those, and they prevent the British from

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

playing a full part in Europe, and from showing as much enthusiasm as many of our neighbours. Let me give three examples: the dozy approach of British industry and British business to the opportunities offered by Europe, our lack of languages, and our general attitude to our history.

We should bear it in mind that we in the House must vote on the single currency within the next five years—by 31 December 1996. That vote will probably take place in the next Parliament. If we are to make a sensible decision then—a decision based on the conditions, economic and otherwise, that prevail at the time—and if whatever decision we make is backed by the electorate and is not unduly influenced by emotion, sentiment or ill-informed or excessively narrow nationalism, our Government will have a good deal of work to do in the meantime.

Business on this side of the channel seems to be sleep-walking. It seems to be missing a trick. Markets are opening up and developing, but we seem to be failing to adapt. We do not seem to recognise that those developments mean not only that we must go out to Europe, but that increasing competition is heading our way. Every business in the country is affected by the current changes, but are they aware of it? I sometimes wonder.

According to figures released by the German Foreign Office, in the first seven months of 1991—as a result of German unification—there was a tremendous increase in exports from other Community countries into Germany. The figure leapt by almost 24 per cent., nearly a quarter. The highest rate of export growth, 42 per cent., was registered by Spain. Denmark was second, with 31 per cent.; Belgium and Luxembourg followed with 28 per cent., and France with 27 per cent. Britain was way below the average, with an increase of only 19 per cent. I have no doubt that every business person involved congratulated himself on that 19 per cent., but it was well below the average.

The net result is that in trade with Germany in the first part of this year we stand not first, second or third, but fifth. Our exports of manufactured goods—and all the other exports of which we are so proud—to Germany, which desperately needs them following unification, are exceeded by those of countries such as Belgium. That is not good enough: British industry must pick up its feet.

Much has been said about attracting foreign industry and investment. My constituency is immensely proud of the fact that it has attracted investment not only from Toyota but from Sweden, in the form of ABB, and from Switzerland in the form of Nestlé. Constituents of mine work for Pirelli in Burton-on-Trent, and for many companies owned by other countries. We are proud that we can make them welcome, and pleased that they can make us wealthy. Last year we attracted more than half of all Japanese and American investment coming into the European Community. According to Nomura, a new estimate suggests that by 1995 Japanese investment in the United Kingdom could add £4 billion to our trade balance, 2 per cent. to output and more than 400,000 new jobs.

That is not enough. It is not enough to welcome foreign investment in our country, although our rejection of the social chapter will make that sort of investment more likely. It is not enough to encourage other European nations to invest in us, as they are doing in greater numbers. Somewhere along the line British-owned business must wake up and realise that there is a huge market out there of about 340 million people and that it has access to business throughout the Community and the world.

When the Single European Act was put on the statute book, a campaign was led by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Lord Young of Graffham, on what was called 1992. That seems to have faded somewhat since then, but it is even more important now. I urge the Government to have a new campaign to raise British business awareness of the opportunities offered by the single market and of what will happen if it continues to behave as if Europe does not exist.

We still act as if all foreigners speak English. They do not, but we act as if they should. That attitude is not only bad manners, but bad business. If the Japanese came to our country and sold goods with booklets in Japanese, we would not buy them. Yet we go to other countries where the majority of people speak their native language and try to sell them goods in English. Our salesmen speak English and we wonder why we retire baffled from the fray, even in a country next door such as France. We wonder why it is so difficult to penetrate their markets. It reduces drastically our chances of winning contracts overseas and it perpetuates the dislike of foreigners and the hostility to Europe that are still common in our country.

What are we doing about that? Last year 44,000 students took an A-level in modern languages. That is only 6 per cent. of the 700,000 A-levels sat last year. Two thirds of those students took French, barely one in five took German—the main business language—and only a handful, a few hundred, took the other main languages. The students have the right idea. Between 1990 and 1991 we have seen a 13 per cent. increase in the number of students taking A-level French, a 12 per cent. increase in the number taking German and a 10 per cent. increase in those taking Spanish—I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be pleased about that. We should be teaching those languages in the same way as English and other languages are taught in countries such as Denmark and Holland. They should be taught not only from the age of 11 simply as part of the national curriculum. Children should begin to learn languages when they are seven or eight, as that is when they start to learn language properly. We should teach those languages in the same way as we teach our children road safety, because that knowledge is essential for their future.

We have a real problem in doing that because there is an extraordinary shortage of language teachers since business is employing many of the available people. My hon. Friend the Minister will know of article A in chapter 3 of title VIII on

"Education, vocational training and youth".

It says:

"Community action shall be aimed at:

—developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States."

My hon. Friend the Minister is nodding his head. He signed it and I hope that he means it and will do something about it.

The worst barrier of all is that of attitudes. It is high time that we abandoned for ever the notion that we can

survive outside Europe. It is time for a culture switch—[HON. MEMBERS: "Time."] I have waited 26 hours to make this speech.

We are no longer a top-dog nation telling other nations what to do. We are a partner nation, sharing, being convinced and convincing other countries—a talent that our Prime Minister has shown. The real culture change will come when we realise that we are British and Europeans, and that we are lucky to be both.

9.54 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Like all my colleagues, of course, I support the social chapter. In the most unlikely event of a Tory Government being in office when the programme is being implemented by the other Community countries, I am sure that there would be a challenge on legal grounds to the European Court of Justice. People in this country will not wish to be discriminated against while those changes and advances are being made by fellow members of the Community.

As for the second so-called triumph of the Prime Minister at the summit—the proposed opting out of a single currency—although I am a Euro-sceptic I have little doubt that whatever party is in government Britain will join the single currency if it comes about. The pressure from the business community here and on the pound will be such that it will be most unlikely, to say the least, that Britain will stay out of that arrangement for long. Indeed, we joined the exchange rate mechanism under such pressure.

Much has been made of the exclusion of the word "federal" from the treaty, but that is irrelevant. It has been agreed to continue down the federal road, and the emphasis on the words "ever closer union" shows that that is precisely what the other members of the Community want. Whether one is for a federal Europe—I certainly am not—or against, we should be clear and honest about what is being fought for in the Community. It is nonsense, therefore, to say that because "federal" has been excluded there is no need to be concerned, because a federal arrangement is in the offing and could come about within the next few years. I cannot take the view that that further erosion of national sovereignty is desirable.

One should recall that at almost every stage of debating whether we should join the EC, and then in the 1975 referendum debate on whether we should stay in, little or no mention was made by the advocates of the substantial erosion of national sovereignty. If anything, it was played down. Those who expressed reservations about joining or staying in were told that we were exaggerating. In their statement recommending a yes vote in the referendum, the then Labour Government, with the full support of the Conservative and Liberal parties, said:

"No important new policy can be decided in Brussels or anywhere else without the consent of a British Minister answerable to a British Government and British Parliament."

Without any further erosion of sovereignty, Ministers often now say, "Such and such is Community policy and there is nothing that British Ministers can do about it." The House no longer has power over that. Majority voting, let alone monetary and political union, would make a nonsense of what I have just quoted.

Paragraph 29 of the White Paper issued by the Conservative Government in July 1971, two years before Britain joined the Community, said:

"There is no question of any erosion of essential national sovereignty."

I favour Britain remaining in the Community, but can any hon. Member argue that our present membership, let alone EMU and political union, will not lead to further erosion of our essential national sovereignty? If there was no question of such erosion, there would never have been the Single European Act, let alone the further steps that have been taken by the Community.

What surprises me—I am sure that I am not the only one—is that, although much emphasis has been placed on further union by its enthusiastic advocates, when we consider what is actually happening in Europe we discover that the picture is quite different. Let us consider, for example, one or two countries outside the Community. There is the bloody civil war in Yugoslavia. The federal arrangement which has existed there and which many of us took for granted would continue—as it did for 40 years—is crumbling.

Sir Russell Johnston: That was a federal arrangement imposed by the great powers after the great war.

Hon. Members: So is this one.

Mr. Winnick: I heard some of my hon. Friends say that this arrangement is also imposed. For the sake of argument, I am willing to concede that the rule of law and parliamentary democracy—which some of us are keen to retain in this country in addition to national sovereignty—did not exist in Yugoslavia. I accept that, but most people would argue that there were worse examples of communist dictatorship than that in Yugoslavia. However, that federation is crumbling, and whatever the outcome of the civil war in Yugoslavia it is certain that there will be no restoration of the federation.

Further east, there is the continued break-up of the former Soviet Union. It could be argued, again with justification, that that union was established without a mandate, but that does not alter the fact that now that the dictatorship is disappearing the people do not want to belong to a single union—hence the independent republics which will probably be the outcome of the rather muddled political situation there. We should take those issues on board.

Let us consider the Community itself, however. It is all very well for the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on foreign affairs to say what he did about Yugoslavia and for us to argue about the Soviet Union, but what about the Community itself? The administrative headquarters of the Community is in Belgium, and when we talk about the European Community we always associate it with Brussels. Belgium is a democracy, but there is little doubt that the federal set-up in that country is currently being seriously undermined and there is a question mark over whether Belgium will continue to exist as a state. Unfortunately—it is, indeed, unfortunate—the parties of the extreme right have been successful in the recent Belgian elections.

In the Community countries there is mounting unemployment, recession and deflation which is helping to feed the extreme right wing and fascist movements which have had electoral success in Belgium and France, and outside the Community in Austria. Surely, instead of emphasising EMU and further political union, it would be more relevant and sensible for us to take steps within the Community to reduce unemployment and to try to reverse

[Mr. Winnick]

the circumstances which cause so much economic misery within the Community as well as to help those countries —certainly the former communist countries—which are in a much worse economic plight than we are.

We have heard a great deal about conversion today. We heard my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) say eloquently that he has been converted. I am willing to accept that on occasions one must stand up and say in all honesty that one has changed one's mind. There is nothing especially wrong or dishonourable in holding a political view and then changing it. I cannot claim—nor would I wish to do so —that in my political time I have not changed my views on one or two subjects. On the Community, however, I do not believe that any further erosion of national sovereignty is in the interests of this country. We certainly do not have a mandate to transfer even more authority overseas from this House.

Clearly our predecessors on the Labour Benches were far more involved than we were in the process, but like the other Labour Members who argued for colonial independence—we were often harshly criticised by Conservative Members, who said that we were willing to defend every country but our own—we said that the countries which made up the empire had a right to national independence. What they made of it was up to them, but they had the right to rule themselves.

If I passionately believed that—as I did—it is surely consistent that I should take the same view about my own country. I believe that Britain should continue to rule itself. Of course, we can remain in the Community, although with some erosion of powers—as with NATO, it could be argued—but at the end of the day the House of Commons should decide on major political and economic issues. That is what the House of Commons is all about.

This country has ruled itself for centuries. I cannot believe that the time has come when we should say to ourselves that the Community and the arrangements in Europe are so perfect or near-perfect that we should abdicate the ability that we have exercised throughout the centuries. I do not believe that I was selected, or elected, to do anything of the kind. I treasure the national independence that this country has had, and the sovereignty that the House has had, and I shall not be a party in any way to any further erosion of our sovereignty.

10.1 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I agree with the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who has just spoken with characteristic passion about people's right to change their minds on important issues. Unlike some others, I am delighted. I see it not as an object of derision but as a cause for pleasure and satisfaction that the Labour party should have changed its mind for the seventh time in 10 years, and finally come round to the European idea. It is good for the House and for Europe that it has done so.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that he had changed his mind on the subject, and we all now know him to be an ardent supporter of Europe and of the House of Commons, and a keen student of the present and future difficulties that we will have to overcome. Although we must have every suspicion of a convert, I am glad that the Labour party has thrown its weight behind the European idea.

We need not be equivocal about it: what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has brought back from Maastricht is, by any stretch of the imagination, a remarkable achievement for him, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and for the Foreign Secretary—and for my hon. Friend the Minister of State, too. It is also a considerable achievement for the European experts at the Foreign Office, and especially for our people in Brussels, whose technical expertise is admired throughout the Community.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the hon. Gentleman not think that that result was also a credit to the other European countries, which were willing to compromise with us, although they were not keen to do so?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman makes a respectable point, In any great negotiation, if an agreement is to be reached, compromises must be made on all sides. I am glad that we find friends in different areas where before we may have been devoid of friends. That is a cause for satisfaction. Of course we had to compromise, and so did everyone else.

The Community must now go carefully and slowly about its business. The upheaval in its structures and the dimensions of what it is about to absorb will make it a constitutional boa constrictor. It must now be careful how it proceeds. We must give time and careful thought to putting proper substance on the foundations of Maastricht. We must not close off too many of the avenues of the future by rigidly laying down the way forward through the minefields that lie ahead, through which common sense dictates that we proceed with the greatest care. No advantage will accrue to EC countries jointly or separately if the agreements reached cannot cope with the stresses and strains that are likely to arise in the future.

There is no doubt in my mind or in the minds of the vast majority of Conservative Members that it was in our national interest to reach agreement on the treaty at Maastricht in the light of the measured and sensible package which was negotiated there. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has put Britain back at the heart of the Community, where we shall have a far greater influence and from which we can be in the vanguard in shaping the future.

My right hon. Friends signed the union treaty having made a realistic assessment of Britain's national self-interest. They know that, with the huge upheavals taking place in eastern Europe, the debate about Europe's future is only just beginning. They know that many of the thoughts and assumptions of the past 40 years, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North rightly said, will have to be shaken off and that the European vested interests which have for the past 40 years been so much a part of European life will have to look at the facts of the modern world as it really is and respond accordingly. This weekend, the Community looked out over the future, and it has made an act of faith across all the people of Europe. For that reason alone, it was an important occasion.

It is a matter of pleasure and pride for this country that there was such a breadth of debate before the Maastricht summit. In France, in Germany, in Spain and in Italy, there was hardly any discussion. I understand that the

Cortes debated the matter for half a day. In France and in Germany, countries that are instinctively so pro everything that happens within Europe because of their situation in Europe and their history, people have only just woken up to what has been done in their name at Maastricht. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) had some important points to make on that.

Despite the vigorous public debate before the Council, I was sometimes saddened by the extraordinary lack of confidence that Britain seems to have in its own future. We must try to persuade our people that the treaty of union is not just about Britain—that its effects will be felt for the good, I hope, throughout the length and breadth of western Europe. We must persuade our people that it will reflect, and should reflect, the interests and commitments that are of vital significance for large sections of European industry, for agriculture and for the national policies of all the member states.

For many people in Britain who are involved in everyday commercial life, the transactions within and across Europe are quite matter-of-fact. In that respect, industry has for many years led opinion in the House into seeking far closer ties within the Community. I am a director of a subsidiary of one of our great British corporations which this year has opened new offices in its European network in Aix-en-Provence, in Budapest, in Oporto, in Warsaw and, with great pleasure, only recently in Watford.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): Well done.

Mr. Soames: I knew that my hon. Friend would be pleased.

To the people who work in that company, the idea of Europe means a great deal. The agreements at Maastricht will have given great encouragement to business men and women whose everyday work is the transaction of business on the European scale. Great will be the opportunities available and accruing to the United Kingdom with the completion of the single market.

The agreement will lead to a far greater appreciation by people in Britain of the idea that the United Kingdom is truly an integral and important part of the real Europe, by geography, by tradition, by history, by culture, by civilisation and, most importantly, by commerce and trade of every kind.

Other urgent and vital matters for the United Kingdom arise from the agreement. The first, which was raised by the Leader of the Opposition, is the critical necessity for a swift reform of the common agricultural policy. We really must get this matter resolved in the future interests of the whole European Community.

We and our partners must also set about the creation of a low-cost, free-trade, lightly regulated, low-taxed and high-productivity Europe. We have much work to do in that respect. We shall need more advanced technology, better education, higher investment and lower interest rates and taxation. We look to Ministers in our Government and to all the other Governments of the Community to ensure that the Community does not become an inward-looking, introspective entity; that it keeps its eye on the wider world; and that it is dedicated to the philosophy and ideal of free trade without which the Community and the world would perish. Without those highly desirable industrial essentials, we shall not be able to compete in the world and provide the standard of living that our people have come to expect.

For my own part, the argument in this respect is simple, and has been admirably put by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). Do we want the people of our country to be increasingly better-off or to be poor? Do we want to be rich and prosperous in Europe, or do we want to become the poor cousins, living outside it? For far too long we have ignored what my hon. Friend called the bottom line of the European calculation and our duty to all our people to secure their prosperity, safety and security. Those are some of the most important thoughts behind my right hon. Friend's thinking in the lead-up to the Maastricht summit.

The future of Europe over the next 20 years will be one of dazzling opportunity, and I am glad that, as a result of the treaty, we are now back in a position to help to influence those opportunities for Britain's benefit. The Community will push on as the biggest single trading market in the world—bigger than the United States and Japan combined. It will attract global investment. It will develop and employ, in the most extraordinary manner, the very latest technology on offer. It will use all the skills of its many different peoples to provide goods and services to a market of nearly 380 million people.

My constituency—as well as the United Kingdom as a whole—has already been a major recipient of such investment and, following Maastricht and the Government's absolutely correct arrangement for an opt-in on monetary union, we shall have greater and better opportunities for more inward investment over the next few years. The reason for that is not only that we shall have taken an advantageous position at Maastricht, but that Britain has an excellent entrepreneurial climate, in which people are permitted to get on with their business and take advantage of Britain's proximity to, and partnership and arrangements with, Europe.

On defence and foreign affairs, my right hon. and hon. Friends have succeeded in developing the excellent concept of a common foreign and security policy but only for issues in respect of which we have interests in common. To my mind, the most serious matter for the Community is that the United Kingdom's freedom to act is safeguarded when we need to respond in an emergency to protect our own interests.

The most formidable difficulties exist in eastern Europe, and they must be dealt with. I hope that the new arrangements will allow the Twelve to act more efficiently and coherently. The crucial test for the arrangements will be whether the structures of the European Community are suitable for the post-cold-war world and the way in which they can be developed to meet the needs of a Europe entirely different from that which the Communities were designed to serve.

For example, Germany is now reunited. She has the most powerful economy in Europe, and is moving rapidly to recover her old spheres of commercial and political interest. Inevitably, Germany will replace the Soviet Union as the dominant power within Europe. Are the Community's institutions suited to such a change?

I believe that the conference really came three years too soon; it is far too soon to assess the shape of the post-cold-war world. This Gadarene rush for defence cuts is, I believe, a change that has been made far too soon. We need a long-term, fundamental rethink of the structures of

[Mr. Soames]

political and economic co-operation in a Europe that is no longer embattled and on the defensive, and a rethink of Europe's relationship with a world in which communism has ceased to matter. That is a critical necessity for the future.

This year, the Twelve will have to deal with famine in several republics of the Soviet Union. They will also have to deal with explosive nationalistic hatreds in many ex-communist countries. We will see whether the systems are sufficient to cope with the great strains and problems that lie ahead.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has brought back a splendid package from Maastricht. Negotiations started a year ago, with Britain in a highly defensive position. However, with exhaustive and patient skill, the Government have secured an agreement which has achieved all Britain's objectives and her interests, as well as being a most important step forward for the European Community. I will have great pleasure in supporting the Government tomorrow night.

10.20 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Earlier in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) said that she had changed her mind. This debate is rather like a confessional. Hon. Members have described how they have changed their minds. However, I can tell the Government Front Bench that I have never changed my mind about the need for a united Europe, preferably one based on the principles of democratic socialism. However, I have changed my mind about what used to be called the Common Market.

At the time of the Schumann and Monnet plans, and during the 1950s and 1960s, I honestly believed that the Common Market covered only half Europe so it was wrong to talk about being pro-Europe and anti-Europe. I believed that it was a common market of the multinational corporations. I now believe that the multinational corporations have become sovereign states and the only way in which the people represented by democratic representatives can control the activities of those corporations is through elected supranational Governments. That is the stage that we have reached.

As late as 1975 and the referendum when I opposed our remaining in the Common Market, Britain was still a fairly substantial manufacturing power. However, since 1975 our manufacturing base has been decimated by the Government. One third of our manufacturing base has been lost despite the fact that we are the only country in the Community to have benefited from a North sea oil bonanza.

What would the Germans or the French have done with the revenues from North sea oil? This country wasted that great asset and we are now one of the weakest manufacturing countries in the Community—so weak, indeed, that the Government do not believe that our working people can be guaranteed the same rights as those in manufacturing industry in Greece, Spain and Portugal.

Some hon. Members have referred to opting out and oppose further loss of sovereignty, but what is that sovereignty? When I ask people on the doorsteps in my constituency about that, I find that they are not worried about sovereignty. If sovereignty means anything to them, it means the right to a decent home, a decent education and a decent chance in life. They are no longer interested in the nationalist nonsense that we hear from the Government, and which was the real motive behind the way in which the Government approached Maastricht.

I have no doubt that, once the election is out of the way, the Government will head in the direction of a single currency and the European central bank. Indeed, hon. Members have already alluded to that today. The Government have already lost the opportunity for that bank to be located in London, and that means lost job opportunities for our people—the people whom we represent.

The Government make this country the laughing stock of the world when they talk about the European Community and its social policies being the back door to socialism. O that such policies would lead to democratic socialism as an inevitability. That is something for which people such as myself would fight in Europe—in order to bring about a decent life for our people. The Government have found themselves in an ideological cul-de-sac which is not shared by even the most conservative parties represented in the Bundestag, the French National Assembly or any country in the European Community. The Conservative party, of all political parties holding any power within the European Community, does not believe in social progress and the concept of one nation. Where is one-nation Toryism today? We have only to go less than half a mile from this House to see how our nation is divided. On one side of the street there are banks which are rich on the profit that they have made out of ordinary people, and on the other side there is cardboard city. We have only to walk along Victoria street to see what the Government's social policies mean for ordinary people —the people whom we represent.

The Conservative party is the only major political party that is opposed to the social charter. Conservative Members are also trying to tell Mr. Kohl that the co-determination that Germany has had since 1952 is also a stepping stone to the horrors of militant strikes and trade union activity. They should ask the Germans whether co-determination has succeeded in their country. Nobody in Germany today wants to see the end of the co-determination statute. When our workers go to Germany and visit their opposite numbers, as our dock workers recently did during the passage of the Government's docks legislation, they were amazed that German workers were consulted about their place of work, production, and activity within their plants.

A blatant lie is being told. Time and again we are told that the Government's industrial relations legislation would have to be changed to what it was before 1979. I shall not deal with the arguments about that legislation, but it is a blatant lie that anything in the social charter would entail the repeal of one piece of industrial relations legislation. I defy any Conservative Member to tell me the name of any Act that has been passed since 1979 which would have to be repealed if we signed the social charter.

The Government talk about subsidiarity—it is the new word—and say that if a function is best performed at the national level rather than at the Community level, that is where it should be done. I do not disagree with that, but the Government denied the principle of subsidiarity to the Greater London council, the Merseyside county council,

the West Midlands council and the Tyne and Wear council precisely because they were elected Labour councils with whom they happened to disagree.

The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) has been tramping around eastern Europe and talking about democracy when she does not even believe in democracy in her own country. Let us not allow the Tories to tell us that they care about sovereignty because they are keen on the principle of parliamentary or local democracy in Britain because it is a blatant lie to suggest that that is the case.

Unfortunately, nationalism catches on with many people. We have seen how Milosevic used the nationalist card in Kosovo and eventually entrenched his power in Serbia. Tudjman in Croatia has used the same card. The same has happened in various parts of the Soviet Union. However, one does not have to look beyond our shores to see where nationalism is being used to engender support from the electorate. As I said before, when the Government went to Maastricht to negotiate on behalf of the United Kingdom, first they were more worried about the unity of the Tory party than that of Europe and, secondly, they were more worried about wrongfooting the Labour party. They hoped that the British electorate would think of the Labour party as anti-British.

I represent my constituents' interests and I believe that the way to achieve better conditions for them is not to opt out of Europe. Britain's manufacturing base cannot be restored outside the European scene. That is an absolute impossibility. We need the Siemens and other industrial concerns of Europe to help us build up our base.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) talked about Japanese investment, but who will control Japanese investment? Will it be controlled in Europe, London or Tokyo? I should have preferred to have the opportunity to elect a Parliament in Europe which could control the institutions of government—the Executive in Europe—and could see to it that multinational firms acted in the interests of the peoples of Europe.

We must think in terms of being in Europe. The Government were willing to sacrifice even one of their own principles because they were worried about what would happen in the general election. They gave up the possibility of having any say whatever in determining who will be the officials of the European central bank. We have lost all chance of ensuring that London becomes the financial centre of Europe. Undoubtedly, the bank will go to Frankfurt instead.

Nothing was so cynical in the past week as the manipulation of the news in much of the British press. Headlines about the so-called "Triumph of Major" were signposted across the cheap tabloids. It was in fact an absolute disaster for Britain. It would perhaps be better to refer to what was said in the continental press. For example, the *Rheinischer Merkur* said:

"branding reasonable protection for workers as 'socialism through the back door' is throwing out the baby with the bath water."

A Danish newspaper said that Maastricht

"exhibits Britain as a developing country which wants to compete on cheap labour."

That is the truth of the matter. Those newspapers are not sycophants of the Tory party: they are telling what I believe to be the truth, and the truth that my constituents will believe when we come to the general election.

10.33 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): It worries me that our continuing debate about Britain's relations with her European Community partners is still dogged with overtones which I find unnecessary and, in some cases, unpleasant. I do not understand why the argument has reappeared that there is a political side to the enterprise which no one realised at the beginning and that, if they had done so, people's view would have been different about it.

I go back to the time when Mr. Harold Macmillan came to the House to make a statement on 31 July 1961. He had barely paused to take breath when he said:

"This is a political as well as an economic issue. Although the Treaty of Rome is concerned with economic matters it has an important political objective, namely, to promote unity and stability in Europe, which is so essential a factor in the struggle for freedom and progress through the world."—[*Official Report*, 31 July 1961; Vol. 645, c. 928.]

How can anyone be in any doubt that that was the tone with which this whole debate began in this country and has continued since?

In 1971, throughout the debate over our decision to attach ourselves to the treaty of Rome, there were constant references to the political dimension. Sir Alec Douglas-Home's speech on 21 October was full of references to that, including use of the "F" word. How can anyone doubt that there was a political dimension to the Community?

In his winding up speech my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said:

"I want Britain as a member of a Europe which is united politically, and which will enjoy lasting peace and the greater security which would ensue."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1971; Vol. 823, c. 2212.]

Those sentiments received an endorsement in this House of 356 votes in favour to 244 against. How can it be said, in this latter day, that there was some doubt about the political dimension of the European Community?

Mr. Winnick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Haselhurst: No; we have only a short time available.

The political nature of the Community has been apparent to us all right from the start, and has never been omitted from the debate. It was certainly not omitted from the referendum debate.

I do not accept that we are the only country in the Community to obey the rules. We are very good at obeying the rules, but we only lie third in the league table of adopting and implementing Community regulations. It does not help to sneer at our Community partners because they are less good. The right approach—the approach adopted at Maastricht—is to ensure that we tighten up on implementation. Indeed, a country should face penalties if it does not obey the rules of the Community.

Nor does it help the debate if we suggest that somehow our democracy is superior to everyone else's and are rather scornful about democracy in the Community. We are entitled to be proud of our parliamentary democracy. I am intensely proud of it, but I do not spurn democracy in our partner countries. I recognise that some of them have had to fight to reassert their democracy and we should respect that. It may be a tender plant in some countries, but it is a plant which they revere considerably.

To suggest that if we progress to unification in Europe we shall lose our national identity is false and unreasonable. I do not detect any loss of identity among

[Mr. Haselhurst]

the Scots after 284 years of full political union with this country. Nor do I detect any move by the French or the Italians to erase their national identity, even though they may be the most enthusiastic in the terms with which they wish to embrace the idea of a united states of Europe.

Against that background I found the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) immensely depressing. It struck me as a speech full of bile and scorn, with hardly a respectful word for our partners in the Community, with whom, as a Minister, he must have worked closely at one time. He heard the debate in 1971. He should have known then what we were setting our names to and what he supported.

Mr. Tebbit *rose*——

Mr. Haselhurst: I shall give him an opportunity to reply in a moment. He was a member of the Cabinet in 1985 when the Single European Act was introduced and he has the gall to complain about the transport regulations, which I am happy that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) told the House had not a little to do with the Single European Act. How can my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford say that he did not see all that coming? As he was a member of the Cabinet when those matters were discussed, how can he discover its great constitutional importance now? I do not think that it befits him well to complain to the House now.

Mr. Tebbit: I am happy to explain to my hon. Friend. At that time, I did not believe that the doctrine of subsidiarity would require that our speed limits be dictated by Brussels. Secondly, in Cabinet I believed, as hon. Members generally believed, the then Foreign Secretary when he told us things about the Single European Act that have proved not to be true in fact. He believed it to be true at the time, but that is not the way that it worked out. Having had my fingers burnt, I am damned if I am going to put my arm in the fire.

Furthermore, if my hon. Friend goes back to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said when he came back from his famous meeting with President Pompidou, he will see that my right hon. Friend explained carefully to the House that the democratic line of accountability would be, exclusively, through the Council of Ministers to the national Parliaments. He further observed that the Commission was a bureaucratic organisation with limited terms of reference, and it would not have control over policy. That is why I voted for it.

Mr. Haselhurst: Out of courtesy, I gave my right hon. Friend the opportunity to intervene, but I did not expect him to make a third speech on Europe within such a short time. He must have had amnesia during his ministerial days if he failed to understand the importance of what he was apparently happily prepared to assent to.

Mr. Tebbit: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Haselhurst: I think that I have heard enough from my right hon. Friend.

Set out in the preamble of the treaty of Rome was ever-closer political union. That is what we signed for, and in the treaty of Maastricht it is repeated that we are moving towards an ever-closer union. I recognise that, as we move ever closer to an ever-closer union, hon. Members may have doubts about what that implies for the future of the House and its powers, but one has to look at it realistically. To say that we shall be denuded of our sovereignty is unreal.

Let us consider what we spend our time doing. The Order Paper shows the various matters that concern us. Our constituency mail bags show us the matters that our constituents want us to consider. We should recognise that we are not dealing with great international issues all the time. I must have had about three letters about the Maastricht treaty, but I had 10 times that number about Sunday trading and similar matters.

The House does not deal with the great issues all the time. For example, did the House go into solemn conclave to discuss whether interest rates should go up or down? In or out of the ERM, if the Bundesbank put up its interest rates, we followed within half an hour, without any debate in the House at all. Those are the realities that we must face. We may not like them, but that is the case.

I find the argument that democracy is under attack because of the ever-closer union with the European people difficult to understand. This argument can be raised at any level of democracy. Parish councils sometimes complain about the over-weaning power of the district councils, but we know that the power of planning, of deciding where new housing estates are to go, cannot be left to parish councils. The decisions cannot realistically be taken at that level; and so it goes on up the system.

No wonder that we hear complaints from the people of Scotland about the government that they are getting within the United Kingdom. I am, to my fingertips, a unionist. I want to unite Scotland with the rest of us in the British Isles, and if I want to convince the Scottish people that they are right to be part of this united kingdom, I do not see why I should adopt an entirely different attitude towards ever-closer union within the European Community.

Ms. Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Haselhurst: I am afraid that I must say no to the hon. Lady.

If we are always going to settle for a narrow view, by saying that it will always be the smallest group of people who must hold sway over every decision, we shall never be capable of taking the greater decisions with the greater vision that is necessary if we are to keep apace of events. I hope that we shall move on to closer union, but I hope that we shall do it at a reasonable and sensible pace. That is the tone that the Prime Minister has adopted in his negotiations.

If economic union and a single currency could be achieved, I should prefer that. There will be considerable difficulties, but if it did happen it would be for the benefit of British business, of British industry, and therefore of the wealth of the people of Britain.

I welcome the important progress that was made at Maastricht. I do not complain that it was not sufficient progress, and I certainly do not complain that it was too much. I return to the words of Sir Alec Douglas-Home in the debate in 1971 when, in answer to a question from Jo Grimond, he said:

"I said that the political processes in Europe would evolve, and that they would evolve by consent, because if one tried to

go too fast and impose too much the Community could break up. The change will occur by evolution and by consent."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1971; Vol. 823, c. 921-22.]

I am content with that approach. I think that we are making good progress.

10.45 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) was present, as I was, during the debates in 1971 and 1972. I do not want to pursue this line, but I must say that I had a different impression of the way in which the EC was sold at that time. Being a Celt, I can smell a union wherever it may be. I was quite convinced that the matter was about union. The Prime Minister of the day, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), and others did not convey that impression, nor did many of the so-called pro-marketeers on the Labour Benches. However, many of us were convinced that it was about union, and that is what it has been about from the beginning.

I am not sure whether the treaty of Maastricht has speeded up the conveyor belt to unionism or federalism —whatever the words mean—or whether it has slowed the process. I do not know what effect it will have. I suspect that the conveyor belt will keep moving for a while, but listening to these debates I also suspect that those on that conveyor belt—and those who cling on to it—do not know where they are going. They are not quite sure about the conveyor belt. Some of them are happy for it to go round and round and others are happy to jump on it because it is the only conveyor belt available and they think that they might get some benefit from it.

I am not convinced about the consequences of Maastricht. I have a feeling—it is just a feeling—that Maastricht was the high water mark of what I call the old Europe: the Europe of the Schumann plan and the European Coal and Steel Community; the Europe of the bureaucratic centralism of the Commission; the Europe of the Six, huddled around Paris, Bonn and Brussels.

I do not believe that the Europe of the Six has ever come to terms even with the Europe of the Nine. It is having even more difficulty coming to terms with the Europe of the Twelve. I have considerable doubts about how the Europe of the Six will manage the Europe of the Fifteen, the Eighteen or the Twenty. Of course, the old Europe that I have described had its roots in an older Europe, and that was the older Europe of congresses and chancelleries, of people who drew boundaries on maps and wrote irreversible treaties.

One abiding impression I had when watching what happened at Maastricht, mainly on the television, was the arrogance of some of the leaders of the Europe of the Six —the arrogance of Chancellor Kohl, President Mitterrand, Mr. Delors and the Dutch presidency. What about the arrogance of Chancellor Kohl, who announced to the world that Europe would have a single currency by 1 January 1999? What about the arrogance of the proclamation that it was irreversible?

There is also the arrogance that purports in the treaty to transfer for ever economic and monetary power from democratically elected countries to a non-elected Commission and a non-elected central bank. I suppose that those who took part in the congress of Vienna or in writing the treaty of Versailles also thought that the decisions that they took on Europe were irreversible, and proclaimed as much to the world.

This same arrogance decreed that elected Governments, even in stage 2, be pilloried, hounded, and coralled if they did not meet certain economic indices written into the treaty. They have to keep within a ratio of Government borrowing to gross national product of 3 per cent., for instance. Why 3 per cent.? Why a ratio of 60 per cent. for Government borrowing and GDP? We pride ourselves on our debates here, but I have not heard the 3 per cent. figure debated at all. Where did it come from? Why not 3·5 per cent.—or 3·99 recurring per cent.? Who decreed these figures? Are they the distillation of centuries of human wisdom, now written into the treaties?

More arrogance is to come with stage 3. The elected Governments of member states are to be fined for transgressing certain economic indices and statistics. Monetary policy is to be transferred, and with it control over economics, to a central bank whose president or governor shall sit for eight years—the equivalent of two terms of office for an American president. In that time, he cannot be sacked or replaced, whatever he does and whatever effects his decisions have on millions of people in Europe.

No doubt he and his colleagues will enjoy marvellous Euro-salaries and pay low Euro-taxes. They will also enjoy diplomatic status and immunity and all the trappings. If there are any members of Brezhnev's politburo left, they must be drooling at the mouth at the thought of such non-democratic perquisites. If these bureaucrats put curtains in their stretch limos and reserve the central lanes of the autobahns for themselves, the picture will be complete.

It is arrogant to transfer power to non-elected people. It is arrogant to subjugate politics to economics and to subordinate democracy to bureaucracy.

The treaty says nothing about the unemployed. It has plenty to say about price stability and debt, about borrowing and monetary policy—all good things in themselves—but there is nothing about the unemployed or about poverty. The treaty says that member states should avoid excessive budgetary deficits, so why does not it say that they should avoid excessive unemployment?

Sir Russell Johnston: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to arrest his wonderful Welsh Periclean rhetoric for a moment, I must tell him that the social charter is about precisely the topics he has mentioned. It tries to create prosperous conditions for all the citizens of Europe.

Mr. Davies: No one is defending opting out of the social chapter. Monetary matters are at the heart of the social chapter, however, and if we lose control over our economy, high hopes for the social chapter cannot be fulfilled.

Why does not the treaty stipulate that member states shall keep unemployment below, say, 5 per cent?

Ms. Short: Absolutely.

Mr. Davies: In that case, I do not understand why my hon. Friend, and many other members of my party, support the idea of a central bank, which will entrench monetarism in Europe for ever.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Is it not obvious to the right hon. Gentleman that the reason why unemployment is not mentioned is that it will inevitably rise dramatically as a result of a single currency?

Mr. Davies: It seems that none of these matters should be mentioned. Debt, unemployment and price stability, for example, should not be mentioned, but if we mention some economic indicators, why not others? We are entrenching money and finance—they will be declared king. The poor, the underprivileged and the disadvantaged have always understood that money was king; but they have always had the hope that, somehow or other, Government could dethrone the king; that democratic action could dethrone the king and that they could change the idea that money always controls everything.

Very often, that hope did not materialise, but they then hoped that the next generation would be able to do it. By entrenching money in the treaty, we are taking that hope from people—from the unemployed, the underprivileged and the poor of Europe. We are taking political choice and ideology away from them, together with the chance of their opting for a different monetary and financial system.

Ms. Short: I know that my hon. Friend understands economics very well, but does he not agree that the capacity of a state such as Britain to look after the poor and its unemployed has gone? Our interest rates are controlled by Germany. Therefore, although I agree that the terms on which economic and monetary union are discussed in the treaty are deeply deflationary, is not our only hope to parallel the power of money with democracy, to try to civilise the power of money, so as to create the possibility of dealing with poverty and unemployment?

Mr. Davies: But my point is that we are losing all democracy. We are losing even the little control that we have over money to the European bankers and financiers —and at a time of turmoil in Europe. Unemployment is extremely high at the moment in the Europe of the Twelve. The Europe of the Twelve will not be an economic panacea. In fact, Europe is no longer very productive. Perhaps the Europe of the Six was productive, but as it has moved to the Europe of the Nine and of the Twelve, so it is ceasing to be productive. Therefore, the problems of unemployment are built in.

On top of that, people will be coming from the east, where there are worse economic problems, and they will swell unemployment in Europe. In addition, deflation has been enshrined in the treaty. What Europe needs in the next 10 or 15 years is flexible politics, not entrenched economics and finances, which is what the treaty will give us.

I do not know where the conveyor belt is going and I suspect that many other people do not. Some people think that it will produce a great European consultative assembly, representing people stretching from Cape St. Vincent in the south-west of Portugal all the way up to the northern shores of the Baltic and even across, and perhaps beyond, the Hellespont. Who knows, it may stretch to Asia Minor. The very idea that such a huge assembly could, in any shape or form, be democratic is nonsense. It would be run by the imperial civil service, and the glue that attempted to keep it together would be some kind of currency—a latter-day Roman denarius. It would be impossible.

The only way for the new Europe to progress is for it to be a Europe of democratic, pluralistic nation states, co-operating, acting and deciding together. That is the only way forward. I do not believe in a Europe of bureaucracy or bankers. I believe in a Europe of democracy, but in this treaty we are moving away from democracy and towards bureaucracy and bankers.

10.58 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Like the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), I too was here in 1971. In October that year, I was one of the 39 members of the Conservative and Unionist party to vote against the motion:

"That this House approves Her Majesty's Government's decision of principle to join the European Communities on the basis of the arrangements which have been negotiated." —[*Official Report*, 21 October 1971; Vol. 823, c. 911.]

In 1986, I abstained in the vote on the Single European Bill and last month I abstained in the vote on the pre-Maastricht debate. I believe that I have been rather more consistent than the leadership of the Labour party, which has swung right across from one extreme to the other. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) said, that has happened seven times. If it can happen seven times, perhaps it can happen eight. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition believes, with Emerson, that "consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds".

The motion is in two parts. With the first part, which congratulates the Prime Minister on achieving all the negotiating objectives set out in the motion that was supported by the House on 21 November, I can agree. I can happily endorse that. Within the goalposts that my right hon. Friend set—which were rigorous—his tactics and those of his team, their persistence, sheer industry and application, were most remarkable. The Government have achieved, against the odds and courageously, a pause—an important and significant pause, but still a pause—in the seemingly remorseless process of swallowing up.

What I question are the goalposts. I do not want just a pause, or just to keep the status quo; I should like to see the powers of the European Community drastically curtailed. Basically, the concept of the treaty is to see the European Community more and more as one unit. The documents are shot through not only with the original words of 20 or 30 years ago about "ever closer union", but with many more words with the same emphasis and of the same genre. We must ask what it really means.

Let us take defence, and the references to the Western European Union and NATO. Defence is the first duty of any Government. The purpose of defence is, of course, to defend. It is not just some expression of foreign policy, but an end in itself, to keep our people safe and free.

All through human history people have attacked each other. It would be a dangerous gamble to assume that human nature has somehow changed so much for the better in our generation, or will in the next, that we shall be immune from that risk. Even though the Soviet Union is breaking up, we cannot know where the next threats may come from.

The Maastricht treaty upholds NATO as the main bastion of our defence, with the Western European Union within it, but its reference to the strengthened role of the WEU really means a strengthened role for the European Community. On page 114, we read that

"Member States agree to strengthen the role of WEU, in the longer term perspective of a common defence policy within the European Union which might in time lead to a

common defence, compatible with that of the Atlantic Alliance . . . To this end, it will formulate common European defence policy".

On page 115, it states:

"The objective is to build up WEU in stages as the defence component of the European Union"—

that is, of the European Community.

"To this end WEU is prepared at the request of the European Union"—

that is, the European Community—

"to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union"—

that is, the European Community again.

"To this end WEU will take the following measures to develop a close working relationship with the Union".

The treaty then lists several measures, including

"arranging . . . to ensure that the Commission of the European Community is regularly informed and . . . consulted on WEU activities in accordance with the role of the Commission in the Common Foreign and Security Policy as defined in the European Union Treaty".

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am sure that my hon. Friend has been noticing as he reads that all of that makes it clear that the WEU is not subject to the union but is separate and independent from it. Our purpose, which was contained in the Anglo-Italian paper—as my hon. Friend, who follows these matters closely, will know—was to be able to build a European defence personality around the WEU, of whose parliamentary Assembly my hon. Friend is a member, to supplement and complement our role in NATO, which is the cornerstone of European defence.

Mr. Jessel: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I accept what he says about NATO being the cornerstone. My point is that, for the first time, the European Community and its organs have the right to be consulted about European defence. In some sense, the WEU becomes answerable, through those procedures, to the European Community. I see it as the thin end of the wedge. The European Community will want more and more say on defence. It could have a real influence over defence in the end; and I believe that that will weaken our defences.

When Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait, Britain—led by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—responded robustly, as did two or three other states in the Community. Most of the other member states, however, were vacillating, craven and supine. Some of them were much the same when Argentina attacked the Falkland Islands. I do not see how we can ever rely on them, or their representatives through the European union, to respond quickly, certainly and effectively in the event of an outside attack. For years I have heard the way that they talk in the Western European Union Assembly. I believe profoundly that our defences and our security will be far sounder if the European Community has no link with them.

Constitutions must reflect the public will, otherwise they will crack up as in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. We see centrifugal forces in Quebec, Kashmir and elsewhere. Within the European Community we see the growth of ugly forms of nationalism. In France, M. Le Pen is said now to be more popular than President Mitterrand. We see nationalism also in Belgium and Germany and Austria.

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jessel: No, I must get on. I said that I would be no more than 10 minutes, and I have only three more minutes.

In our own country, there is a deep instinct for and a healthy streak of stubbornness, which I share. There is a refusal to be pushed around. Can anyone imagine that in the end Britain will be more docile than France, Belgium or Germany?

The Community talks of "ever closer union", which means ever more ubiquitous interference. The European Community, in clasping the member states, or member nations, too closely is planting the seeds of its own destruction. I believe that some of the nations will break out. I do not believe that Britain will still be a member of the Community in 30 or 40 years' time. It is only a matter of time before small national or nationalist parties spring up in Britain. To occupy their ground and to stop their advance, both the main parties will have to become less Euro-centred and more national again. At some stage, one or other of the main parties will campaign on a European issue. It may be that we can no longer steer our own course between inflation and unemployment, or the issue might be immigration. There are any number of issues that might arise.

In the end, I believe that one party or another will secure a majority in the House on the platform of flouting the European Community, its institutions and its courts. We shall then have a constitutional crisis, and it will be a question of who the army and the police obey. I would rather have a smaller constitutional crisis now than a big one later on.

I recognise that some economic functions have to be pooled, but beyond that most of the British people do not want any power over, say, Italy or Spain. They certainly do not want the Italians or the Spanish, for example, to share in ruling Britain. That is what I feel deep in my bones. I feel that I have no sense of duty, owe no loyalty and have no sense of belonging to any of them. I believe that I speak for the majority of my constituents. That view is in stark conflict with the spirit of the treaty of the union. That is why I cannot endorse the latter part of the motion, which contains the words "warmly endorses" the Maastricht agreement. Despite my great admiration for the negotiating skills of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the rest of the team, that is why I cannot vote for the motion.

11.9 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Government have complimented themselves on their achievements at Maastricht, but they concentrated their opposition on the wrong subjects. The obvious ones are the social chapter and economic and monetary union, but there are a number of others.

The social chapter is a continuation of the social charter of 1989. We are outside the agreement on the social chapter that was reached by the other Eleven. By exercising our veto, we have ensured that shall be unable to influence the policy of the other 11 nations.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) suggested that the social chapter is unnecessary because a Labour Government could enact all the measures contained in it. He is mistaken. The social chapter is not a detailed programme for legislation but a hook on which a range of policies can be hung, which can then be taken up by the institutions of the Community.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) correctly said that the social chapter should be used to tackle unemployment and poverty. Democratic socialists should be explaining their views on the purpose of the social charter and seeking to extend the bland provisions of EC treaties. It is the duty of democratic socialists to argue for social provision.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does my hon. Friend believe that it is the role of democratic socialists to consider economic planning, and particularly to exercise control over the taxation policies of their own Governments?

Mr. Barnes: Democratic socialists should be concerned about such major economic matters, which is why the Maastricht treaty's provisions on economic and monetary union should apply to not only this country but other EC countries.

We have an essential role to play in overcoming the democratic deficit in the European Community. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned democracy in the House, but democratic provisions must be fought for on a European basis.

The Government have complimented themselves on the deletion of the word "federal", which was only ever a pious goal mentioned in the original draft. Nevertheless, it is relevant to social provision and economic measures. The United Kingdom's initial democratic developments came within the economic field. Those developments came from the industrial revolution. As a result of the development of the railways, many small market economies became interlinked and developed into a national economy. Working people then had to struggle for the franchise which was granted first to various men in the 19th century and then granted on a universal basis at the beginning of the 20th century. The franchise was granted to women as a result of the suffragette movement. The development of democracy led to social provision and that is how we got the people's budget of 1909 and the welfare state from 1945 onwards.

Democratic socialists should now impose that pattern on the developments in Europe. Social and democratic elements must be added solidly to the current developments in commerce and trade. We should not allow the EC to be merely a common market based on the principles required by the Government. Our agenda should be excluded because the struggle in which we engaged for democracy and social provision was also undertaken by the other 11 nations of the Community.

It is disturbing that the Government believe that they also achieved a victory in that there are a number of pillars outside the provisions of the institutions which are part of intergovernmental conference decisions on defence and foreign affairs. Surely EC institutions should be involved in such matters, especially if those institutions operate through parliamentary democracy at European level with a federal division which allows us to act on our own concerns. If not, royal prerogative powers will be used by Governments in, for example, defence and foreign affairs and they will be kept outside any democratic checks and balances at either European or national level.

The one thing that the Government have got right is that the European Community requires expansion and that we should be outward looking and should seek to involve some of the new democracies in eastern Europe in that framework. If we do so, we cannot allow a situation to develop in which countries such as Czechoslovakia, which has just achieved democracy, become involved with us in a structure in which they will lose out on their democratic arrangements.

The present structure of the European Community is a democratic disgrace in that its major decisions are made in secret conclaves by Ministers and there is no possibility of our knowing exactly what takes place. There is no possibility—even through the scrutiny arrangements in the House—of influencing the decisions made by Ministers on certain subjects. It would be preferable if the major decisions in Europe were made by a European Parliament with a European Government held responsible to us and if we had a clear separation of powers to say what areas we are to be involved in. Those areas can be significant because federalism can provide for considerable elements of decentralisation. It is folly to argue that getting rid of the word "federal" has improved matters and prevented a drift towards centralism.

We have a European union and institutions which are geared towards the development of a unitary state. Federalism is a democratic argument and it can operate only within democratic areas. We have heard some nonsense this evening about Yugoslavia, Russia and other countries, but we should consider the example of the United States of America which has developed federal institutions but which is not in danger of breaking up.

11.20 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I express my appreciation for having been called relatively early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker—at least, some of my hon. Friends may still consider this early.

The European ideal was the reason why I originally came into politics. I spent much of the 1970s representing the British young farmers movement in Brussels soon after we joined the Community, and that experience made me decide that I wanted to go into politics properly. That desire was based on two fundamental perceptions about the future of Europe.

The first perception was that the rest of the Community wanted Britain to play a full part in its organisation and development, and the second was that the Community would never really fulfil its primary purpose until there was a single currency. I have little doubt that the necessary degree of convergence will be achieved one day, but I do not believe that will happen quickly. It may take many years—indeed, it may never happen. If and when it does, if I am still fortunate enough to be a Member of the House, I shall vote in favour of Britain's becoming part of it.

The speeches that we have heard tonight have displayed two distinct approaches. Some people want no part of a single currency and wish that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had said from the outset, "No; no for ever." Such people, both among my hon. Friends and among Opposition Members, would like us to be able to buy short-term competitiveness by devaluing our currency when necessary. But where would that get us?

When I was a boy—that was not too long ago—a dollar was worth five shillings, and not long ago a deutschmark was worth 25p. Values have gone a long way down since then, and we must ask where we are to stop, if we

continually use devaluation as a means of achieving competitiveness. What sort of people are we that we are afraid of the economic might of Germany? Have we so little faith in the ability of British business and in the skills of the British worker and the British entrepreneur? If those people do not have the skills or the ability, this country is sunk, whether we are part of the Community or not.

The sooner that we realise that the major advances of the past 12 years have been made because we have accepted that politicians are not good at running things —then perhaps we shall see the odd man out—and the sooner that the Bank of England is made independent, the better. That would be a useful major staging post towards the goal of a central European bank. I should like such a bank to be as independent as possible, too. Much has been said about its political accountability, but I am not sure whether I want a bank that is controlled by politicians. If we can achieve our aim, it will give us the conditions for business to prosper—the stable exchange rate and the low inflation that it needs.

The other group of hon. Members that has emerged this evening is to be found almost entirely on the Labour Front Bench. I have great sympathy with the Labour spokesman who will have to wind up for the Opposition, because he is almost without friends, judging by the speeches that we have heard from his Back-Bench colleagues tonight. I do not say that he has no friends, but few speeches from Back-Bench Members have supported their leadership.

The second group would like to say yes to a single currency today, regardless of what may happen. That is a cavalier approach to our future. How can those people be certain that, by 1999, the extremely severe conditions of convergence will have been achieved? Of course they cannot be. I wonder how they—and other states—will try to extricate themselves from an agreement. When it comes to the crunch, they may not be able to fulfil the conditions.

Do Belgium and Italy really expect to get their deficits down, or will the rules have to be slackened? In either event, something will have to give; somebody will have to backtrack. It is far better now that we should hold back and say that we shall decide when the time is right rather than have to go through the application for derogation so that we do not have to fulfil what may not be achievable.

I believe that economic and monetary union will become a necessary development, but that a commitment now would be gambling on an outcome later this decade that no one can prophesy. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, a commitment to a single currency would be unthinkable without a prior decision by the House.

Political union is a matter of many strands; it is a complex issue. Primarily, it is a matter of vision. There is the vision of a uniform Europe, and that is the path down which we appear to have been headed for the past few years. Such a Europe would consist of the EC standard European—a BSI standard, although BSI standards would not be allowed. That is the Europe in which harmonisation means uniformity, from the content of a sausage to dictating the day of the week on which we should rest.

It is small wonder that, when Mr. Delors told the Labour party conference two or three years ago that only through Europe could Labour's dreams of socialism be fulfilled, the Damascene conversion was outshone by the red star that beckoned Labour Front-Benchers to Europe. They dream of a continent controlled by Brussels, where every human activity is dictated, controlled, regulated and harmonised by Brussels. The only amazing thing is that it has taken Labour so long to realise that.

There is another vision of Europe—a far more exciting, colourful and progressive vision. That is the vision that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister brought on to the stage of Europe at Maastricht last week. In that vision, each nation and state maintains its own traditions, cultures and practices, in which individual Governments work together for mutual benefit and in which decisions are taken on a European level which are best taken at that level. Those decisions may be not necessarily taken under the umbrella of the treaty of Rome, but by other agreements.

That vision also encompasses the emerging democracies of central and eastern Europe. That vision will allow businesses to prosper, with fewer and not more regulations. There will be less intervention, and from that prosperity will flow benefits to all the peoples of Europe. That vision will, sooner or later, be seen as the better way for Europe and it is a vision whose time has probably now come.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: I will not, because so many hon. Members wish to speak tonight.

I welcome the many measures that we have already adopted through the social charter, especially those which affect competition, such as health and safety regulations. They should be dealt with at European level, and once dealt with, and almost more importantly, they must be implemented, monitored and enforced at European level. One of our major achievements at Maastricht is a system of far better enforcement of agreed directives with heavy penalties for those who flout them.

The other side of the coin is the clear definition of the many policy areas in which European competence is unnecessary and undesirable. If, for example, we get the details of our education policy wrong, that is our problem. If the Greeks get theirs wrong, it is their problem. In a single market, with full free-trading opportunities, those chickens will come home to roost. Central regulation will not be needed, because economic pressures will bring the necessary changes in policy. The market effect will come to bear on policy.

The proposed extension of the social affairs function, as proposed in the social chapter, shows unacceptable aspects. Our primary role here is to stimulate prosperity through the economy. Prosperity will provide the public revenues for all our vital services. Profitable businesses will provide better terms and conditions of employment and many trade unions on the continent recognise it. Sadly, many of our trade unions do not recognise it. That is why our trade union reforms are as important today as when they were first begun more than 10 years ago.

It would be bad enough if a Labour Government here abolished that legislation so that restrictive practices and picket lines were free to flourish. However, it would be far worse if that was forced on an unwilling Britain by a majority vote in Brussels.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): How can that be forced?

Mr. Paice: If the hon. Gentleman reads the treaty he will discover that article 182 clearly states that working

[Mr. Paice]

conditions are to be dealt with by a majority vote. "Working conditions" is a pretty all-embracing heading. Mr. Delors and Mrs. Papandreou intend to use the health and safety majority voting procedure to deal with the working time directive. If they can wangle that, what can stop them wangling under "working conditions" virtually anything that they want to bring in?

Mr. Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I will not give way.

It is rubbish to suggest that it is not possible—although I accept that it is not certain as the details are not clear—for what I have described to happen.

As a result of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister forcing into the treaty the provision for fines on member states that flout agreements, particularly on health and safety, my right hon. Friend has done more to help the work force of Europe than could have been achieved by signing the social chapter. That is crucial for the safety and welfare of workers throughout the Community.

However, the storm warnings are out. As I have said, Mr. Delors and Mrs. Papandreou want to use the majority voting provisions on health and safety to force through that directive. That would be an abuse of the rules. That is exploitation of a possible loophole, and I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Minister replies, he will make clear that the Government will resist and if necessary will take the matter to the European Court to make the choice of article under which that directive is pursued absolutely clear.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has exhibited brilliant leadership to our country in the way in which he has handled himself over Maastricht. He laid his criteria out clearly to the House, he went to Maastricht, and he has delivered. He should be proud of that record. He stood up to the pressure and to the bullying, and, significantly, he has retained his composure throughout the proceedings. That is a rare contrast with the Leader of the Opposition and to the "sign anything" brigade on the Opposition Benches.

The Maastricht agreement will go down in history as the turning point, when the Community began to turn away from drab uniformity towards a future in which it will be a kaleidoscope of individual peoples stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals—a kaleidoscope of peoples that are unique, with their own traditions and practices, but working together under a variety of arrangements and agreements for their mutual benefit. I believe that I saw that future coming nearly 20 years ago, and I am delighted to have been able to speak about it tonight.

11.33 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On the 30th anniversary of the signing of the treaty of Rome I was the European Commission's delegate to Guinea Bissau and we were given a small amount of money to celebrate the fact —*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may not know where Guinea Bissau is, but they might learn something if they listen. I used that small amount of money to buy a football cup because it gave pleasure to all the people and not just to a few diplomats from the Foreign Office and elsewhere. That is what the signing of the treaty of Rome was about. It was about people.

Throughout my 37-year membership of the Labour party, I have believed in what Jean Monnet said. I have believed that Europe is for the citizens of Europe, and not just for the economics of Europe. Jean Monnet made an important point—I hope that the Foreign Secretary pays attention and remembers it—when he said that we should not just look to negotiations, negotiations and negotiations; we should prepare the common task beforehand and then work out how to achieve the common task of all the peoples of Europe. That is precisely what the Government have not done in the negotiations.

The Government have talked, often long, about sovereignty. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) also talked about sovereignty. What are the sovereignty and arrogance of which my right hon. Friend talked? It is arrogant of the Government to talk about sovereignty when they cannot even control their own civil servants. Anyone who has been in local government and who knows how latter-day viceroys—regional civil servants—[illegible] knows that there is no subsidiarity there. Local government is controlled centrally by Ministers, whether it be in Yorkshire, Scotland or Wales. As I discovered last week, regional civil servants are authorised—indeed, they are told—by Ministers not to reveal road plans to local councillors and to reveal them only to officials. That is a negation of democracy.

Let us consider the word "federal". The Foreign Secretary went to a decent school, so he should know the origins of the word. Its origins are in foedus. The treaty served the peace. The induciae led to the cessation of war for a time. The federation was under an agreement. The federated allies were treated more fairly than anybody else. That provided greater democracy at the very lowest level. That is a long historical tradition on the continent of Europe—indeed, it stretched to part of the United Kingdom. That point should be remembered.

Essentially, we are pooling our sovereignty in getting rid of the national egoisms that I have heard expressed on several occasions, so that we can have more control over our affairs. Time and again it has been said—it was also said by one of my hon. Friends—that we cannot control our currency unless we have a say in other people's currencies. That is precisely what economic and monetary union does.

The Government have not yet said, and probably will never say, why they have set up, helped to set up or gone along with methods of adopting a common currency without committing themselves. If the conditions that they lay down are reasonable, it is reasonable to go along with them. The hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) mentioned that matter, and I commend him on his splendid speech.

I now refer to the social chapter. Europe is not about supply and demand—it never has been. It is clear from the treaty of Rome and from the writings of those who had the foresight to set up the European Community that Europe is about the social side of life as well as the economic side of life. Economics is only the handmaiden of society. Economics is not the end of a society. That is why it is important that social legislation be integrated into the economic demands of the Community. The Government are strangely ambivalent. Let us take RECHAR as an example. Some Government Departments are enlightened on it. Thank heavens that the Department of the Environment is one. But the Treasury is not. What is more, the Department of Trade and Industry, as I heard in the

early hours of Friday morning, is far from enlightened on RECHAR. It is cheating on European rules and it should do something about it.

Then I hear that on no account will we let these nasty foreigners control our hours of work, which are for us to decide. But that is not the case when it comes to the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. The Secretary of State for Energy, who made a fleeting appearance in the Chamber tonight, said on that subject:

"The proposed new European Directive, which would regulate the working hours of industry throughout the Community, would necessitate the agreement of new working arrangements for British Coal's workforce. The repeal of the 1908 Act would be an essential part of that process."

Those are the two voices of the Government. There is no cohesion whatever.

The Government do not look at the European Community as a market in the traditional sense. In the traditional sense, the market is a social market in which there is social intercourse between people, as well as buying and selling. That is not for this Government. They look on the Community as a hypermarket which must be open on Sundays. They go dashing around with a trolley. They have no sense whatever of culture, coming together, amity or a social dimension. That is truly appalling. They say, "Get on your trolley and go round but do not look to the quality of life." But it is the quality of life that is important. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) can smirk for all he is worth. He applauded the Prime Minister's statement. The Prime Minister said that we have longer maternity leave than any other country in the Community. That is true. Women in the United Kingdom are allowed longer maternity leave than women anywhere else in the Community, but we pay the lowest amount. We pay less than any of the Twelve, including Eire, Portugal and Greece. That is a damning indictment of the Government.

We need to fight unemployment and inflation and renew the industrial structures of Britain. To that end, in cohesion with Europe, we can pursue research and development that will start to put us on the right way. It will not be the solution to everything—I would not dream of suggesting that—but it will be a start.

As some hon. Members have said, we must look outwards. I ask the Minister of State to consider one issue that has not been mentioned tonight. We tend to look at the Community as if it is the Community looking back at us. We consider how we are affected by the Community. But the Community looks outwards. The general agreement on tariffs and trade talks are an obvious example. The development and co-operation section of the Maastricht agreement was an absolute disgrace and should have been tightened. The budget for the Lomé convention is still not transparent. That is undemocratic because what results is a gang of twelve who come together to pursue their ideas in secret. That mirrors the institutional reform that we need in the Community.

The right hon. Member for Chingford said that nothing functions unless there are decent institutions. He is right that we must examine our institutions all the time to tone them and make them better. The one truly awful institution in the European Community is the Council of Ministers. It meets in secret. It is not open. It does not tell us what is happening. For example, we see John Selwyn Gummer, to name but a few, on television having just come out of the Council of Agricultural Ministers. He says what has happened and how he has won the battle of agriculture for the United Kingdom. If one is in Brussels, it is even better. One can watch the Ministers from member countries come out of the Council and say how they won for France, Italy or wherever. There is no cohesion because the Council of Ministers is egotistic and nationalistic. It would be much less so if Ministers were more open about what happens.

Ministers go off without consulting the House, make an agreement—they may have consulted the Cabinet—come back and say, "This is the agreement". Then the Government put a three-line Whip on it and there is an end to the matter. That is not a party-political point, as the Labour party did the same. There is no examination of what the Council of Ministers do. That means that we must give more powers to the European Parliament.

I have strained your patience for too long, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have spoken for longer than 10 minutes, which I did not intend to do.

The people who have no vision will perish. The Government have no vision. In Europe they have been like porkers with their snouts in the trough all the time. We need to have an ideal and a vision of Europe which will also be a vision for the rest of the world. The Labour party is capable of doing that.

11.46 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): This is not too late an hour, as some hon. Members have pointed out, compared with the late hours that we spent here discussing Welsh and Scottish assemblies years ago—and this debate is just as important, if not more so.

I welcome and endorse the motion. I believe that the Maastricht treaty is a further step in our efforts to avoid the damage of another territorial war in Europe, or harm between the nations of Europe, and to embrace the need for and have the fortitude to seek common ground, common goals and sensible common methods to achieve them with our European partners.

Britain's prosperity and security depend on working more closely with the very Europeans whom, for too long, too many people in this country have been trying to ignore or even disdain. Even our trading relations with the rest of the world are important and demand greater coherence—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) said at the beginning of the debate—in the pan-European position on the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

I welcome confirmation of Britain's full involvement in shaping the European monetary system and the disciplines attached to the adoption of a single currency. I should have liked greater British commitment to be expressed on meeting the established criteria, and a firmer desire to adopt a single currency at the earliest opportunity. However, there are strong indicators—not only in the House—that sufficient doubts about swift monetary and financial coherence remain in many people's minds in our island kingdom. Buying further time to consider, to persuade and to study developments towards greater convergence must be a wise approach. Our Prime Minister is to be congratulated on obtaining that time, not only for Britain but for other European countries. There is an old Sussex saying, "We won't be druv." He obviously espouses that.

[Mr. Tim Rathbone]

In foreign affairs, a system has been established for better co-ordination and better joint action where possible, although a Community approach to the problems of Yugoslavia in the week after Maastricht—as well as before it—shows how difficult that process may be.

On defence, I welcome the reinforcement of the Western European Union so that it may become the ever-stronger European defence pillar within NATO. The WEU must and will become stronger and more important. It was described by Mr. Genscher as being at the service of all Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe member states.

I must put in a plea to our Government. The value of the democratic element within WEU—its assembly—must be better appreciated and better supported. It is of paramount importance. The assembly is made up of representatives from the democratically elected Parliaments of member states. It requires proper funding to perform its increasingly important role, just as our Parliament could not function properly without appropriate funding. Yet Governments, including our own British Government, have not granted the necessary funds to the WEU Assembly year after year. Already, its ability to function properly is undermined, and that does not bode well for its enlarged future role. That must be corrected, and I hope that the Government will respond more positively to operational suggestions and budget requests when they are next made.

I welcome the steps agreed for further co-operation in combating international crime, including most particularly drug trafficking. This builds on the considerable achievements of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, in his present and previous offices, and of other British Ministers in the Pompidou group of the Council of Europe and elsewhere. There has been a growing need for a European drugs intelligence unit, and the European police office will provide that.

In social policy, it is correct and important to re-accent that Britain has already signed up to the social provisions of the treaty of Rome, and shares with Germany the best record for implementing European Community social measures. That is quite the opposite of what has been said by the Opposition. There is much further to go in adopting the Community's existing social action programme before extending further the social dimension of the Community. Greater support for the reasonable, pragmatic and yet important social charter of the Council of Europe could be valuable as well.

Even though this is outside the treaty of Rome, I hope that Britain can still influence the extent and direction of broader Community social policy. If evolution of the social charter goes too far too fast, it will create even greater difficulties in developing special relationships with, or eventually membership for, the emerging democracies of central and eastern Europe. That would be going against the grain of history.

Britain must still play a part in the process, not least through its Members of the European Parliament. Will it be able to play a strong part as a gap is created between them and the representatives of other countries? Will British parliamentarians in Europe still play as strong a role in the committee work and the debates there? That point requires clarification.

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Rathbone: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall not, as other hon. Members wish to speak and time is short.

This is all the more the case since giving the European Parliament additional powers. Increased control of the Commission and of the way it spends our money is to be welcomed. Each Member of the European Parliament does not yet carry equal political and constitutional authority, because of the varying methods of national elections to the European Parliament. Greater coherence in this is also long overdue. That is not to say that electoral systems in all countries must be identical, although that would be ideal, but they should be as similar as possible, so that all are reasonably uniformly represented.

Reform of the British electoral system for the European Parliament must be part of post-Maastricht planning. The British pragmatism that we have applied to all representative bodies in the United Kingdom, with the sole exception of our Parliament, should be applied to the choice of electoral systems for the European Parliament. Even more than in English and Welsh districts or in Northern Ireland, the European parliamentary chamber is not one in which executive decisions have to be taken, so a system such as we have for our House of Commons, which is biased to give an overall majority most of the time, is infinitely less important than it is here. Better and more even representation everywhere is all the easier. That nettle must be grasped.

That does not mean, nor does anything in the Maastricht treaty mean, that we have denied or should deny the forces of nationalism or individualism. The power of a nation and of individuals in a nation to harness human spirit and encourage endeavour is undoubted, considerable and extremely valuable. No lasting union could ever be built on a desire to submerge individual and national characteristics, identity and culture. Nothing in the Maastricht treaty threatens in that way. It is therefore to be welcomed.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Office Ministers and their teams deserve our complete support on the treaty and in the Lobby tomorrow.

11.55 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I shall resist the temptation to follow the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) down the road of electoral reform in the European Parliament, or I shall be in trouble.

This is certainly the first, and I hope the last, occasion on which I shall make a short speech that spans two separate days. Those who talk of our Parliament as though it were somehow a perfect institution compared with those in Europe might reflect on the fact that we are discussing an important issue quite literally in the middle of the night.

The question before us in this two-day debate is whether we are to be part of the development of Europe over the next 10 to 20 years. I deliberately make the point that we are talking about a process spread over a number of years. We are talking not about a momentous decision that must be made today and that will irrevocably change the face of Europe, but about gradual development. The difference between Labour Members and most

Conservative Members is that we believe that our future lies in Europe and that we must be at the heart of the development of Europe.

If we are not at the heart of Europe, we will have to sign up for something that others have devised to suit their national needs. That has been the history of the British attitude to Europe over the past 20 to 30 years. We have always come to Europe after the European institutions have been established by others. We have therefore always found that those institutions were not ideal and not set up in the way that we would have set them up had we been in Europe from the start.

It is precisely because of that attitude that we fear that the Prime Minister, because of his concern to keep the Tory party united between now and the general election, has relegated Britain to the second division in Europe. Britain has now opted out of two crucial matters—the social chapter and the terms of the development of EMU. I believe that that will lead us to be regarded by our partners in Europe—and, perhaps, just as importantly by outsiders—as having committed ourselves to the second division, the slow lane, of Europe, all because the Prime Minister felt that the most important job that he had to do in Maastricht over the past couple of weeks was to keep the Tory party united.

I also believe that the question of a federal relationship is a bit of a red herring. I know that federalism has different meanings in different parts of Europe. I do not think that Europe is ever likely to have a proper federal relationship such as that in Germany or the United States. I certainly do not envisage that happening in the foreseeable future. I know that some of my hon. Friends envisage such a possibility, but I do not think that one central Government attempting to govern the whole of continental Europe from Greece to the Baltic, from the Hebrides to southern Portugal, could really be effective. The worst forms of centralisation that we complain about in Britain would be writ large if that system were ever to be established in Europe.

I believe that a gradual convergence of interests will mean that there will be a confederation—a coming together, a convergence of policies—which is different from a formal federal relationship. To some extent, the Government have set up the straw man of federalism simply to shoot it down to show that they have had some success. I do not believe that a formal federal relationship is on the cards now or will be within the next 10 years. This red herring has enabled the Government to bring some of their anti-marketeers within their ranks.

I would settle for the definition in the treaty—"an ever closer union" among the peoples of Europe. We need to keep the constitutional changes in Europe under review. There is bound to be organic change.

If the United Kingdom is to be part of Europe, we must play a full part in it. The irony is that, next July, the United Kingdom assumes the presidency. In a year's time, the summit will be held in Edinburgh, in my constituency. It is absurd that, at that summit, the United Kingdom will have to leave the room when the others discuss social policy and when they start to discuss developments in monetary union. Our Ministers will not be in the palace of Holyrood house; instead, they will be huddled together in Princes street while the others get on with discussing the main business of Europe.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to explain on what basis he says that the Government will not be able to take part in any of the discussions on economic and monetary union?

Mr. Darling: I am glad that the Minister does not dispute what I have said about the social charter. On monetary union, the Prime Minister has made a virtue of saying that we will decide in 1996 or 1997 whether to opt in. That means that we will decide whether to opt in to something designed by others, because we have abdicated our responsibility to draw up the plans for EMU, should it come to that. It is perfectly clear from everything said to pacify the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and others that Britain has no intention of being in at the start.

Mr. Garel-Jones *rose*——

Mr. Robertson *rose*——

Mr. Darling: I shall give way to the Minister. Perhaps he will have more success explaining this than the Chancellor did earlier today.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The House will have noted that the hon. Gentleman declined to answer my question. Where does the treaty mention the non-participation of Britain in any aspect of stage 2 or in the transition to stage 3, should it come to pass?

Mr. Darling: I shall draw the attention of the House to the answer to that, but first I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

Mr. Robertson: Should my hon. Friend wish to prove to the Minister that, in the unlikely event of his being re-elected, he will find himself standing in the windy and probably cold Princes street offices, he could draw his attention to the protocol on social policy, which states:

"The United Kingdom shall not take part in the deliberations on and the adoption of Commission proposals relating to fields covered by the above-mentioned Agreement."

Mr. Darling: That is an extremely good point. If the Prime Minister is still in office—I do not think that he will be—he has said that we will have to decide in 1996 or 1997 whether to opt into a phenomenon that we had no part in creating. If I am wrong, perhaps the Minister will explain how we are committed to the development of EMU and whether we are to be allowed to participate in building the structures of the central bank and even in bidding to house it in this country. That is definitely not what the right hon. Gentleman said earlier today and on previous occasions.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Great Britain will certainly take part in all discussions relating to stage 3. I ask the hon. Gentleman to point—if he cannot, perhaps he will withdraw what he has said—to a single reference in the treaty which excludes Britain from any discussion related to stages 2 or 3 of economic and monetary union.

Mr. Darling: I have made my position clear. The whole thrust of what the Prime Minister said this afternoon and last week was that Britiah reserves its position, leaving others to develop policy; and that we will not take part in drawing up the plans to set up a central bank. If the Minister says otherwise, he should have listened more carefully to what the Prime Minister said last week and this week. It is clear that the Government do not intend to play

[Mr. Darling]

a central role now, although they may do after the election, if they win. They are staying out of those discussions now to hold their party together.

I want to deal with four matters that cause me concern. I turn first to the fact that foreign affairs, justice and home affairs are regarded as matters for intergovernmental discussions rather than as part of the treaty. I do not disagree with that in relation to foreign affairs, but it does not seem a satisfactory basis for decision-making on home affairs, especially for this House. We do not have the opportunity to question Ministers effectively. It is clear, for example, that Ministers go to the Trevi talks and hold intergovernmental discussions there, but are not properly answerable to this House because we do not have the structures in place properly to question them. I ask hon. Members to reflect on that.

Although I accept that every country, including our own, has to have a system of immigration that is suited to its own needs and traditions, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said, there will be more and more matters of common interest. With the prospect of the breakdown of the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries, we could face a large-scale movement of refugees into western Europe. It may therefore make sense for us to have a common policy on immigration and asylum. But if that is the case, why was that matter not considered suitable for inclusion in the treaty?

Perhaps it was because the Government did not want the European Court to have any influence on that matter, especially in the light of the Home Secretary's unfortunate experiences in the past few weeks. The right hon. Gentleman seems to have been up before the courts more regularly than any Minister ever. If matters are to be decided on an intergovernmental basis, we should look at our own procedures because they are not effective at present.

I have looked at the definition of "subsidiarity". The only matter on which I agree with the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) is that it is an interesting definition. Its meaning is not entirely clear, but the Government should give some attention to subsidiarity, especially within the United Kingdom. If we are to build on the advantages and developments in Europe, we should consider devolving more power to the regions and nations of this country. Brussels already recognises the English regions for various purposes, so perhaps we should let those English regions have more direct dealings with Brussels.

We should certainly do so for Scotland and Wales. Indeed, many people believe that, in the years to come, Scotland will develop a more federal relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom, but there are no structures at present to allow Scotland to deal directly with Brussels. That is ironic, given that much of Scottish industry, especially its financial sector, has bypassed the City of London, yet we do not have the corresponding structures. It is not surprising that the Government have ignored that matter, but they must turn their attention to it if we are to benefit from the advantages that Europe can bring.

It has been said many times today that the social charter or chapter that was discussed at Maastricht is not about strikes or bad industrial relations. It is about extending many of the things that other European countries can accept, and I do not see why we should not accept them. It is no great advertisement for this country for the Government to say that we shall benefit by staying out of the social chapter because we will have cheaper labour costs. That means that, Britain is, to use the common word, a sweatshop. It means that companies will come here because we have lower standards than the rest of Europe.

Given the performance of economies in the rest of Europe, the Government are not in any position to say that Britain has been a success story. The Germans, however, can say that their performance has outpaced ours, but they had no difficulty in accepting the social chapter, so why did we have such difficulty? Because, for 12 years, the Government have opposed just about everything in the social chapter—and it is no wonder that they oppose it now.

The argument that, with the social chapter, the Japanese and other investors will not come here does not stand up. The Japanese who have invested here, ICI and other such companies that are already here are good employers, and precisely the sort that we should be encouraging.

Turning to inward investment, I do not know whether the rest of Europe will sign up to a single currency. We shall have to wait and see. As everyone knows, the economy will not stand still in this or any other country. If the Community expands to bring in other countries—particularly members of the former eastern bloc, which are much less developed than western European countries—I am not sure that the convergence that is envisaged will be achieved in 1997, or even at the end of the decade.

If, however, the other countries—or, at least, the major ones—can sign up for a currency, it is inconceivable that we shall be able to stand aside and say that we will have nothing to do with it. We shall end up having to shadow that European currency; we shall be a satellite country on the fringe of a massive economic power bloc. The Chancellor's failure to answer the questions put by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition shows that many Conservative Members realise how futile Britain's position would be if that happened. I do not believe, however, that we shall ever be in such a position; I do not think that the Prime Minister believes it either, and I suspect that, if he won the next election, he would change his tune promptly thereafter. We should be alive to the fact that, if there is to be a common European currency, there is no alternative to Britain's being a part of it.

I believe that Britain is part of Europe. Everyone must have known—certainly after 1986—that a single European market will have certain inescapable consequences. I do not believe that, at this stage, we are in a position to sign up for any system along the lines of federalism or monetary union; but I do believe that we should be in there, at the heart of things, arguing for institutions and systems that will suit the British economy and British political arrangements.

If we do not do that, I fear that history will repeat itself again and again. We shall sign up for an arrangement that we did not make, which does not suit Britain, and we shall be dragged along at a slow pace that will be thoroughly unacceptable not only to Europe but to our own country.

By the actions that he has taken over the past week, the Prime Minister has put Britain in the second division. He has failed to take the opportunity of allowing Britain to catch up with the rest of Europe. That is because he is not

master in his own house; he is a slave to the Tory Members who are holding him back. The right hon. Gentleman may have done a good job for the Tory party, but he has failed the people of this country. They will not forget that when they have an opportunity to express their views in a few months' time.

12.12 am

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I must say that that was not one of the better speeches that I have heard from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Darling).

It has been a particular pleasure to an avowed and unabashed federalist to discover four more on the Opposition Benches. I knew already that one could be so described, because he, like me, is a member of the British section of the European Movement; but I was pleased to find that the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett)—and even the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes)—admit to accepting the doctrine to some extent. I take that to mean two things: first, that relations between states should be governed not by their ability to push one another around by force but by some framework of law; and, secondly, that there should be some element of subsidiarity. By that I mean that decisions are made at the centre only when they have to be.

I praise my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary—and also the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who has sat patiently on the Front Bench throughout our debate. I hope that he will not object to my calling him the Talleyrand of the Conservative party, although I doubt whether Prince Talleyrand would have submitted himself to the ordeal that my hon. Friend has endured tonight.

The achievements of my right hon. Friends are a tribute to the trust and, indeed, affection felt by their European Community partners—and, of course, in this country—and, in particular, to the special relationship that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has established with Chancellor Kohl. Without that factor, I do not think that it would have been possible for my right hon. Friends to secure a settlement that would enable them to claim that Britain was still at the heart of Europe, while preserving considerable freedom of manoeuvre—or, at the very least, a substantial reprieve for our country.

The effect here has been all that my right hon. Friends could have desired. There remain a mere handful of the rugged individualists on both sides of the House—but, none the less, outside the mainstream of politics—who wanted Britain to sabotage the conference by using our vetos. How ineffectual the veto would have been. I think that that has been demonstrated—*[Interruption.]* I am having some difficulty hearing myself because of the interjections of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and others. How ineffectual the veto would have been has been demonstrated by the decision of the other 11 members to press on with the social charter.

I know that there are some who still cling to the theory that the 11 are dismayed at finding that Britain is no longer there to block progress on the social charter and think that the entire edifice will collapse from overweight. I must remind them of a gentleman called Russell Bretherton, whose name may not be familiar to everyone in the Chamber. He was the senior official at the then Board of Trade, who was sent by the British Government as an observer to the Messina conference in 1956, at which there was talk about setting up a common market. He reported back confidently that the negotiations would probably come to nothing, and would certainly do so if Britain stayed out of them. The British Government took his advice. It turned out to be a rather expensive mistake.

Mr. Wareing: That was the Administration of Sir Anthony Eden.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Yes.

It would be almost equally mistaken to assume that we shall be able indefinitely to insulate ourselves from social developments in the rest of the European Community, or that we shall be able effectively to influence events from outside the room in which the discussions are taking place and from which we have excluded ourselves. I know that on this matter the Government have the support of the overwhelming majority of Conservative Members and of British industry and business. I find it astonishing, however, that a party that numbers Disraeli and Lord Shaftesbury among its heroes should refuse to contemplate limits on hours of work. I spent last Saturday evening at my local post office, where postmen were heroically working long hours of overtime. I asked how many temporary workers were taken on for the Christmas period, and the answer was none. I was told that the workers wanted the overtime. That attitude does not seem a recipe for creating more jobs.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend that the party that produced Shaftesbury and Disraeli needs lectures from no one about the social dimension of life in this country. Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the practices that we are seeking to defend are national characteristics, and that it just happens to be the case that in Britain many people have a working week of 42, 46 or 48 hours, and they rely on overtime for as much as a third of their income? That happens to be the way in which labour relations have traditionally been structured in this country. Does my hon. Friend agree also that as the United Kingdom is the only country in Europe that pays a pension to a spouse, even though that spouse has not been a contributor to the fund, we need no lectures on social dimensions from others in Europe? Surely we need subsidiarity in these matters.

Sir Anthony Meyer: We have things to learn from one another. God forbid that the social charter should be a way of enabling trade unions to recover the ability that they previously enjoyed of being able to hold us all to ransom, but had we been prepared to negotiate throughout on the social charter, I do not believe that that would necessarily have been a consequence.

I always knew that I would be slightly disappointed by the outcome of the Maastricht negotiations. Of course I am disappointed. That is because I wanted the moon. I shall, however, be voting to support the Government's motion at the end of the debate as, I believe, will pretty well all those Members whose views are diametrically opposed to my own. Those who call themselves Euro-sceptics no longer have the brazen trumpeter—my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—to lead them into battle. They have to rely on

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

the rumblings from the deep of that Kraken of the modern political world, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit).

I think that the Euro-sceptics are probably right when they say that the movement towards a single currency is a movement towards a federal Europe, but not for the reasons that they adopt. Neither the rigid timetable nor the complex procedure laid down for the movement to a single currency will take us in that direction. The solution advanced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of the hard ecu was the best way of achieving a single currency.

However it is achieved, once the movement towards a single currency gets going, the City of London will want to be at the centre of things and British industry will want to be in the single currency. Those hard material considerations will soon overwhelm reservations based almost entirely on an ideological concept of sovereignty which is beginning to look distinctly quaint.

The somewhat excessive attention that has been focused on the two areas where Britain has, as it were, opted out—or chosen to opt in—has distracted interest away from the substantial agreements that were reached on other matters. The skills of British diplomacy were freely acknowledged by all other participants, and it is right to pay tribute to the much maligned Foreign Office officials.

I am delighted at the strong declaration on the urgency of widening the Community and bringing in the newly free countries of eastern Europe, but it would have been vain to embark on a widening of the European Community without having first taken the decisions that were taken at Maastricht to strengthen it.

Amid our preoccupations with the economic aspects of Europe, we must never forget that the Community came into being to ensure that the nations of Europe could never again resort to slaughtering one another or reducing their cities to rubble. They bound themselves to accept certain rules and to set up institutions to enforce and adapt those rules as the need arose. The rules have to be binding, enforceable and freely accepted, not imposed.

That is the priceless gift that the European Community has to bestow on an unstable half continent to the east of it. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have contributed notably to the renewal of that by far the most important of the European Community's qualities, and they deserve the thanks of the House and support in the Lobby tomorrow.

12.22 am

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): All sensible people want the maximum co-operation in Europe, especially when we remember the horrific wars our continent endured. We want the maximum unity, friendship, co-operation and trade to raise the standards of living and prosperity of all our peoples. The questions are: how do we achieve that and what sort of an alliance and what model of European unity do we want? Do we want to create a megastate or a union or commonwealth of democratic, self-governing countries?

Once again at Maastricht, Britain appeared as the odd man out. Throughout this story, Britain has often appeared to be the odd man out. On one issue, we said no, but on another we said maybe. We should ask why, time after time, Britain seems to be the odd man out. One of the main reasons is that our system of democratic parliamentary self-government is incompatible with the Brussels machine, which has an unelected Commission with the sole power of initiative and right of veto, a Council of Ministers which legislates in secret, the so-called Parliament, which is not really a Parliament, has no roots in this country and will never be the focus of the hopes, aspirations and loyalties of our people, and a Community court, which in many ways is a political court and engine of federalism, standing above Parliament. That apparatus does not fit with parliamentary self-government. It already makes us do things that we do not want to do and stops us doing things that we want to do.

A second reason is perhaps that we have not obtained many of the much-trumpeted benefits that we were promised from the original Common Market. We were told that there would be substantial benefits to our balance of trade, but, in fact, we had a multi-billion pound deficit inflicted on us. There has been no reform of the common agricultural policy and the average British family now pays about £17 a week extra for its food.

This year we are paying into the Common Market budget about £2·5 billion more than we receive in order to subsidise richer countries. We give more money to the Common Market budget than we give in aid to the third world. What sense is there in that? Let us think what we could do with that £2·5 billion in the health or education services.

Another possible reason is the deceit. Our people have often not been told the truth. Our political leaders have always moved in a crab-like fashion, saying one thing but doing another. Let us cast our minds back to the referendum. In the Government's manifesto which was sent to every household it was clearly stated that there would be no political union. The manifesto also said that there had been a threat of economic and monetary union which would have brought unemployment, but that that threat had been removed.

We often hear talk of trains. We were not told where the train was going, but we were told that we must all clamber aboard or we should be left behind. I always objected to the idea that everything is predetermined and that we have no choice. That is a fundamentally undemocratic argument. Maastricht has brought us some clarity, because we now know where the train is supposed to be heading.

The original draft treaty spoke blatantly of a "federal vocation". Those words have been taken out and replaced by "an ever closer union" but what is the difference? There is none—it is merely semantic juggling. The people who inserted those words have not changed their minds. They made great strides at Maastricht and moved the train or conveyor belt a long way forward towards federalism. Of course, they did not get all that they wanted, but they will be back for more. Already, there are plans for another intergovernmental conference in 1996 and they already have a timetable for economic and monetary union. The mythical train has not only a destination but a timetable.

We are told that federalism means different things to different people, that it is a benign arrangement which does not centralise but pushes power downwards to the people and the regions and that it is based on subsidiarity. I think that that is another deception. Let us consider economic and monetary union and a single currency.

What happens to economic and monetary policy, to interest rates, exchange rates, budgetary policy, taxing and spending which are the substantial bread-and-butter issues of our politics? Where do they go? Do they go downwards? Of course not—they go upwards. All those vital issues are to be rigidly centralised and that is the crux of the matter.

All of our economic life is to be decided by an unelected, unaccountable single central bank. That is not democracy or power to the people—it is all power to an autarchy of unaccountable conservative central bankers. That might be the heart of Europe, but it is certainly not the heart of socialism. The highly centralised single bank will be a law unto itself. It will be beyond the reach of the ballot box. Governments would have to undertake solemnly not to seek to influence it. I cannot conceive of anything more objectionable, more retrograde or more reactionary. If such highly centralised decision-making——

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leighton: No, because we do not have time.

If we had such highly centralised decision-making it would not matter who won elections or who was Chancellor of the Exchequer, because such issues would be decided elsewhere. The electorates of each country would be stripped of their powers. There would be no subsidiarity in monetary policy. Short-term interest rates would be uniform—identical throughout the area. Regardless of local circumstances, they would be the same in Glasgow as in Naples; the same in Lisbon as in Berlin. There would be no local flexibility.

We already have the first stage of economic and monetary union—the exchange rate mechanism—and it is already doing great damage to Britain. Everybody agrees that the present rate of inflation would justify a cut in interest rates—British industry is crying out for one. Yet we cannot have a cut because interest rates are now set, not according to the needs of our domestic economy, but for the sole purpose of propping up the pound in its ERM band, thus prolonging the recession. That will do great damage, but even after all the pain that it will inflict, it will fail. It is always dangerous to prophesy, but I am prepared to do so and say that it will not be possible to hold the pound at DM2·95.

Our inflation rate is now coming down to approach German levels—but any fool can do that by recession, by knocking the economy flat on its back and by causing mass unemployment. That is the economics of the graveyard. We are also told that wage increases have to come down to German levels, and there has been some movement in that direction.

The important factor, however, is unit labour costs, and they are decided by productivity. As a result of deflation, productivity in Britain went down last year, whereas in Germany it went up. So while unit labour costs in Germany increased by 3 per cent., in Britain they increased by 11 per cent. With a fixed exchange rate, that means that Britain loses competitiveness, and will continue to do so on a cumulative basis.

That all means that we pretend that the pound is worth what it is not. To see what happens when people pretend that a currency is worth what it is not we have only to consider Germany's monetary union. The Germans pretended that an east mark was worth the same as a west mark. At a stroke, overnight, east German industry was knocked out, and the work force was made redundant.

The exchange rate mechanism benefits the stronger economies, especially the German economy. It builds in and reinforces their dominance, but it damages the weaker economies.

The Select Committee on Employment took evidence from a variety of sources on the effect of ERM on Italy and France. It found that the system had inflicted an extra 1 million unemployed on Italy and more than half a million on France, and had slowed both countries' economic growth. The ERM is a high-unemployment club, with a slow growth rate. Already it is having the same effect on Britain. We have high and growing unemployment, and under those policies that high unemployment is built in for the whole of the 1990s, along with recession and slow growth.

Our public services are crumbling, our schools are rotting, our health service waiting lists are growing and our railways are not working—all because our economy has not produced the growth to pay for them. The ERM means that that situation will be perpetuated throughout the 1990s.

While we have separate currencies a poor economic performance will show up as a balance of payments deficit —but with a single currency that warning signal would disappear, and a poor performance would show up by whole regions or countries becoming depressed and blighted areas afflicted with mass unemployment.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) explained, at Maastricht not a single word was spoken about full employment. Full employment is no longer an aim of economic policy. Everything—growth, employment and prosperity—is to be subordinated and sacrificed to pegging the exchange rate of the pound. That means that people—human beings, flesh and blood—are sacrificed to an arid, dogmatic, mistaken theory of money. Money is to be the master, not the servant. The Labour party's role should be to bring those matters under democratic control and not to surrender them to remote, unaccountable central bankers.

What we had at Maastricht was old hat; it was living in a time warp. Since the Delors committee reported, the whole world, especially Europe, has changed. The Berlin wall has come down. We have had the collapse of the totalitarian regimes. New democracies have been born, struggling against appalling odds to find their feet, with hyper-inflation and national rivalries. Those are the new issues, priorities and dangers. What was the response to all that at Maastricht?

Half our continent is an area of instability and need. There are a dozen states asking to join and participate in an all-European economic and political arrangement. That is the great historic opportunity. What did we do? What happened at Maastricht? The whole issue was virtually ignored. Instead, they want to waste the next decade poring over the details of economic and monetary union rather than dealing with the real issues confronting Europe. The more we deepen—to use the jargon—the Community, the more obstacles we put in front of eastern Europe. How do we imagine that the Poles could put the zloty in the exchange rate mechanism? How could the lev or the rouble be put in the ERM? We are building new obstacles and barriers.

[Mr. Leighton]

Our experience of multilingual and multinational federations has not been very good. There was one in central Africa, which collapsed. There was one in the Caribbean, which collapsed. Even in Canada, there are problems in Quebec. After the recent elections, even Brussels cannot govern itself and it looks as if the multilingual state of Belgium is about to collapse. There are the problems in Yugoslavia and in the Soviet Union, where a federation is moving towards some kind of commonwealth of independent states.

Maastricht was not the last word on the development and future of Europe. It was the wrong agenda. In the next decade—and let us bear in mind the next intergovernmental conference—there will be different Ministers who may have different ideas. They will learn from experience. I am convinced that the prospect held out at Maastricht will not be the prospect that we shall have at the end of the 1990s.

12.36 am

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I hope that the Maastricht treaties will be the high water mark of federalism in Europe. That will be proved to be so because of the dogged, persistent and brilliant negotiating work by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and his two Ministers of State, especially my good friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones). They have persistently insisted that the treaty we signed contained agreements to enhance democracy within Europe, within the Commission and within the European Parliament, and at the same time embraced closer European union by means of getting agreements between the Governments of the Twelve on foreign policy, security matters and matters connected with home affairs.

The means of negotiation has profound implications for our democracy, for the accountability of Europe to the electorates of Europe and for the accountability of Ministers to their national Parliaments. It is right that we should consider tonight the question how we enhance the democracy, responsibility and accountability of the European institutions and of our own Ministers to the national Parliament.

On European monetary union, it seems to me that it has long been the cherished aim of Conservative Governments to find a means by which we could control the value of our currency—to make it predictable in its exchange rate, as it was for much of the 19th century. In that time, we were tied to the gold standard, which we found to be inadequate and inflexible, especially as it depended in part on the mining activities in the gold mines of South Africa and the Soviet Union. We abandoned that after the war for the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. We did not at the time think that we were sacrificing sovereignty to join that system. It ushered in a period of expansion over the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s the like of which the world had rarely seen.

It is essential that we should find a way to control our currency and to make it stable. I believe that joining a European monetary union with a single European currency would be a good way to achieve that. However, we should not do that if we joined at the wrong exchange rate—as happened, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) explained, with eastern Germany. We should have the right not to join when the timetable date is reached in respect of the present European monetary union treaty.

We would be foolish to join if that meant serious dislocation of our social, economic and unemployment situations. I wish that all members of the Community had reserved a similar power not to join, but that was not to be. We have an extra lever in the establishment of European monetary union, because, in contradiction of what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and the Leader of the Opposition said, we are going to be fully involved in the negotiations for the establishment of the central bank and the way in which it will operate.

I hope that we will now discuss how to make that central bank responsible and accountable. That must be achieved not simply through ECOFIN, but through all 12 national Parliaments involving the Finance Ministers and Prime Ministers of the 12 countries. The decisions taken in the three pillars to which I have referred—security, foreign affairs and home affairs—should come back to this place for a decision whether the policies adopted at those Councils are correct.

We must pay particular attention to the declaration at the end of the treaty about the role of the national Parliament. We in this House have a serious point to address in that respect. In addition to the three pillars that I have mentioned, we must consider the accountability of the European Council that will be the principal means of establishing policy.

The Council of Heads of Government meets without a published agenda that we can discuss before meetings are held, and it meets in absolute secrecy. At the moment, we in the national Parliaments simply receive the press releases that the Heads of Government decide to release after the events have occurred and policies have been made. That is a thoroughly unsatisfactory way of calling our Heads of Government and that Council to democratic account for their actions to this House and to our people.

The increased qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers, to which we have agreed in the treaty, means that we must have a way of keeping our national Parliaments better informed than they are at present. The word "federalism" is seriously misinterpreted and misunderstood. It is an example of the ability of the Twelve to misunderstand one another. Only if delegations from this House regularly meet delegations from other national Parliaments will we be able to understand the arguments, appreciate them and become sympathetic to the problems facing other member states. In that way, we will generate the consensus that is absolutely essential in a democracy ruled by a democratically elected Parliament and, indeed, by an executive in Brussels.

As soon as we can after the next election, we must consider how we are able to carry out those essential functions if the European union is to be democratically accountable. That means bringing members of the European Parliament into the House and into our Committees. Members of the European Parliament receive warning of matters that are to be discussed by the Commission and by the various pillars and councils that have been established by the treaty.

The treaty has advanced Europe, but it is a Europe of nations which is on trial. Unless the European union works properly, democratically and accountably, we will begin to revert to the horror of a supranational federal Europe which we all fear, and which the majority of people in this country and most hon. Members will reject.

12.46 am

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): As one who joined the Labour party to support my predecessor John Mackintosh as a great European enthusiast, I take great pleasure in the position that has been taken by my party in recent months on this important issue. I passionately favour the increased co-operation within the European Community and the developments that are taking place. However, I am very sad that the Government—for the next few months, anyway—are trying to drag their heels and opt out of so many important aspects of what the Community is doing.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) said that he wanted more democratisation of the institutions of the Community. I heartily agree with him, and I suspect that that is really an argument in favour of

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

federalism in due course—I would not necessarily be too frightened of taking that course. It probably will evolve, but no doubt slowly. However, the hon. Gentleman cannot expect me to agree with his preface, in which he said that his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had negotiated brilliantly. If the Prime Minister was brilliant, he was certainly spectacularly outshone in the opening speeches. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition wiped the floor with the Prime Minister, and never has that been more spectacularly done.

The Prime Minister must be a considerable disappointment to his hon. Friends. He is certainly a bitter disappointment to people in this country. He will be labelled the drop-out Prime Minister. He is dropping out of progress for our people in the European Community. It is worth dwelling for a couple of seconds on what he has dropped out of.

It is a great shame that the social chapter has been excised from the treaty. Annex IV of the draft treaty on European union refers to the

"Agreement concluded between the member states of the European Community with the exception of the United Kingdom."

It goes on to state:

"The undersigned eleven have agreed"

to article 117, which states:

"The Community and its Member States shall have as their objectives the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, proper social protection, dialogue between management and labour, the development of human resources with a view to lasting high employment and the combating of exclusion."

That is what the Prime Minister went to Maastricht to exclude Britain from.

It seems extraordinary that a British Prime Minister can represent such a betrayal of the interests of millions of people in Britain as a victory for British interests. Yet that is the giant con that has been peddled in the Conservative press in recent weeks. It will not stand up to examination by the electorate in the coming election campaign.

One aspect of Britain's opting out of the social charter is that it must surely undermine the single market. The Prime Minister says that it is an advantage to have low wages and longer working hours and that that will attract investors who want to take advantage of bargain basement labour. If that is so, presumably costs to industry will be that much lower here than in the rest of Europe, so there will not be equal competition with enterprises in the other 11 nations of the European Community. There will no longer be a level playing field and the single market will be undermined.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman should perhaps concentrate on feeding his sheep rather than intervene in the debate at this stage.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The hon. Gentleman has obviously recognised that the Prime Minister secured for us a major competitive advantage at Maastricht. The hon. Gentleman said so himself. We have a different regime from the other 11 member states, one which is more competitive. Is it not a considerable tribute to our diplomacy that we were able to persuade our Community partners to allow us to gain an advantage over them?

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) seems to want to treat the work force of the United Kingdom in the same way as he treats his sheep. Yes, the Prime Minister has negotiated a set of circumstances in which it will be possible for employers in Britain to pay lower wages and work their employees for longer hours in worse conditions than their competitors on mainland Europe. That may be the competitive advantage that the hon. Gentleman wants for his constituents, but I do not want it for mine.

It is important that we should recognise that Britain's opting out of the social chapter will create difficulties because the European single market will no longer be a level playing field. There will be a downside to that. We cannot expect our competitors on mainland Europe to put up with such discrimination. We are building up problems for ourselves. It must be a matter of concern that Britain will become a semi-detached part of the European Community. In this debate, we are confronted with a squalid abdication by the Government of responsibility to the British people. The Government deserve to be condemned by the electorate, as they surely will be.

However, I am confident that the European Community will continue to progress in the direction in which it has been driving—and rightly so—for the benefit of all our citizens and citizens on the mainland of Europe. I am confident that the Labour party will put Britain back into the main stream of Europe as soon as a Labour Government is elected. That will be a good thing for our citizens and for business and enterprises in the United Kingdom.

We keep hearing comments tonight—we also heard them in the debate before the Maastricht summit—about sovereignty. People talk about the great sanctity of the sovereignty of Parliament. Who is kidding whom that a middle-size country such as the United Kingdom is sovereign in the modern world? Are we sovereign in defence, in our dealings with multinational corporations or in any significant matter? No, we are not. The only way in which we can achieve sovereignty is by sharing it. By sharing our sovereignty with our partners in the European Community, we can begin to achieve some realistic control and influence over events. I say that with the most heartfelt——

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman must forgive me: I want to be fair to other hon. Members who have been here for a long time.

As a Scot, I speak about shared sovereignty with great feeling. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), who acknowledged that there was shared sovereignty within the United Kingdom. The sovereignty of the people I represent has been shared with the English since 1707. It has not necessarily been a good thing in all ways, and there has certainly been a downside. We have lost a lot, and there are ways to improve the structure of the United Kingdom which would improve democracy and accountability in our government. That is why I am passionately committed to establishing a Parliament in Scotland, and home rule for Scotland within the United Kingdom and within Europe. However, it has surely been to the mutual advantage of the people of

Scotland and England that we have had that union for the past two and a half centuries. It has been of considerable economic advantage to both countries.

I am sad to say that some Conservative Members and one or two of my hon. Friends seem to have a little Englander mentality. The narrow nationalism expressed by people who want to cling to total sovereignty for the United Kingdom is rather like the arguments we hear from Scottish and Welsh nationalists—unrealistic and out of date. It is wrong for any realistic person to pursue such outmoded attitudes, especially anyone in government.

I am sad that the Government, in their dying months, have decided to cop out of the main stream in Europe. I look forward to the day, in a few months' time, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) will be getting back into the main stream of that debate and participating fully in the European Community for the benefit of all our citizens.

12.56 am

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that the winding-up speeches have to start soon, so I shall be brief and leave out much of what I wanted to say. I can cover the issue by associating myself wholly with the speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames), who said precisely what I think. European idealism brought me into politics in the first place. I fundamentally believe in Britain as a part of Europe. Therefore, I welcome the tone and scope of the treaty that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiated at Maastricht.

I shall home in on the social action programme and the declaration on racism and xenophobia, which was separate from the main treaty, but was signed at Maastricht. As background, there is no doubt that many black, Asian and Jewish British people are deeply concerned at racial attacks in the United Kingdom and even more concerned about what is happening in continental Europe. They ask what 1992 means for them.

They are especially worried about the success of the Vlaams Blok party in the elections last month in Belgium, about the rise of the Deutsche Volksunion and Republikaner parties in Germany and by the high opinion poll ratings of the national front, led by the odious Jean-Marie Le Pen in France. They will welcome enormously the steps forward that have been made in the signing of the new declaration on racism and xenophobia, especially the penultimate paragraph, which states:

"The European Council asks Ministers and the Commission to increase their effort to combat discrimination and xenophobia, and to strengthen the legal protection for third country nationals".

Although the declaration was proposed by the Dutch presidency, British Ministers were its main friends during the discussions. They stopped it being watered down and prevented the part about combating discrimination from being taken out. I also welcome the role that the British Government played in this important new move.

There is no doubt that Britain does lead, in the sense that it is the only country with a comprehensive framework of race relations law. Our reputation is high on this, as is that of the Commission for Racial Equality. However, freedom of movement is limited to EC nationals only, and a significant proportion of Britain's ethnic minorities have citizenship of their country of origin and therefore will not be able to move freely within the Community.

There have been some moves forward on this. The Commission, the European Parliament and the International Labour Organisation have discussed extensively the possibility of extending freedom of movement to third-country nationals. My concern is that the single market simply will not be able to operate effectively while one important part of the labour force lacks mobility.

I look forward to a directive under the social action programme. I welcome the declaration, which is a big step forward, but, given British experience and law, we could have had a directive in which we could have taken the lead. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look at that. Britain has set the European Community on a course that I wholly applaud—an ever closer union of nation states. We have set the tone for the future, and that is to be greatly welcomed. I have been looking for that ever since I first became involved in politics.

1.1 am

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate, in which some notable contributions have been made. It is unfortunate that some speakers in the debate—for example, the Prime Minister—have cast doubt on the quality of the debate on these momentous issues in other European Community countries. We have had more debates on these issues, but it is insulting to suggest that our partners do not give them sufficient attention. A debate that starts at 3.30 in the afternoon and goes on until 2 o'clock in the morning is hardly an advert for open government. It would have been better to hold the debate during the day, when television coverage would have taken the views of hon. Members to a wider public.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): The hon. Gentleman has referred to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said. However, to take an example at random, how many times does the hon. Gentleman think that the Bundestag discussed the Maastricht agreement before it was signed?

Mr. Robertson: Regularly. If the hon. Gentleman had been in earlier, he would have heard the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) saying that last week he had attended a debate on this subject in the Bundestag. The hon. Gentleman would do better if he chose his targets with more precision. Much discussion took place in both the Bundestag and the federal German Bundesrat about the content of the intergovernmental conferences. Although our debates on this subject have attracted a flurry of interest, attendances at debates on the European Community are not noted for their large size.

Among the outstanding speeches made today, I have to mention that of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. I hear from those who have not been imprisoned in the debate for a long time that the electronic media have reported well the exchanges that took place. The political reporters on all stations have paid tribute to the outstanding contribution made by my right hon. Friend, and the way in which he trumped the sporting aphorisms of the Prime Minister, used in the orchestrated

[Mr. Robertson]

triumph that we have had to live through in the past few weeks from a Government rocked on their heels by the assault from the Opposition today.

I start on the same note as the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend—by recognising the historic nature of the events through which we are living. Last night—or was it the night before?—I was in the House of Commons Library when a number of hon. Members commented when the Ceefax screen put up the headline

"Soviet Union to end on 31st December."

We can now believe that nothing is impossible in politics. Everything is changing rapidly and beyond all recognition.

That is why the Maastricht summit was always going to be important well beyond its paper agenda. It represented a unique western European opportunity to grab control at that supreme moment of time and to consolidate the structure of what is one of the few secure fixtures in this fast-changing continent that we inhabit. In many senses Maastricht did just that. Deepening the foundations of the Community represented a quantum leap forward in the integration and the internal strengthening of what is the most successful voluntary grouping of nation states.

What happened at Maastricht last week—and I am not passing judgment; hon. Members have expressed differing views today—was the start of the European common foreign and security policies, with their structures established in the treaty. There are to be powers of co-decision for the European Parliament. Although they were called negative assent procedures and now they are called article 189b procedures, the fact is that there has been agreement on areas where the European Parliament will share with the Council of Ministers the power to make legislation. They will have a veto that will allow them to complement, but not to rival, any of the powers that exist in this national Parliament.

The principle of qualified majority voting has become the norm rather than the exception in decision making and in European law making. The scope of the Community's interest has now been extended, whether through the treaty or through intergovernmental co-operation, into home affairs, health, education, research and development, trans-European transport and communication networks, industry and even culture.

The principle of creating a European Community defence arm has been conceded and is included in the treaty. Given the nature of the reply that the Minister gave earlier to one of his hon. Friends, it is worth reminding the House of precisely what the treaty says about defence. The Government moved dramatically from their previous negotiating position. The treaty says in the declaration on page 114:

"WEU will be developed as the defence component of the European Union and as the means to strengthen the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance. To this end, it will formulate common European defence policy".

In article A3, it states:

"The objective is to build up WEU in stages as the defence component of the European Union. To this end, WEU is prepared, at the request of the European Union, to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implementations."

All that was agreed to and signed by the Government in Maastricht last week. However, all that happened despite the Government. All that was signed up, yet every one of those items was opposed by the Government. Their role in Maastricht was only in obstruction, in an attempted dilution and in a vague and futile effort to stop it all.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman has been fair up to now in what he has said. Surely he will recall that it was my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary who, more than a year ago, first proposed that the WEU should be developed into a European defence personality. He will also recall, because I know that he wants to be fair in these matters, the paper that was produced by the United Kingdom and Italy. The wording in that paper is what is reflected in the final treaty.

Mr. Robertson: If the Minister looks back slightly more than two weeks, he will find that the Government set themselves firmly against the idea of the European Community having a separate defence identity. The Government moved through the Anglo-Italian proposals and edged their way, crab-like, towards what came out of it, but, as with all these other areas, it represented a retreat.

I offer one example of many that I could give the House. No doubt my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will give more tomorrow. The Foreign Secretary said on 6 December last year:

"We are not persuaded by the case . . . for adding again to the legislative powers of the European Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 483.]

That is not what the Government signed up to in Maastricht last week.

There has been a comprehensive series of cave-ins. And what was obtained in return for all the concessions made as grudgingly as possible by the British Government? The two words "federal vocation" were surgically removed from the treaty and replaced by the words "ever closer union". In addition, the Government got the two opt-outs —on the central, pivotal issues of monetary union and on the social provisions in the draft treaty. Some triumph for the Government; some negotiation breakthrough; some game, some set, some match.

No wonder the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of the principal conservative newspapers in Germany, described the Prime Minister as

"the winner of empty victories".

No wonder Mr. Ian Davidson, the distinguished correspondent of the *Financial Times*, probably the most influential newspaper in Europe today, described Maastricht as

"a hollow victory for the Prime Minister".

From the point of view of the British people and of those of us who put their interests above the convenience of the unity of any party, the saddest aspect of the isolation of our Government last week was not just the pig-headedness on display or the defensive and negative posture that they always seem to strike but their inherent dishonesty. At the very core of the Government's attitude to the negotiations is a fundamental and deliberate deception. On economic and monetary union the Government have no intention of exercising the opt-out clause about which they make so much noise. They may still resist saying that they accept the principle of the single currency. They may still avoid telling the people of this country of any advantage that there might be in being part of the single currency regime. They may go on pretending

that the calculation on whether to go into the third stage of EMU is exactly equally balanced, with no real penalties involved in staying out while everyone else is in.

The policy is based not on an economy of the truth but on a complete absence of truth. That is an accusation of some seriousness, but it is necessary to make it and I make it neither lightly nor alone. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) made the same accusation earlier this evening.

The Government know—the Minister knows—that Britain must be in if everyone else is in: that we cannot possibly afford to be outside an economic and monetary union with the other 11 inside it, while it is driven in every detail of policy by those who have fully signed up to it. It is just that the Government cannot admit this. They will not admit it; they dare not admit it, lest they offend or alert some dissident elements on the Benches behind them—and we have heard several of their voices this evening.

The Government are frightened; they are running away from this admission. They hide behind the right of Parliament to make the final decision. But the Prime Minister announced in the debate last month that the final decision on the ratification of the treaty—the European Communities (Amendment) Bill that will be necessary to enact the treaty of Maastricht—will come in the new Parliament, after the election, so Parliament will have a decision to make even then. There is no real question about the Government needing to hide behind the figleaf of a parliamentary vote because we know that that is not the reason. However, some members of the Conservative party have the honesty to say things outright. In the European Parliament last week, Sir Christopher Prout, the leader of the Conservative MEPs, said:

"I do not believe that my country will wish to remain outside this arrangement when the moment for decision comes".

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman describe this House as a "figleaf". Not today but in our previous debate, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said to the House that, if the conditions were met, a single currency could bring advantages to this country, but if those conditions were met, political sacrifices would need to be made. If that situation arose, the House would have the right to consider whether it wished, in the balance of advantages, to make those political sacrifices. Is the hon. Gentleman telling us that the Labour party is prepared to commit itself now to a single currency and to say that it is not prepared to give this House the political choice that it should have?

Mr. Robertson: I did not say that the House was a figleaf; I said that the Government's hiding behind the right of the House to make a decision was a figleaf. That is not in question. The House will make its decision in the new Parliament. When the Government have the courage and the guts to ask the people to choose a new Government, this Parliament will make its decision. We are not scared of Parliament making a decision. Parliament must and does have the right to make such decisions. We are clear—as are all other 11 countries—about where we intend to be—and that is in the first division of Europe. We intend to be among the top countries in Europe. In exchanges earlier this afternoon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was unable to answer the question that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked him time after time. In every living room in the country, people saw that exchange and saw that the Chancellor was unable to answer the question: if our country satisfied the convergence conditions, under what circumstances would he recommend that we should be outside?

As I have said, other people are more honest. In the European Parliament, Conservatives were willing to speak out last week. Sir Christopher Prout is not an obscure Back-Bench MEP; he is the leader of that fighting force of Euro-Tories who want to join up with the European People's party, the federalist organisation in the European Parliament. That group of Euro-Tories carry the Conservative party's limited flag in that Parliament. In last week's debate, Mr. Ben Patterson said:

"One of the areas of light is clearly the economic and monetary union decision. Indeed, the most important decision taken at Maastricht was that there will be a single currency for Europe by the end of the century. This is an objective which the European Democratic Group—which is 99 per cent. made up of British Conservatives—has supported from the very start."

All the Prime Minister's praise last week, meticulously orchestrated from the boardrooms to the editorial floors, was predicated on exploding the Prime Minister's explicit view that we can still make that choice, without penalties.

Mr. Ashdown: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman and agree with most of what he is saying, but surely the point that was not raised when his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was speaking was that there is nothing in the treaty as it stands, without the opt-out clauses, to insist that Britain will eventually join a monetary union if the convergence conditions were met. Even if we were a nation that conformed to those convergence conditions, the Government could still choose not to join. In other words, the opt-out clauses for which they argued so much are completely unnecessary as that provision already exists, but they place a real question mark against this country's good faith and against the certainty that will be necessary in future. Surely that is the point.

Mr. Robertson: That is absolutely true, and it illustrates the fact that the opt-out clause exists for the purpose of patching up Conservative unity rather than doing anything for the country.

Last Friday, 23 leading bankers and industrialists—including the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), who is the chairman of a bank as well as, temporarily, a Tory Member of Parliament—signed a letter to *The Times*. Those distinguished people, who wrote to support the Prime Minister's view, made their feelings clear. They said:

"The City of London, as Europe's leading financial centre, contributed over £14 billion last year to the United Kingdom's invisible earnings. The idea that the City can enjoy separate laws and regulations outside, or only partially inside, Europe and still maintain its pre-eminence is untenable."

In that letter, the Government's friends were telling them that their position, and the current prospect, were entirely untenable.

No wonder the Chancellor of the Exchequer was exposed this afternoon as he sat mumbling, unable to answer the question put to him by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. Time and again, the same case has been made by people who ostensibly support the Government; as it has done before, the Conservative party has shamelessly puts its interests before those of the British people.

[Mr. Robertson]

Then there is the social dimension. Here we see another deception—another contrived pitched battle, designed not to make a point or to protect Britain's national interest but to serve as another figleaf to cover the splits. Today, someone handed me a document that had been found in one of the well-known Westminster photocopiers. It is headed:

"From: Lawrence Vince, Sir Teddy Taylor's Office. To Members and correspondents of the Conservative European Reform Group."

The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) has a long history of voting against the Government in every European debate since 1973. If, as he says, he is going to reverse that tomorrow night, it will be an historic moment. All Conservative briefings must, it seems, be phrased in the form of questions and answers. The document asks:

"What about the Social Chapter?"

The answer is:

"Again from a constitutional standpoint, this is a major point. We have never before had a situation when one member state has opted out of a common policy. The 'two tier' principle or twin track principle has been established."

No wonder the hon. Member for Southend, East was given a knighthood. He has hit the nail on the head. We shall be on the twin track, in the second division and moving at a slow speed.

Britain alone opposed the social chapter in the treaty. Britain alone opposed even the diluted compromise that was offered on Tuesday morning by the Dutch President. Britain is isolated and alone, with 11 out of 12 Governments and 12 out of 12 Oppositions taking the opposite view.

Among all 12 Community nations and all seven EFTA members, John Major and Jean-Marie Le Pen of the French national front stand alone, opposed to the concept and practice of providing for basic minimum rights for employees in the new single European market. That is some company for the right hon. Gentleman. As I intended to say this afternoon, I have found a new companion: in the whole of Europe, we have John Major and Jean-Marie Le Pen, but we also have the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). Remarkably, he is in the same company.

I was glad to receive some support earlier; praise sometimes makes people uncomfortable, as I found when the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) praised me in our earlier debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton, the shadow Foreign Secretary, almost sacked me on the spot. In an interview with Brian Walden, the right hon. Member for Yeovil said

"the social chapter in the Maastricht agreement it seems to me is a really worrying attempt by Europe to try and rebuild in Britain the things that we have dismantled over the last twelve or fifteen years."

That was a fascinating interview. Apart from that small treasure—which gives Mr. Le Pen and the Prime Minister some company—there was a remarkable interchange between the right hon. Gentleman and Mr. Walden, which I think that I should share with the House. I crave your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I wish to read it out to you. A breach of parliamentary protocol is involved, but I must read the script as it stands. The passage reads:

"Paddy Ashdown: Look, you describe it . . .
Brian Walden: . . . between nation states . . .
Paddy Ashdown: . . . you describe it to me then.
Brian Walden: . . . but the . . .
Paddy Ashdown: Describe the Britain to me that you think could be prosperous safe and secure if the other 11 go ahead and we're outside, describe it to me.
Brian Walden: Don't, you tell me why it's wrong.
Paddy Ashdown: No come on Brian I've said to you . . .
Brian Walden: No come on, now I'm asking the questions and you're answering.
Paddy Ashdown: Ah, you don't, you don't like it when I turn it on you. But that's the whole question . . .
Brian Walden: I don't mind it, but I . . .
Paddy Ashdown: But, but, but, that's . . .
Brian Walden: . . . and if you want to interview me . . .
Paddy Ashdown: . . . No, no no, I think . . .
Brian Walden: . . . I'll certainly agree to that . . .
Paddy Ashdown: . . . I think if you were to ask me questions . . .
Brian Walden: . . . it seems a silly idea . . ."

The document reads:

"This transcript is the property of London Weekend Television and Walden who must be credited if any part of it is used."

I am glad to do so.

There are some amazing dissidents when it comes to the social charter, and even inside the Cabinet. There is not unity on the opt-out from the social charter or on the social charter. One of the great absentees from any of these debates—they range across the whole area of space—is the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the Secretary of State for the Environment. The right hon. Gentleman resigned from the Cabinet on Europe and crusaded through the country on Europe. He challenged the previous Prime Minister on Europe and after that he became a member of the Cabinet. Since then we have not seen hide nor hair of him on Europe, and small surprise that is.

In an article in the *Daily Mail* in November of 1989, the right hon. Member for Henley, who is now the Secretary of State for the Environment, was quoted as saying that "the growing success of European companies will gradually enable them to buy up more and more of our industries, and their social charter will come here—not because the British Government wanted it but because our companies were not strong enough to resist it. I would rather be at the conference table, setting the terms, than at the receiving end of a process others had designed."

When did the big Cabinet argument take place that led to the position that the Government took at Maastricht last week? If the right hon. Member for Henley still holds the views that I have quoted, it must have been a fairly colourful demonstration of debating styles that took place in the Cabinet. Or has the right hon. Gentleman been forced to change his mind as other Cabinet members were over the poll tax? Deep inside the Cabinet and the Conservative party there are these divisions.

Mr. Tebbit: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I regret that the right hon. Gentleman has come in, as it were, only at this stage in my speech. Only one or two minutes are left to me to reply on behalf of the Opposition. I resist the temptation and forgo the pleasure that I would derive from crossing swords with him.

Mr. Tebbit: I want only to help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Robertson: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman wants to help. I bet that he can help me, but he cannot help his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench.

The reality is that the opt-out on the social charter means that we shall be locked out from influence, from decisions, from the moulding of policies and from institutions that will yet determine the future of our country. The Maastricht summit was a rare opportunity for Britain to make a positive contribution to momentous discussions. We had a new or newish Prime Minister, who came to power on the ruins of a Prime Minister who failed to read the British people's thinking on Europe. It is sad that the right hon. Gentleman has fallen into some of the traps of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). Instead of ideas we had bluster. Instead of initiatives we had threats of vetoes. In the place of constructive dialogue we had obstruction. The saddest feature of the "tennis match", as the Prime Minister trivialisingly called the occasion, was the sheer lack of ambition for Britain that the Government displayed.

We have no need of empty seats and opt-outs to make Britain's impression on fast-flowing events in Europe that will affect us all. When the Prime Minister stops talking, lecturing and preaching about democracy and the will of the British people and their Parliament and gives the people a chance to choose a new Government, we shall grasp the chance to lead this country in Europe because we are ambitious for Britain in Europe.

1.29 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): Few spectacles are less attractive than the House in self-congratulatory mood. Nevertheless, it is right to say that we have had a good debate. About 40 Back Benchers have spoken and substantially more will speak tomorrow.

To deal with the point that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has just made, I do not think that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was saying other than what he and many other Conservative Members have said—that these matters are debated not only in the House but in the press and among the general public in a way which goes much wider and deeper and generates much greater passion than in other Community countries.

Mr. Enright *rose*—

Mr. Garel-Jones: Will the hon. Member allow me to continue?

That point is made not only by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister; European partners frequently comment on the standards of debate in the House. I think that that is right. I was particularly pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) noted the declarations at the end of the treaty, which refer to the House's further involvement in the workings and institutions of the Community and the exhortation—it can be no more than that—to other Parliaments in the Community to emulate the scrutiny of the Danish Parliament and of this Parliament and the Select Committee on European Legislation under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

We need not apologise, either as a Government or as a party, for the attention that we have given to the opinions of hon. Members, because it is to the House that the Government must give the results of the Maastricht treaty and it is in the House that the legislation giving effect to the treaty will be considered. The House remains the cornerstone of our democracy.

I was particularly pleased that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) spoke because these debates are read and followed in the Community with some fascination. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not reply to the legal points that he made about Libya and the terrorist atrocity at Lockerbie. He pointed out that there is a declaration on the matter in the treaty, so his comments were perfectly in order. He rides a high hobby horse and has the respect of hon. Members for doing so. He made the startling admission that he was not prepared to refer my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) to Colonel Gaddafi's courts for trial, so his attitude is obviously softening.

Mr. Dalyell: Having exercised that restraint, and as the learned Attorney-General is present, may I ask for an official statement to be made soon on the legal basis for the request for extradition, because if military action is not ruled out it is terribly important?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I assure the hon. Gentleman that he will receive a reply on that point.

My hon. Friends the Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell), for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and for Hertford and Stortford and my right hon. Friends the Members for Selby (Mr. Alison) and for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) referred to intergovernmental co-operation.

It is worth saying that the first stone, as it were, of intergovernmental co-operation was laid in the Single European Act by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley. I was especially pleased that in her remarks to the House on 20 November she should have taken credit for it. She said that the important thing to remember was that that agreement

"was never made a part of the treaty of Rome—and quite rightly not."

She reminded the House:

"There are two ways to go—the treaty of Rome, with the European Court's interpretation of it, which is quite different from ours, or an intergovernmental agreement which is binding upon us but which does not have to enter into our law and is not part of the treaty of Rome."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1991; Vol.199, c. 293.]

What has attracted a number of my hon. Friends to the success that the Prime Minister has had is the way in which he has built on that aspect of intergovernmental co-operation.

I think that many hon. Members are about the same age as me—I am just 50. I was 16 years old when the British and French Governments went into Suez. Hon. Members will recall that there was a passionate debate in this country at the time about whether that was a wise thing for our Government to do. For a 16-year-old boy, that debate was not of great consequence. I simply supported the British troops in Suez and I remember feeling rather disappointed and let down when it began to dawn on me that we had not won in the traditional sense of the word. I also remember a growing feeling of anger as I became aware that one of the reasons why we had not won in the traditional sense was that someone had picked up a telephone and told us to go home. For me, and for many others at that time, that was something of a turning point in the political history of this country.

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) and, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) referred to the remark made by Dean Acheson that Britain had lost an empire and failed to find a role. For me, that circle was closed this very year when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister arrived at the European Council with his proposal for safe havens for Kurds. The proposal was approved by the Council and we could claim within a week to have picked up an important international issue, to have influenced the policy of the United States of America and of the United Nations and, through our membership of the Community, to have shaped an international event. That is the reason why my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was right to claim credit for having laid the first foundation stone of what will shortly be the common foreign and security policy, now known as European political co-operation.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has achieved what is called the pillared structure of the European union. I shall deal first with that structure, beginning with the common foreign and security policy. It remains outside the competence of the Community. All decisions on key issues within that policy will be taken by consensus. There is an explicit recognition—and this was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford—of the United Kingdom's responsibilities as a member of the United Nations Security Council under paragraph 4 of article E.

On defence, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and many of us realised—beginning with a speech made about 18 months ago by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—that the changes in the world in the past two to two and a half years meant that not only the United Kingdom but all our allies and NATO itself had to reconsider strategic and defence postures. It was the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who first proposed that it should be the Western European Union that formed the nucleus of the developing European defence personality built on the Western European Union. Of course, the WEU must remain autonomous, and the European defence dimension must not be under the aegis of the European Council. That European pillar must reinforce and complement the cornerstone of our defence, which must remain NATO.

Mr. Tebbit: I have read carefully paragraph 4 of article E, in page 110, and it does not seem to say clearly that it overrides the Declaration of the Conference at the foot of page 106, at the end of article C. Is my hon. Friend the Minister telling me that that declaration has no applicability to the United Nations? Or is he saying that it has no applicability to the Security Council? I find it difficult to read either of those interpretations into paragraph 4 of article E.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Paragraph 4 of article E refers to

"Member States which are also members of the United Nations Security Council"

—that is, to France and Britain. As my right hon. Friend has correctly seen, it ends with the following words:

"without prejudice to their responsibilities under the provisions of the United Nations Charter."

I think that that is sufficiently clear.

Mr. Tebbit *rose*——

Mr. Garel-Jones: I hope that my right hon. Friend will forgive me, but I am not giving way to him.

Mr. Tebbit: I have misinformed my hon. Friend by saying——

Mr. Garel-Jones *rose*——

Mr. Tebbit: The passage was actually at the foot of page——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend has addressed the House at considerable length, and also intervened in the speech of one of my hon. Friends to explain why he voted for the Single European Act. As I hope to answer as many as 40 hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, I hope that he will forgive me if I continue.

The other pillar of intergovernmental co-operation is the interior and justice pillar, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) referred. The House and the country are aware that many of the problems that we face—such as crime, drugs and terrorism—call for transnational solutions. European co-operation in that area is right, and is widely supported on both sides of the House.

Those aspects of intergovernmental co-operation have been well received—certainly by Conservative Members. Many of my hon. Friends see it as a way forward for co-operation within the European union.

I must refer, too, to the treaty of Rome and the Community proper—in particular to the enforcement of the rule of law. The House and the country can take some pride in the fact that our record in enforcement and compliance has been described by the European Court of Justice as exemplary. Alas, the record of many of our Community partners is not, perhaps, as exemplary as our own. The action taken by the Government under article 171 of the new treaty, which enables the European Court to fine non-compliant nations, will be not only a good thing in itself but will ensure that many such nations are rather more careful in future before undertaking obligations—as we have to be.

Mr. Robertson: I have heard the Minister's script about the United Kingdom's exemplary record before. However, the latest Commission report, published in the past few weeks, says that the United Kingdom is now in third position in terms of overall compliance. For directives applicable to the customs union, Britain is in eighth place —only Greece, Spain, Italy and Belgium are worse than us. For directives applicable to the environment, the United Kingdom is in seventh place—only Greece, Italy, Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg are worse.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman refers there to implementation, and not to compliance. It is true that generally Denmark is a bit ahead of us, but that we are normally in the first three in terms of implementation. Implementation is not the most important point, important though it is. Compliance with the European Court of Justice is the most important point. We have only one European Court of Justice decision uncomplied with; one member state has 38.

Other areas in which the United Kingdom has taken initiatives within the treaty of Rome, an area to which the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) referred, is in improving the institutional arrangements of

the Community on fraud, on financial accountability, on rights of inquiry and on setting up a European ombudsman.

In the area of legislative powers, the House will be aware that the original and more ambitious proposals from the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Parliament were for what was called co-decision, which sought to give to the European Parliament an equal status with the Council of Ministers. That was not acceptable to us or to some other member states. We have ended up with what is called the "negative assent" article 189b procedure, which has been well received by Conservative Members and by many Opposition Members.

Subsidiarity, which has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members, was principally pressed by the United Kingdom and by the Federal Republic. The subsidiarity text appears under article 3b of the treaty and is also referred to in a further two articles, articles A and B, in what is called the chapeau of the treaty. My hon. Friends the Members for Carshalton and Wallington and for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) laid particular stress on subsidiarity.

It will not surprise hon. Members when I say that subsidiarity will not be a catch-all which will resolve all the problems that we see of the Community seeking to exceed its competence and seeking to extend its activities into what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has called every nook and cranny. Nevertheless, a strongly worded article on subsidiarity such as we now have will certainly be taken into account by the European Court in any decisions that it makes, and it will begin to shore up the principle of subsidiarity to which the House rightly attaches considerable importance.

Mr. Spearing: I raised this matter directly with the Prime Minister in his opening speech this afternoon. I pointed out that the wording in the treaty is:

"In the areas which do not fall within its exclusive jurisdiction, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity."

The article goes on to give two tests, which are a little difficult to understand. Can the Minister give us a quick definition of "exclusive jurisdiction", which I should have thought was a pretty wide term, or does he have to leave the definition to the European Court? Will he tell us now or later what it all means?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman should look at the last sentence of article 3b. He has rightly focused his attention on the main body of the text in the second paragraph. The last paragraph says:

"Any action by the Community shall not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objectives of this Treaty."

That is a catch-all which answers the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister rightly referred to the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as Britain, laid a lot of emphasis on subsidiarity. Will he confirm that the Federal Republic sees subsidiarity as going considerably further than just the relationship between the so-called "national" Governments and the EC government, and as taking in the Länder level and other levels? Will the United Kingdom apply the same approach?

Mr. Garel-Jones: No, because the Federal Republic of Germany, as its name indicates, is a federal state. We are not a federal state and our reasons for supporting subsidiarity may be different from those of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: No, I want to make more progress.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford, my hon. Friends the Members for East Lindsey, for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Hertford and Stortford and the right hon. Members for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and for Ashton-under-Lyne referred to economic and monetary union and to stages 2 and 3 of that process. I will not try to answer all their points in detail because my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will reply to the debate tomorrow and will no doubt wish to pick up many of those points.

However, it is not the case, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) pointed out, that the United Kingdom will not be participating in those decisions. We have participated in the negotiations on the treaty and in the chapter referring to stage 3. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley originally explained, we are not prepared to accept an imposed single currency in this country.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has negotiated strict convergence criteria. If they are met—and they may not be—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it absolutely clear to the House that some benefits could flow from a single currency. However, if we were to go down that route, substantial political sacrifices would have to be made, not least by this House. Therefore, it is right that this House should be given the final decision if and when that stage is reached.

Mr. Darling: I am sure that the Minister will accept that it is common ground that every country in the Community will be able to decide whether to move to the third stage and proceed thereafter. Does not the Minister accept that paragraphs 1, 7 and 10 of the protocol, which this country signed, were clearly designed to flag up the fact that the United Kingdom was setting itself apart from the other EC members simply to placate Conservative Back Benchers, possibly including the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)? Because of that, Britain's commitment will not be taken seriously and that is a very serious point.

Mr. Garel-Jones: That is not the case.

Mr. Ashdown: If, as the Minister claims, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) is not correct, perhaps the Minister will consider the following point. Let us imagine a position in which at one or other of the two prescribed dates a sufficient number of countries voted for a single currency to go ahead because a sufficient number had reached the terms of convergence, and let us suppose that Britain had reached the terms of convergence but did not vote to go ahead. Would there then be any compulsion on this country to join a single currency? If not, what on earth is the opt-out for?

Mr. Garel-Jones: In the circumstances that the right hon. Gentleman describes, of course there is no compulsion on this country.

I do not wish to be quite so partisan as the hon. Member for Hamilton, but I think that I should refer to Labour's attitude to these matters, not least because many

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

Labour Members have spoken in the debate. Most fair-minded observers would agree that the Labour party has steered what might charitably be called a wayward course in respect of this matter over the past 10 years. We heard public confessions from the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) that they have finally seen the light.

Perhaps the most interesting speech was that made by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). He said that everyone had a short memory, but I do not think that the memories of Conservative Members are that short. We well remember the right hon. Gentleman's last intervention on a foreign policy matter when he described the likely outcome of events in the Gulf war. I do not think that he did himself or his party any credit with that speech. The right hon. Gentleman—I told him that I intended to refer to him—is a good example of a good mind serving a bad cause for a very long time. The Labour party's record, not just on Community matters but in general, is that it has been wrong about almost every issue relating to foreign policy and defence, certainly throughout my political lifetime.

I am bound to say—this point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames)—that I very much hope that, for the country's sake at least, this latest change in policy is the last that we shall see. However, there is one partisan point that I am entitled to make, and I can put it very simply and in the way that members of the British public would put it. My political point is this: Hurd-Kaufman, Kinnock-Major. That point is understood on both sides of the House.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is listened to with respect not only in the House but in the country and in the Community. The House will judge whether the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), with his customary sheaf of press cuttings in his hand, is the kind of person who will be listened to and command respect in the chancellories of Europe.

I have spent 18 months doing little other than Community business. I cannot claim to know the treaty and its provisions as well as some of my officials do, but at least I am moderately familiar with it. When I take part in European councils, I am surrounded by well-briefed officials who give me every piece of advice that I can possibly need. European councils do not work like that. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, accompanied by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, and sometimes alone, has to sit alone and negotiate alone. To do that, he not only has to command the respect of colleagues—he must also command a very complicated brief.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I will not give way at the moment.

Again, the House and the country will have to judge whether the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), who is noted in the House for his attention to detail and for his choice of and enthusiam for the use of words, would be able to serve the interests of Britain with the same skill and authority as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the union treaty is a challenge as well as an opportunity. However, he rightly warned the House that the argument about the future and whether we are to have a united states of Europe—what we would call federalism, which the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) support—or whether we are to proceed with a Europe based on intergovernmental co-operation as well as co-operation within the treaty of Rome is not yet settled. We have to win that debate.

I was particularly pleased to hear the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members Thanet, South and for Southend, East. If we are to win the debate, we need the support not just of my hon. Friends who have always been committed to the Community but of hon. Friends such as my hon. Friends the Members for Thanet, South and for Southend, East and, I hope, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford too, who are sceptical about the Community. They need to join us in making those intergovernmental pillars work and in making sure that the sort of Europe that we build is not only based on a single structure through the treaty of Rome but enables the Community to develop through intergovernmental co-operation in foreign policy, defence and interior justice to which Conservative Members attach such great importance. Part of the great achievement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is that he has kept the debate open and laid the foundations for us to move forward together and win it.

Like every hon. Member here, I am intensely proud to be a Member of the House, but I am not so proud as to believe that the House is without fault and cannot learn things from our European partners. Nor am I so faint-hearted as to believe that if the House, and especially the Conservative party, unites behind the vision of Europe that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made possible through the negotiations at Maastricht, we cannot win the debate and provide a European union that will enable us to develop under a common European roof with respect for all our traditions and the democratic basis on which we run the House of Commons.

It being Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned, pursuant to Order [13 December].

Debate to be resumed this day.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Attorney-General has most courteously attended this debate late at night. Before he goes, I wish to make a perfectly serious House of Commons point.

I was lucky enough to be called before half-past six. I would not dream of suggesting that Foreign Office lawyers should be pulled out of their beds at this time of the night. However, with respect to the Minister, when a Member of Parliament is fortunate enough to be called by Mr. Speaker at a reasonable hour and asks for a reply on specific legal questions some reply should be forthcoming. My questions about Libya cannot have been exactly unexpected by the Government.

In the hearing of the Attorney-General, I ask for some statement tomorrow on the matter that I raised. If military action is not ruled out, for heaven's sake we must know the legal basis of what we are up to in asking that alleged criminals be extradited from a country with which we have no diplomatic relations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair, but I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard.

Dangerous Buildings

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

2.1 am

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I welcome the opportunity, even at this late hour of the night, or early hour of the morning, to raise my chosen subject for the Adjournment debate. It may seem small beer, sandwiched as it is between the two days of the Maastricht debate, but it is of great significance to many of my constituents and of special priority to one family.

I promised my constituents, Mr. Brierley and his wife, that I would do my utmost to draw attention to an event that will have an everlasting effect on their family life. Regrettably, it has taken the forfeit of a young life, that of seven-year-old Mark Brierley, who plunged to his death in a derelict building which his parents and local residents refer to as a death trap, to create an awareness of the number of dangerous, dilapidated buildings in inner-city areas.

With the decline of manufacturing industry in Manchester, many empty buildings are a temptation to youngsters. They present a challenge to youngsters and are seen as adventure playgrounds. Such buildings also entice vandals, who enter, cause damage and increase the possibility of accidents and further deaths such as that of Mark Brierley.

Those who have knowledge of the inside of the mill in which Mark died tell me of the dangers which are not apparent to youngsters who may venture inside out of curiosity. Vandals have caused fires. There is a great deal of debris scattered around. Floorboards are missing. Holes in the roof allow some light into the upper floor, but the ground floor is in complete darkness, and torchlight or other artificial light is needed to move about in that area.

In this case, the building in question is Victoria mill in Miles Platting, Manchester—a grade 2 listed building, which was purchased privately. Permission was granted by Manchester city council planning department in October 1989 for conversion to residential and commercial use. Unfortunately, that proposal has been left in abeyance, and the mill still stands, structurally sound but in an extremely sorry state for the want of a commitment and support from the people who can bring about the required transformation.

Rumour has it that the owner purchased the property in the hope that Manchester would be awarded the Olympic games and it would be a profitable investment. Regrettably, last time we were not awarded the Olympic games. We may be more successful next time. The other theory is that the owner is a modern philanthropist and that it is some sort of expensive hobby. The person in question buys interesting architectural gems and converts them to pristine condition, to conserve them for posterity.

I do not know whether either theory is correct. All I know is that the collapse of the venture has resulted in a dangerous, unsightly, dilapidated building, which is detrimental to the neighbourhood. I am informed that the owner is spending about £300 a week to try to secure the property, in an attempt to keep it in its present condition.

One of two things can be done with such buildings: refurbish or demolish. A revised scheme is being drawn up by a church-based organisation named "Linking Up". With the aid of city council funding, it has made a study

[Mr. Robert Litherland]

into the re-use of the old mill. I am informed by the planning department that the overall objective is to link the owner with community leaders and private sector finance to provide housing for rent, community facilities, offices and small commercial uses. The viability of such a scheme for such a large site will depend on grant assistance and a housing association to provide the housing element. The commercial section would require a city grant. The scheme proposed is estimated at £12·9 million, and I am aware that it has been presented to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment for consideration and assessment.

It is refreshing to know that the Under-Secretary has visited the area. He knows of the mill, has taken an interest in it and knows exactly what I am talking about. I appreciate his personal interest.

The line of action presented to the Minister is supported by residents in the area, who recognise that the mill could offer an amenity and revitalise the area. While the city council supports in principle, the objective of the Miles Platting Community Development Trust to re-use the Victoria mill, due to the nature of the proposals it is not in a position to fund the bulk of the redevelopment and has little or no control over the grant aid required to ensure success.

However, there are other derelict buildings in my constituency which do not have the potential of Victoria mill. They have gone to rack and ruin, and no one appears to be accepting responsibility. Under the Acts relating to derelict buildings, the owners are responsible for securing their safety—that is, when they are aware or have reasonable grounds to believe that a danger exists on the premises. The onus is on the owner to take the necessary precautions. That can be a continuing and costly activity in the case of large buildings. Regrettably, many of the properties are allowed to deteriorate until they are in a dangerous state and concerned people or organisations draw the attention of the local authority to them.

An order on dangerous building, requiring the owner to carry out the work so as to obviate the danger, or to demolish the buildings or part of it, can be obtained by application to a magistrates court. If the owner fails to comply, the council can undertake the necessary work itself, and under normal and urgent procedure any expense incurred by the authority may be recovered from the owner.

That sounds good in theory, but the practicality is something different. For example, can the owner be located? I can remember, when I was a member of Manchester city council, that we had to deal with many small properties that had missing owners and absentee landlords, all of which hindered local authority modernisation schemes. Some of the absentee landlords were eventually traced to somewhere in Australia.

For dilapidated buildings such as the Victoria mill, the procedure is by requiring the owner to carry out the works of repair or restoration. This procedure is subject to special appeal and enforcement provisions. The owner is permitted to challenge the notice by way of appeal, so this can be a long-drawn-out process, and if the local authority has to do the work because the owner has not complied with the notice, where does the finance come from? There is not the local government finance to undertake such major operations. Manchester city council has difficulty with its own properties. Blocks with deck access, their tenants long gone, still stand there blighting whole areas because there is no money to demolish them.

The father of Mark Brierley is a good, honest and sensible man. I am supporting his endeavours to ensure that no child suffers the fate of his, and no family suffers the trauma of that experience. George Brierley is not bitter, but, like many of us, he would like to see the problem of derelict buildings accorded proper attention. If they cannot be refurbished and are of no architectural merit, they should be demolished, and the local authority should be given the resources to undertake a survey of all these properties, and the financing to take the appropriate action.

On the other hand, if the building is worth refurbishing, a serious scheme can be presented, as in the case of the Victoria mill. The scheme for that will transform a derelict eyesore into the amenity envisaged by Linking-Up Enterprises Ltd., and described by it as a major opportunity for far-reaching change in the economic and social life of east Manchester. The mill is structurally sound. The project is viable and the local community is enthusiastic but, most of all, there is the energy and the will to succeed. Mr. Brierley supports this action, as do his neighbours, the constituents in the area.

In a deprived inner-city area, this scheme encourages community involvement and participation. It moves away from the traditional, commercially led schemes. It talks of community ownership—an ingredient that the Minister has espoused in recent times. I implore him to become involved, and to do something constructive. I want his interest to help to bring about this dream for the people in my area.

I sincerely hope that Mark did not die in vain, and that his sad death will exercise our minds and act as a catalyst so that, one day, this depressing, dilapidated and dangerous building can be transformed into an amenity of which we can all be proud.

2.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) on his success in winning the opportunity to initiate this debate. I only wish that it was not being held in such sad circumstances. Fainter hearts might have fled the Chamber at 2·15 am, but he and I have serious business to do.

I was in Miles Platting only 10 days ago—before I knew that this debate would take place—and I visited the Victoria mill area. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman said that I had been in the area a number of times during recent months. I acknowledge that his constituents are well served by him. I recognise the difficult circumstances that have led to him bringing this subject to the House. I also recognise, as he put it, the everlasting effect of the death of Mark Brierley on his family, not least his father George, and also on the whole community.

I am a southerner, but I have come to know the people of Manchester over recent months. I know that they are courageous people and will undertstand when I say that courage and patience are both qualities that will be needed if we are to make progress. I listened to the detailed points that the hon. Gentleman made, and I should like to

consider them in depth at a more civilised hour. I am sure that I will be in touch with him frequently in coming weeks.

First, I shall deal with the bones of the hon Gentleman's argument about the building. It is a grade 2 listed building, it is a fine example of architecture, but it is seen by some as a danger to the community—a target for crime and vandalism and, especially now, an object of fear. The listing itself does not prevent necessary work being carried out or even the building's demolition. Demolition or work that would alter its character would require consent. If an application for consent to demolish were made, all the relevant circumstances would be taken into account. Demolition of a listed building is regarded as very much of a last resort, and would be unlikely to receive consent if alternatives to retain the building were reasonably available.

It is for the owners or the local authority to carry out any necessary work and to seek consents that may be required. As the hon. Gentleman said, responsibility for the building rests primarily with its owners, and it is for them to do whatever is necessary to render it safe. The local authority—in this case, Manchester city council—also has a role to play, in that it has the power to take action where a building is in such a defective state that it is prejudicial to health, a nuisance or dangerous.

Sections 76 to 78 of the Building Act 1984 enable local authorities to take steps in relation to premises that are in a defective state and are prejudicial to health, a nuisance or dangerous. It is for the local authority to judge whether the use of that power is appropriate in a particular case. I acknowledge the further points that the hon. Gentleman made, and I will consider them.

For those who are not familiar with the area, it is important to set the building in its context. I have spent a good deal of time in the area, and I have come to know it quite well. Victoria mill is situated in Miles Platting, which forms part of east Manchester—or, as I was told shortly after I first began visiting Manchester, "Don't talk about east Manchester, it doesn't exist; talk about the villages and the communities to the east of Manchester." It is a broad area to the east of the city, covering about 3,000 acres and with a resident population of more than 50,000 people in seven local communities.

The area used to contain much of the city's heavy engineering, chemical and textile industries. Victoria mill is a reminder of the scale and the importance of the textile industry to the city. However, it now has large tracts of derelict land and many vacant buildings.

Past attempts to tackle the area's problems have been piecemeal. The worst of the dereliction has been removed, and programmes are taking shape to deal with the rest, but there remains a great deal to be done. The city action team in Manchester and the city council regard east Manchester as a main priority area. The thrust of the regeneration proposals for the area is to consolidate the vacant and derelict land and bring it forward for redevelopment in partnership with private sector owners.

There are proposals to develop major sporting facilities, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Should Manchester be successful in the bid for the 2000 Olympic games, east Manchester will be the focus of the facilities to be provided. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has now agreed to provide £2 million to support detailed studies of the stadium, velodrome and arena. I have been closely involved in this from the start, and I will continue to be so.

The regeneration of east Manchester will be greatly aided by the steering arrangements, focused through the evolving east Manchester partnership, a widely drawn group from the private sector, chaired by Terry Thomas, the managing director of the Co-operative bank.

Partnership with the private sector is likely to strengthen the regeneration efforts in east Manchester, but a further encouraging sign is the growing strength and participation of community organisations. In February, I was privileged to attend, with the Bishop of Manchester, a meeting inaugurating the Miles Platting development trust. There was discussion of the problems facing communities in east Manchester and a commitment to taking positive action. Following that meeting, I was pleased that my Department was able to fund a feasibility study into the future of Victoria mill, and that further talks are being covered by the bishop, with the support of local Church organisations, to enhance community organisations in the inner city.

During my visits to Miles Platting, I have been impressed by the grandeur of Victoria mill. It is a most imposing Venetian-style building. Victoria mill is privately owned. The building, although structurally sound, is badly run down, and in need of complete refurbishment. I know that the owner is eager for the mill to be refurbished and re-used. He is, however, unable to find funds for such works himself. To this end, my Department provided £65,000 of urban programme grant to enable the feasibility study to be carried out by linking up an ecumenical and national organisation. It investigated a mixture of uses which would be both commercially viable and of major benefit to the community.

The preferred option for redevelopment provides for mixed commercial, community and residential uses—possibly with housing association involvement. A scheme of this nature would provide a valuable resource for Miles Platting and east Manchester and assist its regeneration. I know that the owner is actively seeking investors and that the Housing Corporation is considering its priorities for investing in the city.

As with any major scheme, careful planning is vital to ensure that the final scheme is both practical and viable. Where support from various sources is required to ensure that the project meets a mixture of uses, there is a need to ensure that every part is in place—that there is demand from the market for those parts which depend on the private sector and that the community elements will be welcomed. However, the recent tragic accident at the mill has reinforced the need to act urgently in the interest of public safety.

There are various programmes available with which to tackle dilapidated buildings and render them safe for the public. The urban programme makes a significant contribution to the renewal of the inner cities. I am keen to make people realise that the creation of healthy local economies and communities is the key to urban regeneration. The main emphasis should be on sharply targeted and self-sustaining economic and environmental improvements, with a social and community dimension.

The objectives of the urban programme reflect the wider objective of the Government's efforts of urban regeneration. Those in particular which are relevant to this case reflect the need to make the inner cities more

[Mr. Robert Key]

attractive to residents, as also to businesses—by, for example, tackling dereliction, bringing buildings back into use, preparing sites and encouraging development; but also more specifically, and more importantly in human terms, by making inner cities safe and attractive places to live and work in. Together we must fight crime, including vandalism, improve education and community and health care, and develop better facilities for recreation, sport and the arts.

It is envisaged that this kind of self-sustaining regeneration might best be achieved by targeting tightly drawn geographical areas. East Manchester is one of the targeted areas in Manchester.

This year, Manchester city council's urban programme includes support of nearly £2·5 million for schemes in east Manchester, to be used primarily to bring forward large sites for redevelopment, as well as continuation of environmental upgrading and substantial remodelling of Beswick district centre. In the past the urban programme has been used to great effect in supporting housing refurbishment for the large Miles Platting estate, with environmental and security measures. It is likely east Manchester, or part of it, will be the subject of Manchester's bid for city challenge in the coming round. The focus will shift from the Hulme estate to east Manchester. If successful, the concentrated application of resources could make real sustainable impacts on that area —I hope that that will happen.

Derelict land grant is available for the reclamation of land which is so damaged by industrial or other development that it is incapable of beneficial use without treatment. Land in this context includes buildings and structures, factories, mills and chimneys which have become so dilapidated or decayed that they are structurally unsound. The rate of grant for most of the derelict areas in the north-west is 100 per cent. for local authorities and 80 per cent. for the private sector.

In the current financial year, Manchester city council shares an allocation of £2 million with Tameside metropolitan borough council, of which £264,000 has recently been approved by my Department for the demolition and clearance of a dangerous goods shed on a site known as Ardwick east goods yard, in east Manchester. The building is in an unsafe condition and is a hazard to local children who are attracted to play on the site. After clearance, the site will be marketed for commercial and office use. The hon. Gentleman has referred to the fact that many such buildings still exist. I acknowledge that, and we want to find them and will do so together. Where we can help, we shall seek to do so.

Another derelict and unsafe building in greater Manchester which has been demolished with the aid of derelict land grant was Times mill in Rochdale council's area. That was a privately owned four-storey mill which was vacant and vandalised. Because of the visual value of the site arising from the reclamation, a private-sector grant of only £4,000 was all that was required to secure the removal of a dangerous eyesore.

City grant is another mechanism that the Government use for returning derelict sites and buildings to full economic use. The grant is provided to support private-sector capital projects which benefit run-down inner-city areas and which, because of their inner-city location, cannot proceed without assistance.

In the north-west region, my Department has approved eight city grant projects which involve either the refurbishment or conversion of redundant buildings. Grant of £4·6 million has attracteld private sector investment of nearly £15 million towards the regeneration of those sites. We shall continue to assist the Victoria mill project where possible. I cannot offer any funding until we have explored soundly based proposals for the whole scheme, but I have no doubt that they will be forthcoming.

The hon. Gentleman has raised a topic that is important not only to his constituents but in the wider context to enable people to begin to understand what we are trying to do in inner-city regeneration. So far, we have considered bricks and mortar alone but, like the cities that have accepted city challenge, we recognise that, if we are to succeed where perhaps we have failed for too long, we must engage the attention, enthusiasm and commitment of whole communities.

What we are about is improving the quality of life for everybody living in our cities. We want to make our inner cities places where people want to stay and to which those people who have left want to return, not places that people want to get out of as soon as they can. We are beginning to see a dramatic change. Manchester is a good example. Indeed, we can see those dramatic changes at many sites, not only in Manchester and Salford, but in Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and many other places.

At the heart of all this, Government, the private sector and local authorities must all bear in mind the quality of life of the people living in the city. We have learnt a tragic lesson from the hon. Gentleman's constituency—a lesson that will not be lost.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 19 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Monday 13 January at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk (Dioxin Levels)

1. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is now in a position to reveal the latest survey regarding dioxin levels in milk in the Bolsover area; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): I have already published all the results available to date. The results of the further survey—which involves complex and time-consuming testing—will be published as soon as possible.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that on 10 December the National Rivers Authority told me, by letter, that it had taken two samples from the river—above the Coalite plant and below—and that the sample from the river above the plant showed a low level of dioxin, the one below the plant showed considerably higher levels of dioxin and that it is now certain that the dioxin is coming from the Coalite plant? As the Minister has said that the polluter must pay, will he give a guarantee that the polluter, Coalite, will pay compensation to the farmers concerned? Will he also hold a public inquiry so that the matter can be sorted put?

Mr. Gummer: My action in support of those farmers is well known to the hon. Gentleman. I am concerned that they should have all the help that they can get. The tests that we are carrying out are not yet complete. The tests done by the National Rivers Authority are different from those that we are doing. We shall provide all that information to the public so that decisions may be made. The decisions to which the hon. Gentleman refers are largely not for me.

Mr. Colvin: Is my right hon. Friend happy that the monitoring systems in Bolsover are as good as those in my constituency? There are a number of petrochemical plants in my constituency, as well as the Rechem International plant, which disposes of toxic waste, where Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the local district authority carry out extensive monitoring. What additional monitoring does my right hon. Friend's Department carry out to ensure that toxic emissions cannot enter the food chain?

Mr. Gummer: Our survey programmes have been extensive and we have found nothing of a type similar to that which has been found in Derbyshire. We continue to conduct dioxin surveys. My job is to ensure that dioxin does not enter the food chain and we have a full programme of surveys to ensure that that does not happen. It was as a result of those surveys that we pinpointed two and, later, three farms and that is where the detailed tests are being carried out. In fact, we discovered the problem and acted immediately so that there would be no danger to public health. That is the role of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. William Ross: As it appears from the information published to date by the Minister that it is almost impossible to determine the exact source of the dioxin that is causing the problem, what comfort does that provide to farmers? If the source cannot be discovered, how can the polluter be forced to pay? Given that these are insidious and dangerous chemicals that have wide-ranging and far-reaching implications for the food industry, is not it time that the Government thought again about compensation in such circumstances?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should not overstate the position. We have carried out and are carrying out extensive tests throughout the United Kingdom and have found that only three farms are affected. We are conducting detailed trials on those farms. As soon as we have the results of the trials we shall publish them. That is a perfectly reasonable statement of the position. I do not believe that it is helpful to suggest that the problem is widespread or in any way worrying, either for the consumer or for the farming industry as a whole. What I am concerned about is the specific effect on these three farms, which is extremely serious.

Hens

2. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to improve the welfare of laying hens.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): We will seek the adoption of the highest standards practicable for all laying hens when the existing Community legislation is reviewed next year.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government will implement in full the recommendations of the recent Farm Animal Welfare Council report on the welfare of laying hens in colony systems? Bearing in mind the fact that the report laid out only minimum welfare standards, will the Government take note of and act on the recommendations of the minority report issued at the same time?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman has not grasped the fact that any progress that we make on improving animal welfare in Europe has to be on a Europeanwide basis. I am conscious that we want to improve drastically the standards of laying hens, not just in battery cages but in colony and other systems. If we are to be successful, we

must have Europeanwide agreement. If we acted unilaterally, we should end up putting out of business our own egg producers just to be flooded with eggs produced under the very system that we had banned.

Mr. Ron Davies: Should not consumers who are concerned about the welfare implications of intensive laying systems be able to shop accordingly? In the light of the Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), will he guarantee that at European level he will press for a system of mandatory labelling so that eggs are labelled "battery", "barn eggs", "free range" or whatever? Is not that the most effective way of harnessing consumer choice in the cause of improving welfare standards?

Mr. Maclean: Of course. In all areas of food policy we believe in the principle that the consumer should choose and have sufficient information to do so. We are consulting others on systems to ensure that consumers have a proper choice when buying eggs and other foodstuffs. This is an area where extensive work needs to be done to ensure that the consumer is not misled because of the plethora of terms that are applied. I do not want to go on a dictionary-chasing exercise, laying down one word only to find that the marketing men have circumvented it by finding another word.

Beef Exports

3. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the value of beef exports.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): In the first nine months of this year total United Kingdom beef exports amounted to just over 84,000 tonnes worth about £167 million. For the same period last year exports were 78,000 tonnes worth just over £170 million.

Mr. Hague: Does my hon. Friend agree that the continued success of beef exports is not only good news for the industry but is a powerful reminder, after all the scare stories last year, that British beef is among the best in the world? Does he agree that the use of greater marketing expertise could open up still further opportunities for British exporters? Can he tell us whether and how he will be using the new marketing initiative of his Ministry to assist exports in the industry?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend that in the past the weakness when farmers have got together has been the quality of marketing and management that they bring to a project. The aim of the marketing grants is to address any marketing deficiencies and to provide good management, which we are willing to support. We also have an undertaking from the supermarkets and some of the food industry that they will assist in providing managers. That is an essential part of the campaign to ensure that our beef, which is the world's best, finds its way on to tables across the world.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the best beef exported from Britain comes from the less-favoured areas and hill land? Does he agree that hill farmers had a substantial drop in income in recent years? When will he announce an enhanced hill livestock compensatory allowance?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend that beef production is particularly important in the less-favoured areas. He will know that the Scottish Beef Club has had great success in the export market and that the idea of Scottish beef has been extremely successful. We are pursuing discussions on the future of the HLCAs following the autumn review and we shall announce the results as soon as we can.

Dr. David Clark: In view of the excellence of British beef, why is it that major British restaurant chains, which, incidentally make generous donations to the Conservative party, are unable, on the grounds of quantity, quality and consistency, to use a single ounce of British beef in their restaurants, when at the same time 1 million tonnes is rotting in intervention?

Mr. Curry: The reason is that under the general agreement on tariffs and trade beef from other countries, notably Australia, comes into the European Community. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman supports the liberalisation of trade under GATT and that he would not wish to defy the GATT rules. In many cases those imports are available at a cheaper price than within the Community. The answer is to unwind some of the absurdities of the intervention system which mean that far too much money is devoted to financing the depreciation of beef rather than to putting it on the table. We must also try to direct support much more to the specialist producers of high-quality British beef.

Schools Liaison Programmes

4. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what schools liaison programmes his Department promotes which enhance young peoples awareness of agricultural issues.

Mr. Curry: Young people's awareness of agricultural issues is promoted through publicity material, information packs and planned visits to farms.

Mr. Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that information on agricultural issues for school children is important? Will he provide encouragement so that those schemes teach young people, particularly from inner-city areas, that the beauty of rural areas such as parts of my constituency is not necessarily just given by the good Lord, but often is created by man, because of the traditional and excellent pursuits of hunting and shooting?

Mr. Curry: It is important that children are able to find out what happens in the countryside. Three points are important. First, everyone should realise that the countryside is a workplace and not just a recreation place. Secondly, recreation and sport and conservation are allied activities. Thirdly, there is a great heritage in the countryside and we have sought to enhance that, in particular through our environmentally sensitive areas scheme. I have no doubt that that will be an extremely good place for school children to begin. I know that the farmers of Esher would particularly welcome school visits.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that young people show a keen awareness of animal

welfare? They will be greatly perturbed by the way in which his Department is undermining the provisions of my Badgers Act 1991 by issuing licences to more than 600 fox hunts to enable them to dig up badger setts and unleash terriers into them. Will the hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance this afternoon that that practice will stop immediately?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman has got hold of the wrong end of the stick. The dreadful things that he forecasts will not happen. I suggest that he waits for the consultation paper and I think that he will then be reassured.

There is no doubt that it would be to the advantage of school children if they could find out what happens in the countryside. Perhaps they should recognise that the countryside is not just a theme park where everything is nice, woolly and furry, but that real combat occurs between animals.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is worth pointing out to young children that in 1950 it took a man on average industrial wages a week to earn enough to buy his Christmas turkey and that it now takes a person in a similar position just 90 minutes to do so? Is not that a tribute to the massive increase in the productivity of the farming community and to the massive increase in the earning power of the British worker?

Mr. Curry: I am sure that that is absolutely true. I am sure also that, in the light of our education reforms, most children will eventually be able to do that calculation.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister also accept that, in considering agriculture, it is crucial to bear in mind the responsibility of all involved in the food chain, from production to consumption, to ensure that at all times consumers get good, healthy, pure products at the best possible price?

Mr. Curry: That is a self-evident truth. When children go into the countryside and visit farms, they will see that the conditions are completely different from those that their fathers may have seen when they worked on farms during their holidays—that was one of the great traditions of United Kingdom cities. Our aim is to ensure that food is wholesome, of high quality and produced as economically as possible and to ensure that, not only in the United Kingdom but in the export market, people have the benefits of an outstanding product.

MacSharry Proposals

6. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate has been made of the effect on the EC budget of implementation of the MacSharry proposals.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission admits that its proposals would increase the cost of the common agricultural policy to the Community budget.

Mr. Moss: Will my right hon. Friend clarify a puzzle which arose during yesterday's European Community debate? On two separate occasions, when questioned about the cost of implementing some proposals under the Maastricht treaty, the Leader of the Opposition said that the money could be found from the reform of the common agricultural policy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question must relate to Government policy. The hon. Gentleman knows the rules.

Mr. Moss: If the money can be saved from the reform of the common agricultural policy, would not that mean a reduction in income for farmers in my constituency, unemployment and a reduction in the rural economy?

Mr. Gummer: There is no doubt that reform of the common agricultural policy must be carried out in a way which ensures that there is no discrimination against farmers in the United Kingdom. The proposal of the Leader of the Opposition to spend the money that is now spent on British farmers on farmers in southern Europe is something about which every farmer should know—unless the Opposition spokesman will advise him differently and tell the House when he has so advised him.

Mr. Hume: Does the Minister agree that those mainly affected by the MacSharry proposals are the 3 per cent. of farmers across Europe who are large farmers and that small farmers—those with less than 125 acres of cereals, fewer than 90 beef cows or fewer than 40 milk cows—are not affected? When that is added to the fact that rural development is now a major part of the Maastricht treaty and of the MacSharry proposals, is not that a very good thing for rural society?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong and his views are opposed by the farmers unions of every part of the United Kingdom, including such "big" farmers as the crofters in Scotland. All of them say that the MacSharry plans would be devastating for farmers in every part of the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman's views can give comfort only to the farmers outside the United Kingdom on whom the Leader of the Opposition wishes to spend our money.

Mr. Marlow: Would not my right hon. Friend be insulting British farmers if he were to suggest that he should decimate the financial support available to them so that it could be given to M. Delors for use as a slush fund for so-called cohesion—a bribe to the countries of southern Europe? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that if anyone does make such a daft suggestion, that person's name is put loudly and clearly in front of the British farming community?

Mr. Gummer: So far, the only person who has made that suggestion is the Leader of the Opposition. Therefore, I am quite happy to put his name—at least in this context—in front of the general public. The proposals suggested yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition were clearly to ensure that British farmers reduced their already low incomes and that the money be used for development—rural and urban—in the southern parts of the European Community.

Dr. David Clark: Will the Minister explain to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) that the common agricultural policy which he seeks to defend is a grossly inefficient system? As my right hon. Friend pointed out from the Dispatch Box yesterday, only £1 in £3 of agricultural support goes to farmers, which we do not think makes much sense. As the Minister and I agree that the fatal weakness of the MacSharry proposals is that they will increase the cost of the common agricultural policy, thus breaching the budgetary limit, will the Minister give the House a guarantee today that the

Government will use their right of veto on any proposals to breach the budgetary limit? He has those powers; will he use them?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman quoted his right hon. Friend, but he should examine the words again. The right hon. Gentleman said yesterday that

"it must be the major source of the re-orientated finance for the development of cohesion in the Community."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 290.]

That can mean only that the common agricultural policy is to be reformed in such a way as to take money from the United Kingdom and give it for cohesion to countries outside. The Leader of the Opposition would have signed the treaty without the debate at Maastricht—he would have accepted anything that M. Delors put in front of him. He would have lain down and been rolled over and that is why he must never be Prime Minister.

Mr. Marland: Far from taking money away from British farmers, will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind during his negotiations with Mr. MacSharry the inequity in national aids? Food from Britain has only six representatives trying to sell British food in Spain, whereas Food from France—its French equivalent—has 60 representatives trying to sell French food in Spain. Will my right hon. Friend find out what can be done to even up the balance? Far from reducing the amount of money available for selling British produce, will he try to increase it?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has highlighted the fundamental difference. The Government are determined to get rid of arrangements that differentiate against the United Kingdom, whereas the Labour party wishes to increase such differentiation and to pay farmers and others in the southern European states money that will come from the very low incomes of British farmers. That is the difference—the Conservatives support this country.

Veal Crates

7. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the EC regarding the use of veal crates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: A Community directive setting minimum standards for the welfare of veal calves was agreed by majority vote at the October Agriculture Council. In our view this directive does not properly tackle the cruelty of the veal crate and we voted against it. British standards for veal production will not, however, be reduced and consumers can be sure that if they buy British veal it will have been humanely produced.

Mr. Mullin: I welcome the fact that we voted against it, but this is one area in which a stand against the EC would enjoy the support of people of all political persuasions in this country. A ban on the import of veal from countries that produce it by a method banned here would constitute such a stand. Failing that, should we put the grand EC official who is in charge of such policies—Mr. Legras—in a veal crate for a few weeks and see whether he changes his mind after that?

Mr. Maclean: We have made a stand on veal. We held out strongly in the EC to have our standards implemented widely throughout the Community and when it was clear that other nations were not of a similar mind, we voted against the directive. As the hon. Gentleman knows, our mutual friend Mr. Legras does not seem to take kindly to the breaking of Community law or the treaty. We cannot unilaterally break the law in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests, but we can mobilise consumer opinion. No inhumanely produced veal need be eaten in this country if consumers say that they do not want to touch the filthy stuff.

Dame Janet Fookes: I welcome my hon. Friend's robust attitude, but is it correct that it is still possible to export calves which end up in crates that would be illegal in this country?

Mr. Maclean: Yes, that is true. That was the subject of the correspondence from Mr. Legras when the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) tried to introduce his ten-minute Bill. The EC has made it clear that live animal exports and imports are a fundamental tenet of the treaty and that it is not up to any nation unilaterally to seek to restrict that trade.

That is why we shall insist on the toughest possible standards in the Community directive on the transport of animals, so that animals are moved across frontiers or within any country as safely and humanely as possible.

Mr. Morley: The Minister said that British consumers would not want to buy inhumanely produced veal if they had the choice. How do consumers know whether their veal was produced inhumanely abroad or humanely in this country? When will the Minister introduce proposals for proper labelling, so that consumers can choose food products that have been humanely produced? I assure him of our full support for action to stop the hypocrisy of exporting calves for veal production in other countries.

Mr. Maclean: If we are talking about hypocrisy, let me say that it would be hypocrisy to suggest that we have the powers unilaterally to introduce a labelling directive to discriminate against foreign veal. The hon. Gentleman is making the same point that his hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) made. All these matters have to be dealt with on a Europeanwide basis if we are to have a directive. Alternatively, it can be done by individual companies and by retailers. The British Government cannot order people to label inhumanely produced veal, but consumers can demand it, supermarkets can provide the labelling and the restaurant trade can do the same if it is so minded. It is consumer pressure that will bring about a change.

Bloodstock Breeding

8. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet representatives of the bloodstock breeding industry to discuss the state of this sector.

Mr. Curry: I have no plans to meet the horse bloodstock industry, but my noble Friend Lady Trumpington is to attend the annual luncheon of the Thoroughbred Breeders Association on 9 January 1992.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Minister aware that a number of stud farms in my constituency, including two owned by Her Majesty the Queen, and also stud farms in general make a tremendous contribution to the rural economy?

That is valuable at a time when farming is in difficulties. Is he also aware that bloodstock is subject to a far higher rate of VAT than in this country in France or in Ireland? That is an extremely serious problem which is leading to a number of stud owners moving their horses abroad. Will he tell the House what he is doing about that and what discussions he is having with the Treasury?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend will know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury, has taken the lead in the discussions. The Irish rate of VAT is safe because it was in place before the cut-off date in the Community. The French rate of VAT may be challenged and may have to rise. We cannot lower the rate of VAT under Community rules, but we can try to find a way to assist the industry. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury, is conducting discussions with the industry on the basis of a proposal for a flat rate agricultural tax which would replace the 17·5 per cent. VAT. The discussions are close to a conclusion and I understand that my hon. Friend will shortly be writing to the industry to clear up some of the remaining points, which will isolate the relatively few issues to be settled.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Is the Minister aware that feeling within the industry and the related sales industry is that if the VAT gap between this country and Ireland and between this country and France is not narrowed significantly we could lose a considerable part of our breeding industry and our entire sales industry, which are the most prestigious in the world? Although the recent approaches to the Treasury and the manner of their reception have been much appreciated, there is a feeling that little may yet be done to prevent the most serious disruption of breeding and horse sales in this country.

Mr. Curry: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern. He knows that we cannot reduce the VAT rate as a solution, but he also knows that we can take measures that would have a similar effect in helping the industry. A meeting a week ago today between officials and the industry got to grips with some of the remaining problems. As a result of that, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury, will write to the industry shortly. That should clear the way for what may be the final round of discussions which, I hope, can reach an agreement to achieve a measure that is equivalent to a reduction in VAT, within the Community rules which permit it.

Beef

10. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he is next due to meet the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss the beef sector.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister and I are in frequent contact with the president of the National Farmers Union about all aspects of the agriculture industry, including the beef sector.

Mr. Knox: What plans does my hon. Friend have to take up the 20 ecu supplement to the suckler cow premium agreed by the Council of Ministers on 11 December?

Mr. Curry: We are discussing our response to that decision. We voted against it on the ground that it seemed absurd to respond to a crisis in the beef sector simply by throwing yet more money into a system which has not been reformed. As the intervention system remains entirely in place, and as the Community has not decided to try to make savings by reforming the system to make it less attractive, it seemed to us to be the wrong way to tackle the problem. There are structural difficulties and the Council of Ministers has come up with a typical measure—just finding a few extra bob to see whether it will solve the problem. We are discussing the result of that Council with a view to taking our own decision.

Mr. Edwards: Many beef farmers in my constituency of Monmouth are deeply anxious about the impact of the MacSharry proposals. Their farms are generally too large to get the benefits of the MacSharry proposals, but they do not get the benefit of the less-favoured area payments. May I invite the Minister to come to Monmouth to discuss those problems with the farmers there, which will give him the opportunity to assure them that he is seeking to protect their interests?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend has made that point personally to farmers of Monmouth. The hon. Gentleman knows that our doors are always open to members of the farming or fishing communities who have problems and that we are active around the countryside. The hon. Gentleman can be absolutely certain that we agree that the measures proposed by Mr. MacSharry are to the detriment of his farmers and farmers in every corner of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Knapman: Does my hon. Friend accept that the intervention scheme is a uniquely silly way of buying a first-class article, storing it for months on end, and then dumping it back on the market as a third-class article? Will he please reconsider the scheme as soon as possible?

Mr. Curry: As my hon. Friend knows, our fundamental position on reform is that the intervention system must be made a great deal less attractive. It was designed as a safety net, but in many respects it has now become a high wire for farmers. We should move to a system under which the specialist producer can be rewarded for producing an increasingly better carcase and an increasingly improved quality of meat, which will find a world market. If intervention remains, it should be reduced to the original concept of a safety net for use in extreme emergencies.

Food and Drink (Trade Deficit)

11. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom trade deficit in 1991 as it applies to food and drink.

Mr. Gummer: Net imports of food, feed and drink into the United Kingdom were £4·7 billion for the period January to October 1991. This compared with £5·2 billion for the same period in 1990.

Mr. Barnes: Is the Minister aware that since he was first appointed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1985 there has been a £28 billion food deficit, which amounts to £15 million per year or £1,200 per household? Is that not a pretty inept performance?

Mr. Gummer: Very much the same situation has obtained under Ministers of both Governments for the past 20 years—*[Interruption.]* That happens to be a fact,

and it was this Government who set out to do something about it. The hon. Gentleman may like to ask some of his right hon. and hon. Friends what they did about it. They did not even approach the matter. We are dealing with it as well as we can in the circumstances and are beginning to have some real effect. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will ask his constituents to remember that if they want to do something about that matter there is one answer—to buy the best food that there is, and that is British produced.

Mr. Sims: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the drinks industry enjoys a surplus mainly because the value of exports of Scotch whisky far exceeds the value of imports of wine? He will be aware that there are Commission proposals on harmonisation with a zero rate for wine but a substantially higher rate for spirits, which is bound to have an adverse effect on our trade balance. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will press for harmonisation based on alcoholic strength, or at least some mechanism for capping the rate on spirits?

Mr. Gummer: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will not allow the European Community to roll over him—as would be the case if the Leader of the Opposition were in charge of the affairs of this country—but will be fighting hard for Britain's interests, and especially for the interests of the Scotch whisky industry.

Mr. Tony Banks: Why does this country import more champagne per head than any other country? Could it be that the people of this country are storing up champagne to celebrate the wondrous event of the Tories' being smashed at the next election?

Mr. Gummer: That is an entirely new version of the phrase, "champagne socialist". The hon. Gentleman does not set an example to others in the consumption of champagne, as I do not believe that he seeks such a tipple——

Mr. Banks: The Minister is wrong there.

Mr. Gummer: In that case, the hon. Gentleman sets an example and shows that in a free society people can decide what they want to drink. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wants a society in which people are prevented from drinking what they want.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

12. **Sir Michael Shaw:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to include environmental protection features to the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friends and I are currently seeking the views of interested parties on a package of measures designed to enhance environmental aspects of our support for hill farming. We will study the views put to us carefully before drawing final conclusions.

Sir Michael Shaw: Why are the North York moors not included in the 12 proposed environmentally sensitive areas?

Mr. Gummer: Because our statutory advisers did not recommend that they be included. Statutory advisers from the conservation bodies all gave us a list of the areas that they wanted included and, for the most part, we followed those lists in so far as they agreed with one another. The area to which my hon. Friend refers was not considered such a high priority as others. As a result of our decisions, we will now spend five times as much on the environmentally sensitive areas and they will cover three times more of the United Kingdom than previously—more than 12 per cent. of the land area of England. That is a remarkable achievement and I hope that we can build on it in the future.

MacSharry Proposals

13. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the National Farmers Union to discuss the MacSharry proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: I meet representatives of the National Farmers Union regularly to discuss a range of agricultural issues.

Mr. McKay: Does the Minister appreciate that his tenure of office as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is regarded by farmers as disastrous? Does he agree with his Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who said:

"Never have I known a time when farmers were more fearful of the future, and never has that fear been more justified"?

Mr. Gummer: In referring to the MacSharry proposals, my hon. Friend said what was true. I am happy to say that the farmers of the United Kingdom believe in this ministerial team and in the Government, who are fighting for them against the proposals of the European Community. They know that the Labour party, led by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), would lie down and be run over by anything that the Community proposed.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the hill farmers and raspberry farmers in Tayside look on him and his team as the best champions of their interests? They regard the problems as being a result of the structure of the common agricultural policy. How wise we were not to allow the Europeans to extend their competence to other areas. Not only our farmers but everyone else would suffer if we followed the views expressed yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. The European Community's future is best served by those who believe in Europe and in putting forward strongly the position of their countrymen, farmers and those who have interests in the United Kingdom. We must ensure that that balance exists. It was upheld by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Maastricht, but it would have been undermined if the Leader of the Opposition had had anything to do with governing the country.

Intervention Stocks

14. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the current level of intervention stocks in the United Kingdom and the EC.

Mr. Curry: Tables showing the current level of intervention stocks in the United Kingdom and the EC are placed in the Library of the House each month.

Mr. Eadie: The Minister must be aware that under the 1988 reform package we were assured that intervention stocks would disappear, but they are now at record levels, whether for skimmed milk, butter, beef or cereals. Does the Minister agree that that reform package was merely a cosmetic exercise? Does he further agree that we must now have a fundamental review of the 1988 package, as advocated by the Labour party?

Mr. Curry: We must have reform of the CAP and it must be continuous, because the world situation keeps changing, but we must ensure that it is the right reform. It would be dead easy to reform the CAP at our farmers' expense and simply shovel the money across to other farmers, which appears to be the Labour party's proposal, but we do not share that view; we must ensure that it is a balanced proposal and that in the United Kingdom, where we have efficient agriculture, the efficient farmer has a long-term future.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

15. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the English countryside is covered by environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Gummer: Environmentally sensitive areas currently cover 3·7 per cent. of the agricultural land in England. Proposals I announced last month to create 12 new environmentally sensitive areas will more than treble the area covered.

Mr. Harris: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the fact that so many parts of the country are queueing up for ESA status is a tribute to him and to the usefulness of such areas? When will he announce the extension of existing areas? Will he consider sympathetically inclusion of the Penwith moors in that list?

Mr. Gummer: I hope to announce the extensions soon after we resume after Christmas. I thank my hon. Friend for his compliments. The House should note that the system of environmentally sensitive areas, invented in this country by this Government, is now being copied by almost every other country in the European Community. We are leading in the European Community, rather than allowing others to lead us.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. McAllion: Today Scottish trade unions are lobbying the Scottish Office to support full employment policies. Is the Prime Minister aware that in the year since he took office Scottish dole queues have lengthened by a further 28,000, leaving almost 250,000 Scots without work and leaving him with an even worse record than his predecessor, the former first lady of mass unemployment? Does he agree that the price being paid by 2·5 million unemployed this Christmas is too high, and that if a price has to be paid for the economic mess that our country is in, it should be paid in full by himself and his ragbag of right hon. Friends?

The Prime Minister: In the period of this Parliament, unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency has fallen by 39 per cent. But I appreciate that every job lost is a personal tragedy for the person involved. The latest figures show that the increase in unemployment is continuing to slow down. Vacancies at November are now at their highest level for some time. The hon. Gentleman must bear in mind what is happening elsewhere: unemployment has risen in all the Community countries except the Netherlands, in every country of the European Free Trade Association, and in every G7 country except Japan. That is a reflection of the fact that the world economy is slowing down. The hon. Gentleman would address the problem more accurately were he to acknowledge that fact.

Q2. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alton: Now that it is clear that pre-Christmas Sunday trading has simply been a stalking horse for all-year Sunday trading, will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating stores such as House of Fraser, C and A, and Marks and Spencer which have upheld Sunday trading laws and refused to break them? Will he condemn those who have flouted the law simply for commercial gain?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows from previous exchanges in the House, following the appeal to the European Court the present law is unclear and no one is entirely certain what the correct law is at present. As the Attorney-General explained to the House some time ago, the law is not suspended and local authorities, who have the primary duty of enforcing the law, should decide their own course of action. I believe that, under existing provisions, that is the only way to handle the matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As I inadvertently called two hon. Members from the Opposition Benches, I shall call Sir Peter Tapsell.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that today's raising of German interest rates, at a time when the German economy is in a different stage of its economic cycle from that of France, Britain and the United States, illustrates the great difficulties of a single European currency? Is it not extraordinary that the Leader of the Opposition is incapable of understanding that we might frequently find that monetary and interest rate policies were wholly inappropriate to the requirements of this country if we join a single European currency?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and one which is especially relevant when

the divergence in the performance of the economies of Europe is still so great. If and when there is convergence on a whole range of issues, circumstances may change, but we are certainly many years away from that.

Q3. **Mr. Thorne:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thorne: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the news that mortgage lenders are introducing a package to assist people who are in difficulty with their mortgages will be commended throughout the country? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this is not something that has arisen in the past few days, but has been carefully negotiated by the Government over many weeks?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right about that. We have been pursuing proposals for some time. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has had a number of discussions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and others, and he will be announcing a package of measures later this afternoon.

Mr. Kinnock: Is it not clear from today's awful rise in unemployment to more than 2·5 million that the recession is continuing? Since the Government obviously have no idea what to do about it, will the Prime Minister give me an undertaking that he will call a general election very early in the new year?

The Prime Minister: I will give the right hon. Gentleman no such undertaking; nor did he expect me to. What is clear is that the rate of increase in unemployment is beginning to slow, and that is very welcome. The figures are quite clear about that. Also, job vacancies are rising, unit wage costs are falling and productivity is continuing to improve. That is what will make us more competitive and what will create more jobs. It is not a short-term problem; it is a matter that we have to get right to ensure the long-term prosperity of this country.

Mr. Kinnock: I am sorry that the Prime Minister is continuing to run away from the electorate. Since the right hon. Gentleman became Prime Minister, 800,000 jobs have been lost, 80,000 homes have been repossessed, and 45,000 businesses have failed. That is the record of a completely discredited Government—a Government who must go, and quickly.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has no policies whatever to deal with employment. His jobs tax would cost 50,000 jobs; his strikes charter would cost jobs and lose orders; the sweatshop mentality on the Opposition Front Bench would risk losing the 450,000 jobs that have come in; their minimum wage policy would cost hundreds of thousands of jobs; and the abolition, one way or another, of the trade union legislation that we have produced would reintroduce the difficulties that we faced in the 1960s and 1970s. The right hon. Gentleman's policies would reintroduce the levels of unemployment that we saw in the 1930s.

Mr. Kinnock: When the Government came into power unemployment was 1·25 million. At the time of the last general election, unemployment was going down. The right hon. Gentleman has spent the past two years as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister. In that time he has put unemployment up by nearly 1 million, so he can offer us no lectures on the subject of unemployment.

The Prime Minister: I can certainly inform the right hon. Gentleman about matters that he does not seem to understand. Unemployment has risen in virtually every western country in the past decade. Many of the major industrial countries have seen unemployment increase—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a terrible noise to make.

The Prime Minister: It is clear that the Opposition Whips have been active. Unemployment has been rising in the United States, Italy, France and Canada, and in every country of the European Community. Only the right hon. Gentleman believes that we can be insulated from what is happening throughout the world.

Sir Robert Rhodes James: As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Perez de Cuellar, is retiring at the end of the month, would it not be appropriate on behalf of the House and of all parties for my right hon. Friend to record our gratitude and appreciation for a fine international servant?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in that tribute, which I think is the united view of the House. Mr. Perez de Cuellar has had a lengthy and distinguished record as Secretary-General and the House would wish to record its appreciation of his activities and those of his personal representative in securing the release of so many hostages.

Q4. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: The Prime Minister approves of the obscene pay rises and profits made by the privatised monopolies. Does he also approve of the scandalous racketeering by the gas, electricity and British Telecom undertakings in imposing huge standing charges, which often amount to more than 50 per cent. of the bill for the most vulnerable people in our society and are causing millions of pensioners and poor people to face a cold and miserable Christmas? Does he have any compassion at all? Will he take steps to abolish standing charges or is he the Scrooge of the 1990s?

The Prime Minister: I see that the Christmas spirit has descended upon the hon. Gentleman a little early. Standing charges have often been discussed in the House. The difficulty is that their abolition would have a direct relationship to an increase in unit costs, which would bear most heavily on many of the people who are most in need. Therefore, it is not a way to help people who are particularly in need. Many would suffer from that change.

Mr. Hill: Does my right hon. Friend accept that practically everyone in the House welcomes his initiative on repossessions, no matter what political claptrap we may hear later? The main problem is the dead hand of local authorities, which keep tens of thousands of properties empty. Is it not time for an initiative to make local

authorities hand over their property to housing associations, and could regional ombudsman be set up for that purpose?

The Prime Minister: In a few moments my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will set out our detailed proposals to deal with the problem of repossessions. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall not trail that in advance. My hon. Friend's point about local authorities in terms of voids and, often, delays in letting is a genuine problem. Performance is patchy in different parts of the country. In many inner-city areas, typically though not exclusively run by Labour councils, the policies followed mean that many properties are left empty unnecessarily when many people could safely live in them.

Q5. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Michael: On the day when the Prime Minister's unemployment figures have gone over 2·5 million, will he consider the training and employment needs of adults with learning difficulties, and people over 19 with mental handicaps whom he and his Government have abandoned? Will he consider in particular the training workshop recycling products in my constituency, Track 2000 in Splott, whose income was ended as a result of his cuts in employment training, where the trainers, who are on the dole, and the trainees, who do not get a training allowance, are coming in voluntarily? People are still being referred to the centre by social services because there is nowhere else for them to go. What does the Prime Minister propose to do about that?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman were genuinely concerned about employment and training, he would be prepared to condemn the Trades Union Congress boycott of employment action, youth training, and training and enterprise councils, but neither he nor his party has done so. In the coming year, about 1 million people will be helped through employment and training programmes to get back to work. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are spending on training and enterprise two and a half times as much in real terms as the last Labour Government. When they left office, they were training 6,000 people a year. This year, we shall be training 260,000.

Mr. Hayward: Has my right hon. Friend had time to notice this week substantial orders from abroad for British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce and Govan Shipbuilders? Is it not churlish that Labour Members have not welcomed any of those orders?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I welcome the substantial orders that have been received and I was pleased to see that in the past few days a number of them have come here. The special order for Govan will be particularly welcome. It is a shame that Opposition Members utterly neglect to welcome the successes of this country and take every opportunity to run them down as well as the prospects of the country.

Q6. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Patchett: What single word would the Prime Minister use to describe his Chancellor of the Exchequer?

The Prime Minister: He is a very good Chancellor.

Housing Repossessions

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

Over the past few weeks my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Secretary of State for Social Security, the Minister for Housing and Planning, the Minister of State for Social Security and I have had a series of meetings with representatives of the Council of Mortgage Lenders to discuss the problem of mortgage arrears and repossessions. I wish to pay tribute to the lenders and insurers for the helpful and constructive approach that they have adopted throughout these discussions. We all recognise the hardship that repossessions can lead to for individuals and families, but mortgage lenders have assured us that some of the figures that have been suggested, particularly in recent days, for the level of mortgage repossessions this year and next are greatly exaggerated.

The lending institutions have already agreed to participate in the scheme announced in November by the Minister for Housing and Planning to make empty properties which have already been possessed available to housing associations to house the homeless. We wanted in addition to take action to keep in their homes borrowers who are facing difficulties in keeping up their mortgage payments. Therefore, I am able to announce to the House a number of measures designed to reduce substantially the level of repossessions over the next year.

The first duty of lenders is, of course, to their investors, but they are also concerned about the position of borrowers, especially those in difficulties. In our discussions this week, lenders have confirmed to me that they do not seek to take possession where borrowers have suffered a significant reduction in income but are making a reasonable regular payment. Borrowers will, of course, remain responsible for their debts.

A substantial proportion of repossessions do not result from legal action by the lender. Lenders have assured me that they wish to encourage borrowers to stay in their own homes and that they will continue to increase the counselling and advice that they offer to borrowers in difficulties.

The Government already make generous provision—over £600 million this year—for mortgage interest payments for people on income support. The lenders have argued that in many cases this money is being diverted for other purposes, resulting in unnecessary repossessions. The Department of Social Security is already introducing new arrangements to identify arrears cases and to make payments direct to the lender. The Government have now agreed to introduce legislation after the recess to make direct payment to lenders the norm. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be making a further statement on that subject later today. In response, lenders have confirmed that they will not take possession in cases where mortgage interest payments are covered by income support.

There will, however, be cases where occupiers are not on income support but nevertheless face serious problems. Following our discussions this week, the largest lenders have confirmed that they are prepared in case of need to provide funding on concessional terms to help such borrowers as far as possible to remain in their homes.

In such cases, the homes would either be sold to housing associations or taken into ownership by the lender. The borrower would remain in occupation as a tenant, or as part-owner, part-tenant. Individual lenders have undertaken to announce details of such schemes where they have not already done so and insurers have expressed their support. More than £¾ billion has already been committed for that purpose during the next year by lenders responsible for 60 per cent. of total mortgage lending. The lenders' expectation is that the total figure could be around £1 billion, if the need is there.

The Government and the lenders will introduce those new measures as quickly as possible. In the meantime, lenders will continue to avoid repossessions wherever possible.

The mortgage lenders believe that the new measures announced today, together with the actions that they have already taken, will lead to a reducing trend in repossessions during 1992. All lenders are looking for an early and substantial reduction in repossessions. They have estimated that the measures that I have described should prevent about 40,000 repossessions next year.

But I recognise that there is a wider concern about the depressed state of the housing market, which has consequences for home owners in general and for the wider economy. I therefore have one further announcement to make.

In his 1990 Budget, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that stamp duty on securities would be abolished late in 1991-92 to coincide with the introduction in the stock exchange of the system of paperless trading known as TAURUS—the transfer and automated registration of uncertified stock.

The stock exchange announced recently that TAURUS will not now be ready before April 1993. The abolition of stamp duty on securities will consequently also be delayed at least until then. That will result in a public sector borrowing requirement saving of £1 billion compared with the position shown in this year's medium-term financial strategy.

I have decided to use a portion of that additional revenue to help encourage and facilitate transactions in the housing market. I am therefore lifting the burden of stamp duty from the great bulk of house purchases for a period of eight months from midnight tonight.

Stamp duty is currently charged at 1 per cent. on the full price of land and buildings costing more than £30,000. I intend to raise that threshold to £250,000 for documents executed from tomorrow, until 19 August 1992—after which it will revert to £30,000. Stamp duty at the current rate of 1 per cent. will still be charged on purchases of more than £250,000.

For the next eight months, that will mean that no stamp duty will be payable on 90 per cent. of private home purchases. The consequent saving on an average-priced house will be a little over £600. The cost to the Exchequer will be about £110 million in this financial year and about £310 million in 1992-93.

A short Bill will be introduced early in the new year to give effect to that measure. Until the passing of the necessary resolution, people who need to get their documents stamped will be charged duty on the basis of the present £30,000 threshold. But legislation will provide

that the Inland Revenue will refund any duty paid in excess of what will be due under the proposed £250,000 threshold. Further details will be set out in an Inland Revenue press release to be issued today.

The measures that I have announced today and the schemes that the lending institutions are putting together will contribute to a decisive fall in the level of mortgage repossessions. They will also help to stimulate activity in the housing market more generally, benefiting home buyers and home owners throughout the country. I hope that they will be warmly welcome by the House.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that the Government's handling of the matter has been typically irresponsible, shifty and dishonest? Does he recall that when, as long ago as 1986, the present Prime Minister showed his true colours by cutting mortgage interest support paid to those who lose their jobs, bodies such as the National Consumer Council, the Government's own Social Security Advisory Committee, and many right hon. and hon. Members warned of the dire consequences for those on the lowest incomes, who would be forced deeper and deeper into debt? Consequently, the Prime Minister, in his caring way, described those forebodings as "overcooked".

When, two days ago, the Chancellor heard the Prime Minister tell my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that the Building Societies Association had been consulted about the changes, did he remember that, when consulted, the BSA said that it totally opposed them?

Does the Chancellor recall that, as the present recession deepened, the Prime Minister—then Chancellor of the Exchequer—was pressed during Treasury questions to take action to stem the flood of repossessions, which by then was affecting a far wider swathe of the community, with hundreds of thousands in arrears? The right hon. Gentleman dismissed such action by saying that

"only a relatively small number of borrowers are in difficulty."—*[Official Report,* 15 March 1990; Vol. 169, c.655.]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer continued to pay so little heed that as late as June this year he told David Frost that the "vague stirrings" of recovery that he detected would "begin in certain sectors—probably in the housing market." Even when the president of the House Builders Federation wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer saying that there was no foundation for that assertion, the right hon. Gentleman continued to repeat it.

Will the Chancellor say whether the Government, whose policies on benefits and interest rates—which were defended so felicitously by the Prime Minister with the words,

"If it isn't hurting, it isn't working"—

led to the present crisis, take any of the blame?

From the Chancellor's statement, it seems almost that the Government's only contribution is to find a scapegoat for the problem and to seek credit for the solution. Does the Chancellor acknowledge that our spokespeople have been holding discussions with building societies and the Council of Mortgage Lenders—not just in recent weeks, but for months—and submitted a package that contained some elements of the proposals that the Chancellor outlined today? If the Government had paid heed, it would have saved the homes of thousands and thousands of families for whom it is now too late.

Is it not the case that, although the stamp duty measures will, as the Chancellor said, ease the housing market, they will do absolutely nothing to assist those people already in danger of losing their homes? Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Government have made no net contribution to that scheme—bearing in mind the savings that the Government will make on mortgage interest; bed-and-breakfast costs for the homeless, which I understand are currently running at £1 billion; and, as the Chancellor said, because the postponement of TAURUS will only in a certain proportion be committed to the scheme? How many more families could have been helped if the Government had been prepared to commit even all the savings from TAURUS?

If we contrast the Government's coyness in slipping out a press statement three days ago which revealed cuts in real terms in the provision of public sector house-building next year with the Chancellor's willingness to come to the House to make a statement on a scheme to which the Government are contributing so little the day before the House adjourns for Christmas, the concern that the Chancellor claims to feel can be described in one word —humbug.

Mr. Lamont: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) did not feel able to welcome the substantial measures that I announced. Her only question is, "What are you contributing?" She is not interested in whether the measures work. I should have thought that a contribution of more than £400 million would be regarded as substantial by anyone with a responsible attitude to finance—if not by the Labour party.

The measures that I announced stand to reduce the number of repossessions by 40,000. They are currently running at an annual rate of 80,000. That is a substantial reduction and the hon. Lady should have had the grace and the good manners to welcome it. *[Interruption.]* I hear the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) mentioning the figure of 200,000. Let me tell him that the Council of Mortgage Lenders has told me specifically how disturbed it is by the alarmist talk that the Opposition are putting about in regard to the number of mortgage repossessions. The council specifically distanced itself from the figures quoted by the hon. Member for Dagenham.

I might add that the council also told me that it did not believe that the income support measures taken in 1986 had caused the repossessions. The council said that, provided that people were having half their interest paid by income support, they would not have their houses repossessed on that account. The hon. Lady's allegation is entirely unfounded.

The hon. Lady seems to think that the Government should simply contribute more money. What about Beckett's law? I thought that Labour had only two public spending commitments. That is what the hon. Lady is always telling us, yet, over the past week, we have been told repeatedly in radio broadcasts that Labour want to put in more money. The truth is that it would have done so ineffectively and would not have produced the results that our package will produce.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must bear in mind the fact that we have another statement after this one and then a business statement; moreover, more than 60 right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in the important debate

[Mr. Speaker]

that follows. I shall allow questions to the Chancellor to continue until 4 o'clock, but then we shall proceed to the next statement.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend's announcement constitutes one of the most cheering pieces of news that home owners have heard for a long time. Has he ever seen such a miserable, sour lot of sick parrots as those on the Opposition Front Bench?

Mr. Lamont: As always, my hon. Friend is quite right. The Opposition thrive on bad news: they wish for nothing but bad news. As ever, they will be disappointed.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): We welcome the package, which contains many suggestions made by my right hon. and hon. Friends. It will cost lenders relatively little net and will cost the taxpayer hardly anything net.

Will the Chancellor examine the stamp duty proposal? For an amount that will not have a very decisive impact on the housing market—which may still be in a rather sluggish condition when stamp duty is reimposed next August—he could have extended housing benefit to mortgage payers on very low incomes and given additional help to people who are now in a very difficult position.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving the measures a broad welcome, but I am somewhat puzzled about the fact that he feels aggrieved on the ground that—as he put it—the measures cost both lenders and the Government very little. The fact that we were able to reach such an arrangement, which will substantially reduce the number of repossessions, strikes me as a tribute to the package.

Of course, I understand what the hon. Gentleman said about housing benefit, but the measure that he suggests would involve substantial public expenditure and I do not feel that we could accommodate it in the present fiscal circumstances. Moreover, such a measure would have to be permanent: the money could not be clawed back following the recovery of the housing market.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that today's carefully targeted statement will have a double benefit? First, it will achieve the common-sense solution of keeping borrowers in their own homes; secondly, because of the close relationship between the state of the housing market and consumer confidence, it will have a beneficial effect on the economy.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to say that this is a sensible, well-targeted measure. As I stressed, it has been made possible by the deferral of TAURUS. It is being achieved without prejudicing the fiscal position and should help to increase turnover and get the housing market moving again. Many people in the industry have asked for a reduction in stamp duty. They believe that it will have an effect.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The very awkward position that arises as a result of repossessions has been caused primarily by the recession, which has increased unemployment, reduced incomes in some cases, and reduced the value of the property. The Government have energetically tried to help one element of the population hit by the recession. Why have they selected this element for assistance? Many other people have been hit by the recession. What do the Government intend to do for people the value of whose investments has gone down? House owners should know, as other investors know, that investments can go down in value as well as up. Is it not strange that the Government should give special assistance to house owners? Has not that been primarily because the people worst affected live in the south-east of England?

Mr. Lamont: I believe that the measures that have been announced—to try to bring forward transactions in the housing market and to stimulate the housing market—are in everybody's interest. They are in the interests of those who are in danger of their homes being repossessed. They are also in the interests of the housing market and the wider economy. I think that they will be welcomed by borrowers, lenders and everybody in the country.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Can the Chancellor assure me that the people of Northern Ireland will benefit from these measures at the very same time as people in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lamont: The answer to that question is yes.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is the Chancellor aware that the stamp duty measure is a surprising Finance Bill measure which will do perhaps a little to sell a few houses, but will not do much for those whose homes are being repossessed? That is the problem that the Chancellor has to face over this Finance Bill measure. Is he also aware that a number of building societies have insurance policies that come into force only when a property is sold? If they come into force only when properties are sold, they have an incentive to sell the property to recover the value. What does he have to say about that?

Mr. Lamont: This is a two-part package. It contains, first, the measures that we have been able to agree with the lending institutions, which both they and I believe will have a dramatic impact. Secondly, there is the income support element which in itself, by means of the legislation that we are implementing, the lending institutions believe will lead to a substantial reduction in repossessions. I have already explained that, because of what has happened, the stamp duty measure has been made possible without endangering the fiscal position and makes it possible to postpone the abolition of stamp duty on securities. None the less, the measure will help to stimulate the housing market and to bring forward transactions. For that reason, it should be welcomed by the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely disgraceful for Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen to talk about 200,000 repossessions next year? Does he also agree that it is churlish of the Opposition not to recognise that the measures that he has introduced will halve repossessions next year from 80,000 to 40,000? Is not that something that the Opposition should welcome, instead of being party-minded about it?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right, but he should not underestimate the irresponsibility of the Labour party. Apart from having talked about 200,000 repossessions, on other occasions the Labour party has talked about 300,000 repossessions. Both figures bear no relationship to reality.

The Labour party has also put forward an absolutely cloud-cuckoo-land solution to the problem. It says that there should be a six-month moratorium on repossessions —something which is totally impossible to negotiate and totally irresponsible and which has rightly been described by one authority as a pure L..id Blyton story.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that, compared with last year's figure, there has been a 25 per cent. increase in repossession warrants during the first nine months of this year in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney? Is he also aware that, according to discussions that I have held locally, it does not appear that building societies often force the pace when it comes to repossessions; it is forced by many of those who have offered second mortgages on properties. Will the Chancellor's statement and the deal that he arranged do anything to prevent those who are forcing the pace on second mortgages from causing many of the repossessions?

Mr. Lamont: I note what the hon. Gentleman said. Since he has such a great problem in his constituency, I am sure that what I have announced will be welcomed there, even if its Member of Parliament does not have the grace to do so. The hon. Gentleman asked whether it will help in cases of second mortgages. The answer is yes. Some of the schemes of individual societies will help in cases of a second mortgage that may have affected a business or a family. I must stress that the building societies and other lending institutions have put forward not just one scheme but many schemes, tailored to the problems facing their borrowers. Some of the schemes will enable people to become tenants and later to revert to being owner-occupiers again. That is a welcome characteristic of some of the schemes.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will my right hon. Friend accept the grateful thanks of those of us who have in our constituencies one or two of the 2 per cent. of people who find themselves in difficulties? Of course, 98 per cent. of those buying their homes do not have a problem. Will my right hon. Friend take an interest in the activities of fringe banks, many of which have lent unreasonable sums? In my constituency, someone with a bungalow worth £150,000 was lent almost half a million pounds by a fringe bank. That is thoroughly irresponsible and the cost should not be picked up by the taxpayer. Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the building societies the possibility of spreading mortgages over longer periods? I understand that in Japan it is commonplace for mortgages to be spread over 60 years or more. Could that not be adopted here?

Mr. Lamont: I note what my hon. Friend said. She is right to put the problem in perspective, as the building society chiefs have been anxious to do when they talk to us. As my hon. Friend said, only 0·5 per cent. of all properties are repossessed and only 2 per cent. of mortgages are in serious arrears. The problem must be kept firmly in perspective.

My hon. Friend talked of the problem in her constituency where she said that there has been lending by institutions which she regards as irresponsible and excessive. The prudential requirements on building societies for riskier loans have been tightened up and they are obliged to make greater provision for such loans in future. Therefore, some measures have been taken to deal with the problem worrying my hon. Friend.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Is not this an unfortunate day for the Government, since the Scottish Office has issued its tenants charter, which says:

"Owning your home means that you have full control over your own housing."?

That is manifestly untrue when the Government make such a mess of the economy and render people unemployed. Nevertheless, we welcome any package that produces a solution to the problem facing 40,000 families. However, the other 40,000 families are not covered. What will the Chancellor do about them—see them thrown in the street?

Mr. Lamont: I am moderately grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his half-welcome. It is the Government's policy to encourage ownership and I stressed in answer to another hon. Member that many of the schemes that will take homes into tenancy for the time being will allow people to revert to being owner-occupiers. Many of those whose homes are repossessed face losing all ownership of the property, but such schemes will enable some people to continue to own part of the same property or another property. So there is some flexibility built into the schemes. We would expect that following these measures the level of repossessions will decline. I hope that the remaining 40,000 will be affected as the economy recovers next year.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, but does he agree that one reason for the depressed state of the property market is the way in which we buy and sell properties in England and Wales? "Subject to contract" is meaningless. It allows gazumping and "gazundering". The system is discredited. Is not it time that we adopted the Scottish system of property transactions and allowed our people to honour the obligations that they enter into?

Mr. Lamont: Personally, I have always admired the Scottish system—but then I tend to admire everything Scottish. I fear that this is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor rather than me, but I am sure that he will note my hon. Friend's remarks.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): The right hon. Gentleman said in his opening remarks that borrowers would be able to become either part-tenants or full tenants of their houses. Will they be entitled to claim housing benefit during the period when they are part or full tenants? If the answer is yes, will the right hon. Gentleman announce how much that will cost and whether that money will be refunded to local authorities so that they are not expected to meet the cost out of current funds?

Mr. Lamont: Those who become tenants will qualify for housing benefit although, as the hon. lady knows, housing benefit is an income-related benefit. We expect the cost of the increase to be about £50 million a year.

Mr. Speaker: Further statement—Mr. Secretary Newton.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take points of order later.

Mr. Ashton: This is a genuine point of order about the Chancellor.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not take points of order in the middle of statements.

Mr. Ashton: I want an answer from the Chancellor and he is leaving the Chamber now.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has been here a long time. He knows that points of order are not taken until after statements.

Mortgages (Income Support Payments)

4 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I wish to make a statement about the proposed revision in the arrangements for paying income support in respect of mortgage interest. This will take place in two stages.

First, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People announced on 5 November, we have already initiated action to make more effective the existing provisions which enable direct payments to the lender to be made in cases where an adjudication officer judges it to be in the borrowers' best interests, which is generally interpreted as covering cases where there are arrears of at least a month. The carrying through of that action, which begins next month, will now be accelerated with the aim of identifying by April all existing arrears cases on income support, with a view to adjudication officers taking appropriate decisions on implementing direct payment in those cases.

Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his statment just now, we intend to bring before Parliament when it reassembles after the forthcoming recess a Bill to provide for direct payment to become the norm for income support mortgage interest payments to qualifying lenders should the lenders wish. That will apply whether or not there are arrears, from the time at which income support payments meet the full eligible interest—after the claim has continued for 16 weeks. "Qualifying lenders" will be defined for this purpose to cover building societies, banks, or local authorities, but not private individuals who may have lent money for home purchase. It is hoped, subject to the passage of the Bill, to implement this new system from April 1992.

The administrative cost of introducing these arrangements, including the accelerated identification of arrears cases over the next three months, is estimated to be some £20 million over the next year, of which the Council of Mortgage Lenders expects to meet about £10 million. The Bill will include appropriate provision for that.

Those proposals form an important ingredient in the range of measures described in my right hon. Friend's wider statement earlier and, I believe, will correspondingly be welcomed by borrowers and lenders alike.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): The Secretary of State has announced that Department of Social Security mortgage interest payments will be paid direct to building societies. We support that—we have always done so—and we will not oppose the Bill.

Is the Secretary of State aware that the person who originally blocked payments, and who is thus responsible for thousands of repossessions which would otherwise have been averted, is the Prime Minister? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, when the Prime Minister was the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled, he said in the House on 16 December 1986:

"claimants could face the prospect of having their payments made direct . . . That would be a tighter regime than we want since we believe that claimants should generally be responsible themselves for their dealings with their lenders and for their mortgage interest repayments."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1131.]

That is what the Prime Minister said, so when will he have the grace to apologise to the 100,000 families who have been repossessed this year and to say that he was wrong to introduce the 16-week disqualification rule in the first place, that he was wrong to rule out direct payments since 1986 and that he was wrong to dismiss Opposition predictions at the time that it would lead to widespread evictions and homelessness?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the only reason why so many families have failed to pass on their mortgage interest payments to the mortgage lenders is that they cannot get by on income support, which, for a single person over 25, is only £39·65 a week? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that, if he were unemployed and had no other resources, he could live on that for months and years on end? If he doubts it, why is he today forcing hundreds of thousands of others to do so?

If the right hon. Gentleman is now going to require direct payments, will he also increase the pitifully low levels of income support to realistic levels on which people can manage, especially as the Government will be saving tens of millions of pounds from this deal? Why, if the right hon. Gentleman is serious about stopping further repossessions, has he still not announced that he is abolishing the 16-week disqualification rule which still penalises more than a third of all those receiving mortgage interest payments?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, contrary to what the Prime Minister said at the Dispatch Box two days ago, and contrary to what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said a few minutes ago, the building societies opposed the 16-week disqualification rule from the outset? Is he aware that the Building Societies Association issued a statement in 1986 which said:

"Building societies regret that the government has decided to limit assistance which unemployed owner-occupiers receive through supplementary benefit."

If the building societies opposed it then and oppose it now, why will he not repeal it?

Finally, what is the total saving to the Government from today's deal? Is it not shameless of the Government that their contribution to a repossession crisis that they and especially the Prime Minister have created is to offer no new money and, indeed, to make substantial savings out of other people's misery? Why is the right hon. Gentleman offering no new aid from those savings to the 100,000 families who have already been evicted this year?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that today's deal is far too little, far too late? It is far too late because the Government were fully warned five years ago, and it is far too little because, whether it assists 7,000 families or, as the Government more dubiously claim, 40,000 families, it is still far less than the likely 150,000 to 200,000 repossession victims of this Government next year.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful for what the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said at the outset of his questions about his willingness to support the proposed legislation. Beyond that, there is not very much agreement between us.

There is no question of direct payments having been blocked. The arrangements for direct payments in arrears cases have existed for many years. They are being strengthened at the moment. What we have thought it right to do in the context of the willingness of the building societies and banks to negotiate the very favourable package of measures announced today is to move towards automatic direct payments as part of an overall deal which is in the interests of borrowers, lenders and taxpayers as a whole.

As for income support rates, it is barely two months since I announced a huge uprating of benefits which will increase them all by 7 per cent. next April, and after a number of years in which they have been persistently increased for many groups of claimants, including not least the families with children to whom the hon. Gentleman referred.

On the 16-week rule, the hon. Gentleman quoted very selectively from the Building Societies Association's 1986 statement. Of course it did not welcome the proposal——

Mr. Meacher: Ah.

Mr. Newton: There has never been any dispute about that.

Its statement went on to say:

"Societies will do all they can to help people where benefit is restricted and there is no reason to expect that people will lose their homes as a result."

That was the case then and has been so ever since. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer assured the House a few moments ago, we have been told by the Council of Mortgage Lenders that it remains the case now.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Again, I will allow 15 minutes of questions from Back-Bench Members on the statement. At 4.25 pm, we shall move on to the business statement.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that not only first mortgages but second, third and fourth mortgages, hire purchase catalogue debts and other loans and debts, too, cause the problem? Many of those do not qualify for assistance through social security, and some are granted after the claimant goes on to social security. Is it not time that we insisted that all secondary lenders take into account the overall commitments of the borrower, and that they should say no rather more frequently?

Mr. Newton: Many lenders may well have drawn that conclusion from the experience that we have all shared in recent months. I have no doubt that they will take note of my hon. Friend's words.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Is not this proposal rather inadequate and late? Should not the Government shoulder the financial responsibility for rescuing people who are being dispossessed, and spread that burden of costs throughout society, by means of the tax system? Surely it cannot be right to ask investors in building societies—who received a passing mention from the Chancellor—to carry the burden of the cost of this rescue attempt. Many of them are pensioners with small savings. Are not those the very people whom we are constantly being asked to remember in the battle against inflation? We are told that their savings have been eroded. Why should we erode their savings further by making such people shoulder a burden which is really the responsibility of the whole community and of the Government?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman makes two points. The whole package—the understanding outlined by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and myself—exemplifies a good co-operative arrangement between the Government and the private sector institutions involved to

[Mr. Newton]

tackle the problem. One of the reasons for it is that investors in buidling societies stand to gain considerably from the arrangements. The building societies and other lenders recognise that the measures will have beneficial effects on the housing market—for example, on the volume of property that might otherwise have been repossessed.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Does my right hon. Friend not agree that it is a dreadful slap in the face for most people on income support to suggest that the gap between the amount of mortgage relief allowed and the amount received by lenders is a reflection of a dreadful inability to pay—especially as the vast majority of people on income support do manage on their benefit? Does my hon. Friend agree that the measures announced in his statement will prevent up to 40,000 repossessions next year by making sure that funds go directly to the lenders, and will ensure that income support funds are properly spent on those who are truly in need?

Mr. Newton: Yes, there is much force in everything that my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Secretary of State accept that, as has been said, we give the package an unreserved welcome? None the less, will he give us an undertaking to consider the impact of the change on the level of income support, as there are now several direct debit benefits—six or seven, I believe? The long-term effects should be considered. It is not clear exactly who is eligible for the package. Does anyone having trouble with mortgage costs have the right to opt into the package?

Mr. Newton: Not quite in the way that the hon. Gentleman puts it. Under the proposed Bill, qualifying lenders will be able to opt for direct payment where income support is in place. The arrangements that we shall implement over the next few months involve a requirement for people on income support paying mortgage interest to give the Department—the Benefits Agency—verification of the interest being paid. Their consent will be sought to inform the building society so that direct payment arrangements can be put into effect. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point.

On the first point, about direct debit, most building society arrangements operate by standing order rather than by direct debit, which is not quite the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Although it is clear that unemployment has its part to play in the number of repossessions, is it not true that a substantial proportion of repossessions stem from the break-up of marriages and from other domestic problems? Will my right hon. Friend assure me that his package today will be of considerable assistance to families in which the principal wage earner has walked out?

Mr. Newton: Yes, I think I can. The range of circumstances that lead to people being in difficulty is wide. One of the encouraging features of our talks with the building societies over the past few weeks is that, apart from their specific undertakings in relation to cases in which income support is being paid, it is clear that they really mean their words about improving counselling services and generally trying to find new ways in which to help those in difficulty, whether they are on income support or not.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): How many items can now be taken out of somebody's benefit before he gets some money to live on? Given that 255,000 families —the equivalent of a city the size of Coventry—are more than six months in arrears with their mortgage interest payments, should we not have heard from the Secretary of State today an announcement of the restoration of full mortgage payments immediately, and not after four months, to somebody who is on benefit, and an amnesty, or halt, on repossessions, instead of Elastoplast politics which are timed so nakedly for the election schedule?

Mr. Newton: The last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, as I have said several times, bears no relation to reality. Building societies simply do not take action to repossess people who have been paying half the mortgage interest for four months unless there are other relevant circumstances, such as the fact that they were already in large arrears before they went on to income support.

On the other point, I had the uneasy feeling that I had missed something that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) had asked me about direct debits—direct deductions. It was his use of the phrase "direct debits" that put me off course. Those are in a different category from the deductions to which the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) referred, which are for fuel debts, rent debts and the like, and which arise as deductions from regular weekly payments of benefit. My statement concerns a specific additional payment directed to a specific purpose—the payment of mortgage interest. Different considerations therefore apply.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend will know that the problem is far more serious in certain parts of the country. Will he ask the Benefits Agency to show greater flexibility on the opening hours of offices, and to consider the temporary redeployment of staff? Many people will need face-to-face interviews rather than telephone calls on the new arrangements.

Mr. Newton: Yes. I will certainly draw the attention of the chief executive of the Benefits Agency to my hon. Friend's remarks. The chief executive's remit very much includes developing Benefits Agency services to be more flexible in responding to the needs of local communities.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is it not a fact that, in the housing boom of the mid-1980s, many young couples were encouraged to take out endowment mortgages from insurance companies, which the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not mention this afternoon? What happens if the lender does not volunteer to come into the scheme? How many couples are likely to be affected by that?

Mr. Newton: The Council of Mortgage Lenders speaks for the vast majority of the lenders whom the hon. Gentleman has in mind. I have the list, but I will not attempt to read it out. Nobody can speak for everyone who may under any circumstances lend money that may be associated with house purchase. The spirit of our discussions and the approach that has been adopted by the very large lenders, who account for a huge majority of

those in the housing market, suggests that our proposals will have a considerable effect on people with mortgages of any kind.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although the proposals are welcome, they can never remove the borrower's responsibility to realise, when taking out a mortgage, that his circumstances may change and that interest rates may go up as well as down? Bearing in mind the fact that, to my certain knowledge, there have been many cases of building societies positively encouraging people to take on commitments when any expert would know that they could not possibly maintain them, is it not highly appropriate that building societies should play their part in helping to clear up some of the mess that such irresponsibility causes?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has made a not dissimilar point from that made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). I have no doubt that the results of what has been happening in recent months will be borne in mind by all lenders when considering applications for both first and second mortgages.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I welcome the Secretary of State's proposals that will enable those people who wish to remain in their own homes to do so. I support the view that income support that is intended for mortgage payments should be made directly to the mortgage lender, but will the right hon. Gentleman remember that other people, who are not on income support, may also be in difficulties and may be unable to keep up their payments because, for example, of the cost of repairs? Such people may put their home on the market but then face difficulties in getting housed because, for example, of the cuts in the housing budget in Northern Ireland.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the scheme extends to Northern Ireland, given the statement by a building society spokesman to the effect that most of the money would go to the south-east of England and is not required for Northern Ireland?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, it is obviously for the building societies and banks to determine the precise coverage of their arrangements, because those arrangements will differ from one institution to another depending on their circumstances and on the situation in different parts of the country. However, I shall ensure that the building societies' attention is drawn to the hon. Gentleman's point.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point, of course it is true that, despite the best efforts of some Opposition Members to suggest otherwise, the effects of the difficulties that have occurred are not by any means confined to those in receipt of income support. That is precisely why, from the building societies' point of view, much the biggest element of the package is the measures that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer outlined, which will be worth perhaps up to £1 billion, most of which will be directed to those who are not on income support.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that measures have been taken to counter possible abuse by unscrupulous lenders who may take the opportunity to try to raise repayments by those who they know are having their mortgages paid directly?

Mr. Newton: We are always looking for ways of preventing abuse in the social security system, but my primary purpose this afternoon is to put in place arrangements that will effectively help with the problem of repossessions.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Given that the Secretary of State obviously accepts that the vast bulk of the problem is caused by unemployment and by people losing their jobs, may I, against that background and in all seriousness, make a helpful suggestion to the right hon. Gentleman? He must be aware that, at the time of the next election, when every current occupant of the Treasury Bench will lose his or her ministerial job, their ministerial salaries will nevertheless continue to be paid for a further three months to allow them to adjust to a lower level of income. Might it not be a good idea to extend that principle to every other person in the country who loses his or her job?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who is concerned with those arrangements, will no doubt have noted the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. For the moment, I must sensibly concentrate on ensuring that our arrangements for income support are directed towards those whom we are trying to help.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): I welcome unreservedly my right hon. Friend's proposals for direct payments in respect of mortgage interest. Will he consider extending that principle to rent in respect of income support claimants? Landlords in my constituency are increasingly unwilling to let their properties to potential tenants who draw income support because of bad experiences of income support not being paid to them and large debts being accrued.

Mr. Newton: I have not adverted to housing benefit in that sense because local authorities already have wider powers to make direct payments of rent if they wish. The sensible course may be for my hon. Friend to take up the matter with his local authority. If he thinks that I could help, for example by contacting the local authority, he should give me details and I shall see what I can do.

Business of the House

4.25 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for the week following the Christmas adjournment.

MONDAY 13 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill [Lords]

Motion on Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at Seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 14 JANUARY—Debate on nuclear defence on a Government motion.

Motion on Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposal of land etc.) Order.

WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Coal Industry Bill.

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill.

FRIDAY 17 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): What has happened to Opposition Supply days? Almost a month has elapsed since the Government last gave the Opposition an opportunity to pick a subject for debate. I understand the Government's embarrassment about facing up to challenges on their mismanagement of the economy, but is it not long overdue for the Leader of the House to provide some Opposition Supply time? Under Standing Orders of the House, the official Opposition and Opposition parties generally are entitled to choose subjects for debate. Will the Leader of the House assure us that some time will be allocated when the House resumes?

Has the Leader of the House seen the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee? When shall we have an opportunity to debate the autumn statement on public expenditure, another important aspect of Government policy which the Government seem reluctant to face up to in the House? Earlier this year there was a long delay between the autumn statement and the opportunity to debate it. I would welcome an assurance from the right hon. Gentleman that we shall have a debate before too long.

As we have just heard some attempts to smear me and my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench in relation to housing repossessions, may we have a debate on Government housing policy? We can then refute the claims that all those who are in difficulty are in that position because of their own errors or those of the building societies. The Government left hundreds of thousands of families no option but to take on mortgages because they stopped local authorities building houses at rents that people could afford.

To set the record straight on repossessions—the Chancellor of the Exchequer accused us of exaggeration—*The Observer* of 8 December referred to 300,000 repossessions next year, and analysts at Lehman Brothers referred to 250,000 repossessions next year, so our figure of 200,000 can hardly be called exaggeration.

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are in a roughly similar position to that of this time last year, and there is no question of our trying to delay Opposition Supply days. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that we have rightly had to accommodate four days debate on Europe and the outcome of the Maastricht summit. Clearly, four days before Christmas were used to debate an important matter that was in the interests of the House. We also have an important legislative programme to get through, and business the first week back clearly shows that I have had to give priority to that.

Another important point that I am sure the House will recognise is that we shall also have to fit in at the earliest appropriate time the necessary action to fulfil the undertaking on stamp duty given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his statement this afternoon. I shall seek to give hon. Members notice of how we shall do that as soon as I can. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall use my best endeavours to see whether we can fit in a Supply day in the week following the first week back.

As for the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate on the economy generally and on the autumn statement in particular, he will recognise that there was a considerable delay last year due to specific factors of which he is well aware—not least the amount of time that we had to spend discussing the Gulf. I assure him that I note what he said and, as I have said before, I am keen to have a debate on the economy generally, public expenditure and taxation matters. I hope that I shall be able to accommodate him on that matter fairly soon after we return.

On the hon. Gentleman's final point, the fact that he picks up figures from newspaper statements does not exonerate the Opposition from attempting to be accurate and not trying to scare people.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am always reluctant to curtail business questions, but we have a busy day today. I shall allow business questions until 4.50 pm, then we must move on. I urge hon. Members to ask about business for the week we return, not general matters.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Now that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) has been sent to Coventry so to speak, may we have a debate on the left wing and the Labour party as, despite the best endeavours of Opposition Members, the left-wing element is still there? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in a by-election in St. Martin's ward in the London borough of Lambeth last Thursday, the Conservatives gained the seat from the Labour party on a swing of 20 per cent.? May we therefore have a debate when we return after the Christmas recess to prove that when people see socialism in practice they reject it?

Mr. MacGregor: Comments on one aspect of the left-wing influence on the Labour party could be made during the debate on nuclear defence scheduled for the Tuesday we return.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will there be a statement tomorrow on the Fisheries Council which took place earlier this week? Will the Leader of the House arrange for a more general debate on fisheries early in the new year, given the 1992 review of fishing? I am not asking for a debate like that last week which related to specific proposals for the Council.

Mr. MacGregor: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's point. The outcome of the Fisheries Council was good for Britain. I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman raised the subject because it enables me to say that we hope to have a statement on it tomorrow. As for a debate early next year, as the hon. Gentleman recognises, we have already had one debate on fisheries. Although it was not quite on the matter that he raised, as a result of that and of other pressures on business, I cannot promise an early further debate on fisheries in Government time.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): When my right hon. Friend considers the business of the week we return, will he bear in mind that some of us will probably not be called in the European debate today and were also not called yesterday? I cannot honourably continue as vice-chairman of the Conservative party in Scotland while unable to support the Government today, and it seems that I shall not have an opportunity to let the House know the reasons for and the logic behind my position.

Mr. MacGregor: I am very sorry to hear what my hon. Friend has to say, but I am certain that if he cannot speak he will be in a small minority this evening. I do not know why the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is laughing as it is noticeable that the Labour party has failed to table an amendment to today's Government motion, for the simple reason that it did not want a vote on its own amendment and thus reveal the big differences within the Labour party.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As the Government intend to find time for the Bills relating to the statements today, will the money resolutions be broad enough in both cases to allow for an increase in interest rates?

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said, I shall endeavour to ensure that we make the terms of the money resolution known to hon. Members as soon as we can.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the tremendous problem for public houses being caused by the Government's enactment of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the brewery trade—especially in the country, where there is a danger that pubs will be replaced by continental-style bars? Does he not think that if we wait until 1993 for that to be reviewed in the House it will be far too late? Please may we have a debate now or in the near future?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate on that now or in the near future. As he rightly said, in 1993 there will be a review of the action taken earlier on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report, but it will be for each pub to decide what provisions it wants to make in the countryside.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On the possible statement tomorrow about the Fisheries Council, will the Leader of the House consider asking the relevant Department to provide full written details of what was agreed at the Fisheries Council in advance of the oral statement so that interested Members can examine the fine detail of the agreement?

Mr. MacGregor: The details will certainly be contained in the statement tomorrow. I will see what can be done before that, but the normal practice is for Ministers to give details in the statements that they make on their return from a Council meeting.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the GATT Uruguay round should conclude this weekend. He will also be well aware of my interest in that matter, and especially in how the decisions will affect the textile industry. When we come back to the House, will he find time for a statement and possibly a debate on that important subject?

Mr. MacGregor: I am very much aware of my hon. Friend's interest in the GATT Uruguay round, especially in relation to the textile industry. Tomorrow Mr. Dunkel is due to put his resolution to the GATT Uruguay round and there will have to be a final decision on that. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is an extremely important matter. When the Uruguay round reaches a conclusion, as we must all sincerely hope will be the case, I shall see what I can do to enable the House to debate it.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the latest crime figures are extremely serious? As the Government gave that matter great prominence and priority in 1979, and as the largest increase in crime in British history has followed, does not that severe problem justify a change in the business of the House so that we can have an urgent debate on it?

Mr. MacGregor: We have debated those matters on many occasions and no doubt will continue to do so. The fact of the matter is that crime in certain areas is rising, as is reported crime in other areas, especially in relation to rape cases. There has been a large rise in crimes involving motor cars. That is why a number of the steps that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has been taking are appropriately directed to motor cars. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have taken many measures on the whole law and order front during our period in office.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many pensioners feel a sense of injustice over the concessionary television licence scheme. Would it be possible to have a debate in the new year to discuss the anomalies, especially the fact that old age pensioners living in identically constructed old age pensioners' dwellings pay two different levels of licence, depending merely on whether there is a warden in attendance?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise any Government time for that in the first week back. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be able to find other ways of raising the matter, not necessarily in the House.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the Lord President arrange for an early ministerial statement, possibly in the first week back, on a matter to which I have already drawn his attention—the dumping of toxic waste and the secrecy surrounding it, both in my constituency and generally?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is a matter for the new waste disposal authorities, which will have the powers to act on these matters. I cannot promise a debate, but I am sure that he will wish to direct his concerns in the first instance to the waste disposal authority.

Sir Patrick Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Did the Leader of the House notice earlier in the week the announcement by the senior steward of the Jockey Club of a bold, imaginative and widely welcomed proposal for a British horse racing board which will eventually assume responsibility for the industry's future direction? In view of the report of the Home Affairs Select Committee in the spring and the subsequent response of the Home Office, many hon. Members from all parts of the House who were members of the all-party racing and bloodstock industries group, of which I am an officer, are anxious that the Leader of the House should bear those matters in mind and try to fit in a debate early in the new year.

Mr. MacGregor: I have only just seen the report of the speech to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would wish to have time to give it due consideration. I cannot promise an early debate, but I have noted what the hon. Gentleman said.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am afraid that I was deflected and called two Members from one side. [HON. MEMBERS: "Carry on."] I shall call two Members from the other side.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I wish to raise a matter that I raised a few weeks ago. Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the world recession and on our commitment to Europe and the Commonwealth? Is he aware that the United States, Australia and France, to name but three countries, have recessions rather worse than our own and that it would be useful to make some comparisons?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes the realistic point that there is a world recession. I have already told my hon. Friend that I hope to be able to arrange a debate on economic matters early in the new year. I hope that he will be able to elaborate his point at that time.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): When the House returns, will my right hon. Friend try to arrange a debate on the lamentable practice of other hon. Members intervening in one's constituency? Is he aware that the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) wrote to the chairman of my health authority demanding information about how it was implementing health and safety regulations——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should ask for a statement when we get back or something like that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend please try to arrange matters so that the hon. Member for Stretford does not intrude in my constituency again?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes her point forcefully and I am sure that it will be noted. That makes it unnecessary for me to arrange a debate in the first week back.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): It is more than unfortunate that the Leader of the House has failed to ensure that a moratorium on public sector capital spending in Northern Ireland, which deals with almost one third of the financial year's business, has not been dealt with according to the procedures of the House but has been announced in a press statement. In view of the serious repercussions on every aspect of life in Northern Ireland, and bearing in mind that money which is badly needed there is being paid to people who have been questioned at the Castlereagh holding centre—including 58 clients of one firm of solicitors, Madden and Finucane—will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that that aspect of public spending in Northern Ireland is debated in the House at the earliest possible moment?

Mr. MacGregor: The general point about public expenditure in Northern Ireland was raised last week, but I have had to take into account the fact that, as the House knows, there have been heavy pressures on this week's business. The hon. Gentleman raises a specific point which I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall that last month we had a debate in Opposition time on sport which, regrettably, was dominated by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) who spoke for more than a third of the time allocated? Today the Government announced their new sports review, with excellent initiatives for sport in schools, fund raising and sponsorship and other new policies. May we have a full day's debate in Government time so that these matters can be raised and the empty rhetoric of the Opposition exposed?

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad that my hon. Friend has been able to draw attention to the excellent statement by my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport. I cannot promise a debate early in the new year, but I shall bear in mind the pertinent points that he has made.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): If "there ain't no sanity clause" at least one thing is clear—Robert Maxwell was a crook living off the stock exchange as well as pension funds, which was utterly disgraceful. He also told lies about Scargill and Heathfield and about many other people. With that in mind, will the Leader of the House ensure an early debate to discuss the power of press barons past and present?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that other opportunities to elaborate his points are available in the House.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): If my right hon. Friend gives way to the Opposition request for a debate on housing in the first week of our return, will he ensure that it includes the concept of Wendy houses which are being declared sexist by socialist Kirklees council on the ground that boys are frightened to play for fear of being labelled pansies? That would be fairly precocious at that age. The council has suggested that they should be called pretend corners. Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate to remind the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) that since he became Leader of the Opposition his dwelling has been and always will be a pretend corner?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. and learned Friend tempts me as I am sure that the whole House would wish to hear more along the lines of what he has said.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): My first Consolidated Fund debate was on north-east Derbyshire's environment. There are now serious problems in the area,

such as dioxin in the Bolsover region and effluent in the Grassmoor lagoons associated with Avenue coke works. As there are many other problems in the area, it would be a good idea to have a debate involving at least my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover and I, so that we could discuss serious environmental issues in that area and argue for an environmental audit.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the dioxin case has been raised several times recently in the House. I think that there was a question about it earlier and a written answer yesterday. The issue has thus already had a considerable airing in the House. We must now await the review of the matter. There are opportunities for the hon. Gentleman to raise the wider issues in the same way as the dioxin issue has been raised.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): May we have a statement as early as possible on the Government's response to the intention of some large commercial firms to break the Sunday trading laws in 1992? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, contrary to the impression given by the Prime Minister this afternoon, an appeal against the law does not change the law? Until the law is changed, it must be enforced—and that applies especially to the Government. If the Government condone breaches of the law, which is happening despite the silly excuses given by Front-Bench spokesmen on the subject, law and order in areas more important than Sunday trading will also be affected.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has already clarified his position about any prosecutions that he might undertake. As my hon. Friend knows, it is for local authorities to consider the position in their areas.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 79 which has been signed by more than 60 hon. Members and concerns the disposal of the bodies of aborted babies by macerators into public sewers and drains.

[The this House unreservedly condemns the practice of some private clinics of disposing of the bodies of aborted unborn babies by pulping them through a macerator and discharging them into the public sewers and drains; welcomes the undertaking given by the Minister of State for Health that an inquiry will be held; reasserts the view of the Polkinghorne Committee that the human remains of the unborn child should be treated with respect; and calls on the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health to prosecute those responsible for these degrading practices.]

That motion calls for the prosecution of those responsible and it surely requires a reply. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement in the first week of our return?

Mr. MacGregor: That early-day motion has been drawn to my attention and the Department is aware of the limited use of maceration as a form of disposal of foetal tissue. Although this does not present any public health hazard, we believe that it is not appropriate and steps are being taken to phase it out.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): There are a number of foreign relations issues which, although not encompassed by east-west relations, nuclear disarmament, or Europe, are nevertheless important and in some cases urgent. The parliamentary human rights group has recently looked at a number of them, including East Timor, Iran and Burma. Could time be given for a debate on such important human rights issues?

Mr. MacGregor: I well understand my hon. Friend's concern. He will understand that I am under pressure for a large number of general debates. I am endeavouring to find time for as many as possible, but I cannot give him a promise on that one for the near future.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Obviously, one hopes that this will not occur, but will the Leader of the House give an assurance that if interest rates go up in the next few days there will be a statement or debate on the matter in the week we come back? Is that not extremely important, bearing in mind the further immense hardship that will undoubtedly be caused if interest rates rise again?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman raises an entirely hypothetical question, but perhaps I may go much wider. I have already said that I hope that we shall be able to have a debate on economic matters before long in the new year because I am aware that many in the House would like to have one, just as many would like to compare the respective economic policies of the Government and the official Opposition.

BILL PRESENTED

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Bill Walker, supported by Dr. Norman A. Godman, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, and Sir Hector Monro, presented a Bill to amend the provisions of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 relating to the transfer of licences; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 47].

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

1. Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Act 1991
2. Welsh Development Agency Act 1991
3. City of Edinburgh District Council Order Confirmation Act 1991
4. Strathclyde Regional Council Order Confirmation Act 1991
5. Torquay Market Act 1991
6. Commercial and Private Bank Act 1991
7. London Docklands Railway Act 1991

Orders of the Day

Maastricht

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on amendment to Question [18 December]:

That this House congratulates the Prime Minister on achieving all the negotiating objectives set out in the motion that was supported by the House on 21st November; and warmly endorses the agreement secured by the Government at Maastricht.—*[The Prime Minister.]*

Which amendment was: to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"whilst welcoming the fact that the United Kingdom became a signatory at Maastricht to an agreement which represents an historic step towards a federal Europe, regrets that the Prime Minister, by insisting on opt-out arrangements for the United Kingdom on Economic and Monetary Union and the Social Chapter, rather than negotiating improvements, has left Britain semi-detached from Europe, obliged every citizen to pay a price for the divisions within the Conservative Party and damaged the prospects for Britain's long-term economic and political success."—*[Mr. Ashdown.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Speaker: Before we proceed to the debate, I should say to the House that there are over 60 right hon. and hon. Members seeking to participate, 11 of whom sat throughout yesterday's debate until 2 am. I hope that the House will feel it fair if I give precedence to those hon. Members in the debate today.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is about questions.

Mr. Speaker: Well, we have moved on.

Mr. Rowe: But you asked us to sit here until after the statements.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I will take it, but it takes time from the speeches of other hon. Members.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appeared to me today in Question Time that there was a change in your practice and I wonder whether you would explain it.

Mr. Speaker: I would not be prepared to do that anyway, so we may deal with that in another location.

I should announce to the House that, sadly, I shall have to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. I urge hon. Members who are called before that time to bear that limit in mind, as happened last night. I am not in favour of an imposed 10-minute limit, as I think the whole House knows. I much prefer a voluntary discretion, and I hope that the limit will be observed throughout today.

4.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Perhaps I am not entirely alone in feeling that the House has been debating Europe more or less continuously for 15 months. The discussion will go on, but I hope that tonight the House will come to a conclusion on the motion before it, as that will match in importance the conclusions, which some of us remember, that were reached in 1971 and 1972. I shall deal briefly with the three parts of the new treaty on which yesterday's debate concentrated—the single currency and the bank, the social chapter, and the common foreign and security policy. The House may like to know the Government's view on these before tonight's vote.

I shall first say a word about the vote tonight, and about a point on which my right hon. Friend the Lord President has already touched—the mystery of the missing amendment. I always thought that one of the main aims of the Labour party was to prevent the Liberal Democrats from being portrayed as the Opposition. However, tonight we shall be voting first on an amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). Where, on the Order Paper, there was a place for the views of the official Opposition, there is a blank.

I am sure that they tried. I can imagine the scene around the shadow Cabinet table. It is not as if there is any shortage of policies for them to choose from—indeed, there is an embarrassment of riches. There would have been papers scattered all over the table and they would have been asking themselves, "Is it Gaitskell 1961 anti? Which of Lord Wilson's three policies should we choose —the pro, the anti or the pro? Shall we choose the anti policy of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot)? Which of the policies of the present Leader of the Opposition shall we choose, the anti or the pro?"

If their filing system were any good, they would have found powerful speeches in favour of all these policies, all written by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). They reached the conclusion they did because today none of those policies would have attracted more than a fraction of the parliamentary Labour party. Therefore, any attempt to define what the Labour party stood for on the European question was doomed to failure.

In the past few weeks, we have seen our party come together. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Did nobody listen to the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor)? They show what I mean. However, as we came together, the official Opposition split apart. Only one thing could unite them tonight, and that is what they have—a summons to a completely empty, expressionless, negative vote advocated yesterday, as it no doubt will be today, with the maximum amount of noise.

The Leader of the Opposition learned yesterday from what we shall kindly call his disaster in the debate immediately before Maastricht. In that debate, as we clearly remember all too well, he was repeatedly torpedoed as he tried to analyse the negotiations. Yesterday, he reminded me of one of those warships in classical times that never ventured out of sight of land. He never ventured on to the substance of the negotiations, except once, when he was immediately mauled on the social chapter by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. He scuttled back into the shallows after that, loudly applauded, as he is today, by his supporters, who are divided on every aspect of the European question except the need to applaud their leader and his noisy generalities.

I shall pick up the point that the Leader of the Opposition made yesterday about economic and monetary union. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will deal with that issue tonight, but the Leader of the Opposition made an important point on it towards the end of his speech. In his peroration, talking about economic and monetary union and the social chapter, he said:

"British influence over both has now diminished; the gap has widened. After the passage of stage, Britain will be faced with a structure that others have fashioned. That cannot be in British interests."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 297.]

That shows that the right hon. Gentleman still does not understand one of the crucial points, perhaps the crucial point, of the negotiations and of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's achievement. We do, and we shall, take a full part in the preparation of stage 3 as well as stage 2. The ability to play a full part in the shaping of the future while preserving fully the freedom of the House to decide whether to join in stage 3 is one of the most significant achievements at Maastricht.

The Leader of the Opposition challenged my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to come to the House after convergence had been achieved and in any circumstances argue that Britain should stay out of the single bank and the single currency. He showed a touching faith in my right hon. Friend's length of tenure in his present office, which I am sure will be justified .

But the challenge makes no sense. It is not a bad rule of politics to take decisions at the right time if one can—when they have to be taken and when the facts are clear. It is better to take decisions then rather than six, seven or eight years earlier, when all that is known is that, in six, seven or eight years's time, the economic and political arguments will be different from those of today.

That was the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) in the "Walden" interview, about which the Leader of the Opposition was so extraordinarily defensive yesterday. That is the point that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made repeatedly, and that is the point which British business has made. So far from criticising the Maastricht agreement on the grounds that the Leader of the Opposition criticised it, British business and the City have welcomed it. It is a remarkable negotiating achievement on the part of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor—I can say this because I had no part in the negotiations—to have secured a full part for Britain in the shaping of the future of economic and monetary union and at the same time full freedom for the Government and the House in 1996, or whenever the right moment comes, to decide whether to take part.

Another theme that ran through yesterday's debate was that of the social chapter. I shall summarise, but I do not think that I shall in any way distort, the Leader of the Opposition's argument, in which he was followed considerably during the debate by those on the Benches behind him. He thought that the draft treaty, as it was before us at the beginning of last week, on the social chapter and the declaration which he read out, offered sufficient safeguards against the dangers which the Government and the leader of the Liberal Democrats feared, and which led us in the end to decide that we would not accept that chapter.

However, the right hon. Gentleman did not notice that the declaration that he was quoting covered only one of the methods of legislation provided. When that ace of trumps turned out to be a two of clubs, he simply charged on. But it is a crucial point.

The issue here is philosophical and practical. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to get to the heart of the disagreement between the two parties on the social chapter.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: I shall deal with the social chapter, then I shall give way.

Mr. Cook: On that point.

Mr. Hurd: In that case, the hon. Gentleman can wait until I have made my point; then I shall give way to him, and he can make his.

We were faced in those paragraphs with a concept which we find unacceptable—that there should be a special status of some kind for discussions and agreements reached in a corporatist way between organised labour and organised management but purporting to cover the whole area of employment. It is said that we are in some way behind the times because we do not find that acceptable. Our difficulty is that the British people have visited and lived with that philosophy in the recent past—25, 20, 15 years ago. It may suit others—we are not saying that it does not—but it does not work here, and we do not like it.

The practical point flows from the philosophical point. The agreement of the 11, which the Leader of the Opposition praised, would cover a wide range of categories—working conditions and the consultation of workers. But when one sees what use or misuse the Commission makes of its present competence on health and safety matters, heaven knows what it would make of a wider competence on those matters if it got hold of them.

Having carefully studied yesterday's *Hansard*, I want to underline the point that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Employment made. There is no provision or procedure for the proposed discussions between organised labour and management in what we declined to accept. There is certainly no requirement that conclusions should be unanimous.

Therefore, it is true, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, that either British management or British workers, or British management and British workers, could be outvoted in the Community discussions, and the resulting measure under the proposal which the Leader of the Opposition would accept could be waved through the Council by qualified majority voting against the wishes of the British Government. Qualified majority voting could therefore result in measures within the area described, which could have been opposed by British management and trade unions and the Government, being imposed on Britain.

To summarise the argument, it follows that if, on Tuesday afternoon last week, we had swallowed paragraph 118 of the treaty before us, we would have threatened to undermine the responsibilities of British management and trade unions and the British Government, and therefore the House. The case made against that by the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues does not stand up against our experiences and the text with which we were confronted. In view of the history of the matter and the Government's sustained and successful policies, the decision that we took, although reluctantly, was inevitable.

Mr. Frank Cook: Would the Foreign Secretary care to tell the House and the nation this afternoon in words that the nation will understand why the much-vaunted level playing field which is to be so advantageous and beneficial

[Mr. Frank Cook]

to the captains of British industry should be denied to the other important members of the team, the British working man and woman?

Mr. Hurd: That simply illustrates the difference between the two parties. We do not believe that the interests of our constituents, the interests of British working people, are best served by giving organised management and labour a privileged position and asking them to take provisions to make suggestions across the whole area of employment. We believe in a more flexible system. Britain has more part-time workers, and we are moving towards more localised bargaining. That, we have learnt during the past 12 years, is the right way for Britain.

Successive Governments, Conservative and Labour, experimented in good faith with the kind of approach which was before us last Tuesday. Efforts in good faith were repeatedly made, but they repeatedly failed. The progress that we made over the past 12 years is undoubted, and we do not intend to put it at risk in the way that the right hon. Gentleman asks us to do.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford) *rose*——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I want to make a little progress, and then I will give way.—*[Interruption.]* I will give way to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Tebbit: I agree with every word that my right hon. Friend has just said, but he is relying on arguments of experience and points of view. Would he not be wise to rely also on the argument so brilliantly made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—that it is not a matter of whether one would secure better maternity leave or creches from Madame Thatcher or from Madame Papandreou, but of whether one could sack Madame Thatcher or Madame Papandreou if one disagreed with their policies?

Mr. Hurd: I intended to give way to my right hon. Friend later, on foreign policy—but now I shall not be able to do that. I entirely agree with his point. Such matters do not need to be settled on a European or Community basis, but can—compatible with the level playing field—be settled on a national basis, in line with national traditions and experiences.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if employees in this country are to benefit, we should encourage inward investment? Will he remind the House of Jacques Delors's remark that the package resulted from the negotiations with the British Government?

Mr. Hurd: I do not know how far our 11 partners will go, in reaching agreements under the protocol that they agreed, in putting at risk their competitiveness with Japan and the United States. They are aware of that danger. I have just read a speech by the Spanish Prime Minister to the Cortes in which, in rebuking or calling into question the policy of Spanish trade unions, he referred rather enviously to the evident success of British policies in that regard.

I naturally took a particularly close interest in those speeches made yesterday that related to foreign policy. The treaty that we agreed provides, as now, for co-operation in foreign policy between Governments. It provides also, but still on the basis of work between Governments, for binding joint action where all Governments agree.

There is no restriction on the action of national Governments unless they agree to such a restriction by accepting joint action in a particular sphere. The decisions under that heading are unanimous, except in any cases where everybody agrees by unanimity that particular points could be settled by qualified majority voting.

That is a satisfactory outcome for the United Kingdom. We resisted strong pressures to bring the whole subject under Community competence and to have more general acceptance of qualified majority voting. Some speakers in yesterday's debate, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), are sceptical and suspicious of that process. The case argued by my right hon. Friend, and also by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), is, in a way, the most difficult from my point of view, because Monday's discussion was very difficult. However, I will cite Yugloslavia in order to illustrate my general point.

As to the recognition of Yugoslav republics, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford was not correct. There is no reason why he should follow my statements and utterances on Yugoslavia, but if he had done so, he would know that there is no clash of principle. The argument was about timing. I said that in *The Times* on 3 December, and added that recognition of Croatia and Slovenia might not be far off. I dealt with the arguments of substance during Question Time yesterday, and I will not repeat them all.

From Monday's long and difficult discussion emerged a compromise based on conditional recognition of republics that apply for recognition and follow the conditions that we laid down, with an implementation date of 15 January 1992. There is no legal obligation involved, and certainly no majority voting. The alternative to that compromise among the Foreign Ministers of the Twelve was clear to all who sat around that table—the unconditional recognition of at least two republics by Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, and a number of countries outside the Community.

There was criticism of that compromise in yesterday's debate by right hon. and hon. Members who thought that recognition was being made too slowly, and by others who thought that it was coming too fast. Leaving aside the merits of timing, I ask the House to contemplate the alternative. The alternative would have been a step back to the old system, under which each European power of any size had in the east of our continent its rival clients in Governments, in the streets, and eventually on the battlefields of the Balkans. That system led to the most awful war in Europe's history.

Under the new system, we thrash out our differences around a table and agree, where we can reach agreement, to act jointly—and to hold to that action. I readily concede that it is not at all easy to operate, but it becomes easier as we learn from experience and accept the discipline of working together. I am certain that it is right to adopt and to strengthen that new system, and to do our utmost to make it work. That I so intend.

The next test is upon us immediately. It arises from the Soviet Union's daily disintegration.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Bearing in mind the Community's hopeless record in respect of the Gulf war and the comments made yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State about the United Nations Security Council, how does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reconcile the provisions of article 4e of the union treaty—which require Britain as a matter of duty to defend the position and interests of the union where a joint decision is adopted—with those of article 27 of the United Nations charter, which preserves to us absolute discretion, and in certain cases a duty, in exercising a veto?

Does not my right hon. Friend anticipate that confusion could arise, with the prospect of endangering world peace and stability? In similar circumstances, such confusion could have led to Saddam Hussein continuing to occupy Kuwait.

Mr. Hurd: I do not see that happening at all. The French and ourselves worked carefully and thoroughly on that point. Article 4e makes a specific reference to the fact that the arrangements described therein must be compatible with our duties as permanent members of the Security Council. I do not see any difficulty about that.

As at present with the case of Yugoslavia, there are three EC members of the Security Council—two permanent and one elected. The line that we take in New York of course reflects the discussions and conclusions reached by the Twelve around the table. However, the statutory position of the British and French regarding the United Nations charter has been fully safeguarded. I do not see that there will be any difficulty in practice in that regard.

I refer again to the massive problems of the Soviet Union. The last days of that institution are clearly at hand. Since arriving at the House this afternoon, I have received reports that President Yeltsin has taken control of the Kremlin and has dissolved the Foreign Ministry of the Soviet Union. We are consulting our allies and partners. Because of the daily disintegration of the Soviet Union, NATO Ministers are meeting in Brussels today. I shall be going there tonight, and talking to the United States Secretary of State tomorrow.

The way in which things are moving suggests that we should proceed to the early recognition—as indepenent countries—of those Soviet republics that sort out their relations with each other. There is an important meeting in Kazakhstan this weekend to extend that process.

At their summit meeting in Rome last month, NATO's Heads of Government agreed that it was for the peoples of the Soviet Union to decide their future relationships, through peaceful and democratic means. The NATO leaders also underlined the importance of the international commitments of the Soviet Union and its republics over nuclear weapons and conventional forces, as well as human rights for the individual and for minority groups. We have received important assurances on those points, and we shall be looking for more.

As for the case of Russia, and the important issue—related to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash)—of the permanent seat on the Security Council, one possibility is for the seat to remain occupied by the representative from Moscow, on the basis that Russia is the continuation of the Soviet Union. That may be the most orderly solution—I stress the word "may". There is a precedent in the India of 1947: a country reduced in size, but, it was said, maintaining its international attributes.

The House will recognise that a huge set of problems is involved. This is not the occasion on which to debate them in detail. Today and tomorrow, we shall be acting together with our allies and our partners in the European Community. Clearly it is important that, as far as possible, solid and concerted action is taken, so that we can do what we can, first, to safeguard our own national, western and European interests, and, secondly, to exercise any influence that we can to pull the republics back from the abyss into which they will fall unless the new discussions and arrangements that are in hand mature and succeed.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): May I make a point about the issue of the seat on the United Nations Security Council? The Foreign Secretary will be aware of the widespread suspicion in the non-Russian republics—from Kazakhstan to Ukraine—that Mr. Yeltsin is simply trying to substitute a Russian imperialism for the old Soviet imperialism. That is one reason that the republics have given for wishing to retain control of their nuclear weapons, at least for the time being, rather than sending them back to Russia or submitting them to sole control by that country.

Does not the Foreign Secretary agree that it would be absolutely disastrous for western Governments—without consulting the other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States—to recognise Russia as the inheritor of the Soviet seat, thereby nullifying the discussions that they have all said should take place on how the question should be resolved? Surely it is primarily a question for the member states in the CIS.

Mr. Hurd: Of course there will need to be consultation and discussion, but the right hon. Gentleman has not taken into account the importance of finding a solution. There are other possibilities: there is, for example, the possibility that the commonwealth of only three republics that was envisaged at the Minsk meeting could achieve some legal entity and, by itself, take over the seat on the Security Council. But, if the report that I have just given the House is true, there will be no Ministry of Foreign Affairs to back that up. The Soviet Ministry at the centre, which could have sustained that Security Council representative, will have evaporated.

Of course, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East is right. Consultation and discussion are needed inside the republics of the Soviet Union, and that is taking place. Ukraine is already a member of the United Nations, and our political director, Mr. Appleyard, has received reasonably promising assurances in the republics that he has visited in the past week; but, as I have said, much more discussion is needed before firm decisions can be reached.

Mr. Rowe: My right hon. Friend will know that the parliamentary assembly of the Western European Union is considerably frustrated by its anxiety to resolve the growing tensions between minorities throughout eastern Europe and its capacity to act. The assembly greatly welcomes the fact that European Community Ministers and others have got together.

Will my right hon. Friend explain his attitude to the real difficulty concerning boundaries? Many minorities would vote for independence within those minorities, but that

[Mr. Rowe]

would set at naught the policy of recognising existing boundaries. It is a difficult conflict. Would my right hon. Friend be kind enough to comment on it?

Mr. Hurd: It is indeed. That question runs through much of the argument about Yugoslavia—and not only Yugoslavia. I am sure that the right answer—the one to which we have all subscribed—is that we cannot accept the alteration of boundaries by force. Within the existing boundaries, clearer and stronger definitions of the rights of minority groups are needed. I believe that that combination of working within existing boundaries and guaranteeing the rights of minority groups offers a better hope than encouraging minorities to bring about boundary alterations by means of force. A great deal of bloodshed and anarchy lies down that second road.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Is my right hon. Friend saying that there is no British foreign policy on Yugoslavia independent of Europe, or that our policy is so close to that of other Community members that we have decided to sublimate it?

Mr. Hurd: I am saying that, if we wish to influence for the better what happens in Yugoslavia, the Government have concluded that it is best to do so by seeking and then implementing agreements among the Twelve. There is no sensible prospect of British influence for good in Yugoslavia if that influence is in rivalry or contradiction with the influence of other European powers. That is a national conclusion. We were not bound to reach it by any treaty, let alone by any majority vote; it is simply a view, which I am sure is correct.

If we wish to do what we can to help forward peace in Yugoslavia and a lasting solution between its peoples, our best hope of doing so is to work with our Community partners. That is the view of the United States and the United Nations, and of others who are concentrating on the issue.

As the House recognises, the discussions and negotiations that took place at Maastricht represent the end of a long process—a long haul. I think that it is fair to say that we gained what we set out to gain. Hon. Members on both sides of the House see clearly, and accept without quibble, the need for Europeans to work together: that last exchange provides just one example. Europeans need to work together more intensively, across a growing range of subjects. We committed ourselves to that at Maastricht.

Through the treaty of Maastricht, we have established that that working together does not have to be within the institutions of the Community, with the Commission having the monopoly of initiative and with the results under the jurisdiction of the European Court. Now, we must prove the architecture of pillars—as it has often been described—that we have secured: in other words, we must prove to ourselves, our partners and the world that co-operation between Governments can be just as effective and just as European as action within the Community's institutions.

I have always believed, and have sometimes said in recent years, that there is a good majority for that policy in our party, in the House and in the country. What was uncertain was whether we could pull it off and bring that policy to a successful conclusion. Some hon. Members, including some of my hon. Friends, feared that we would be sucked into making immediate concessions or into postponed commitments to a centralised system. Others feared that, if we stuck to what we had said, we would not get an agreement. Certainly there were doubtful moments. I was not at all sure until late last Tuesday evening, on the second day of the Maastricht conference, that we would get an agreement.

I paid tribute in his absence to the negotiating skills of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but our success at Maastricht was due principally to the patient and courteous strength of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his dealings with the House and our partners in Europe. We have to make the agreement work; we have the will to make it work; we have the wherewithal to make it work. British interests lie in the success of Europe. We want it to be enlarged, as the Prime Minister set out yesterday. Our commitment is to the success of Europe. It is as strong as the commitment of anyone else in the Community. I hope that the House will sustain and reinforce the Government in that commitment. I commend the motion to the House.

5.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The Foreign Secretary referred to the situation in the Soviet Union. I put it to him that in the discussions as to who should take over the seat of the declining and departing Soviet Union in the Security Council, the Government, together with the other Governments who are permanent members of the Security Council, should be extremely cautious and not precipitate in coming to a conclusion. The right hon. Gentleman drew an analogy with the position in India in 1947, but it was not an exact analogy because India is not a permanent member of the Security Council. We are dealing with the question of accepting into the Security Council a permanent member with the right to veto. Again I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that hasty and precipitate action will not favour peace in the world and that we should take our time and consult our allies and partners.

The Foreign Secretary seemed to be a great deal more comfortable when dealing with the broader theme of the situation in the Soviet Union than he was when dealing with the precise subject of Maastricht. We always enjoy it when the Foreign Secretary makes one of his rare ventures into party politics, as he did at the beginning of his speech. However, having taken into account the nature, quality and substance of what he said, I would recommend him to return to the soporific tone that has made the House so fond of him.

The Foreign Secretary began by saying that the aim of the Labour party is to prevent the Liberal party from being portrayed as the real Opposition. However, the Labour party's intention is that within a matter of months the Opposition shall be the Conservative party.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: In a little while. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my theme. Then I shall give way to him.

The Foreign Secretary dealt with narrow points in those parts of his speech which he devoted to Maastricht, to which I shall return, but he did not deal with how we test the Government's success, or otherwise, at Maastricht.

There are two tests by which to judge whether the outcome at Maastricht was a success. First, was the Maastricht agreement good for the European Community and, secondly, was the Maastricht agreement good for the United Kingdom? One could go further and say that the Maastricht agreement is good for Britain only if it is also good for Europe.

The United Kingdom is a country with many strengths, resources and talents. During the nearly 19 years that we have been a member of the European Community, our future has become indissolubly linked with that of the Community. We, the United Kingdom, cannot be strong if the Community is weak. We cannot claim to have achieved strength if our actions have weakened the Community or made the Community weaker than it might otherwise be.

There may have been many worthwhile achievements at Maastricht, but the summit cannot be counted an unqualified success for the Community. Agreements were made, often by compromise, as is the custom of the Community, but on some issues the Community did not reach what I would regard as completely desirable agreements—for example, on the Commission. It is a pity that full accountability of the Commission was neither proposed nor agreed at Maastricht. On two issues, one of the most important countries—the United Kingdom—opted out of the Maastricht outcome.

The Prime Minister came back claiming that he had won everything that he went to Maastricht to get. In his speech yesterday he said that he had achieved his goals in every respect. Game, set and match was his claim. In his speech today the Foreign Secretary said of what took place at Maastricht that

"we gained what we set out to gain."

If one examines the Government's negotiating objectives, it is clear that, on issue after issue, the Government did not achieve what they went to Maastricht to achieve. Ministers —including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary —have been incautious enough to set out criteria, conditions and even ultimata about what they wanted from Maastricht, yet on issue after issue what they wanted they did not get and what they got they did not want.

Mr. Marlow: The right hon. Gentleman criticises the Government for what he calls opting out of two areas of policy. The right hon. Gentleman is aware of the fact that under the health and safety competence we are going to be foisted with a 48-hour week, which has got nothing to do with health and safety. On that basis, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the social charter could make a snack of our industrial relations legislation. Is he naive, or does he want to see Arthur Scargill's tanks in Parliament square again?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall deal with those matters in the precise order that I believe it to be sensible to take them.

In our debate on the Community on 26 June this year, the Foreign Secretary expressed his opposition to new Community competencies. He said that he was against them, yet last week both he and the Prime Minister agreed to a treaty that includes numerous new competencies for the Community. They include education, public health, culture and something that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) referred to yesterday as trans-European networks. That was a violation of what the Foreign Secretary told the House that he wanted in June.

The Prime Minister expressed his distaste for another item. In the debate on 20 November he said that immigration matters should be decided on an intergovernmental basis and should be outside the treaty, yet at Maastricht the Prime Minister agreed to a treaty article which includes conditions about visa qualifications and requirements. What is more, he agreed that some of those items should be decided by qualified majority voting. Game, set and match?

In that same speech the Prime Minister said that any blocking power for the European Parliament

"must cover a far narrower range than that set out in the present Presidency text."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 279.]

Yet at Maastricht the Prime Minister signed a treaty article which was word for word the text that the Prime Minister had rejected only three weeks before. Game, set and match?

Ministers have a long record of rejecting extensions to qualified majority voting. In November last year the Foreign Secretary, speaking to the Confederation of British Industry, said that the Government were opposed to what he called

"significantly extended qualified majority voting."

The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who was bobbing up and down like a yo-yo yesterday but is absent today, repeated that objection when he told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on 19 November that the Government opposed qualified majority voting on the environment.

On 3 December this year the Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) that he had "great difficulty" with co-operation being replaced by majority voting. Yet the Government have not only accepted majority voting on visa matters, but in the Maastricht agreement they accepted a treaty which includes qualified majority voting on the environment, to which the Minister of State said that the Government were opposed. They also accepted qualified majority voting on all the new competencies included in the treaty—those which the Prime Minister said that he did not want in the treaty. Game, set and match?

On no issue have the Government been firmer in rejecting qualified majority voting than on foreign policy. In the debate on 26 June the Foreign Secretary rejected what he called

"mechanical or forced agreement through the use of majority voting in foreign policy."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. 1016.]

In the debate on the Loyal Address the Foreign Secretary said:

"My clear instinct is that a weakening of co-operation would result from qualified majority voting on substantive foreign policy decisions, however qualified the voting may be."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 124.]

On 21 November the Chancellor of the Exchequer repeated that foreign policy

"cannot be subject to mechanistic voting procedures".—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1991; Vol. 199 c. 512.]

Yet at Maastricht the Government signed a treaty which includes specific provisions for qualified majority voting on foreign and security matters.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The right hon. Gentleman has enumerated various so-called concessions by the Government. Has it ever occurred to him that, when one is conducting international negotiations and one wants some concessions from the

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

other side, it is a good idea to play hard ball on some matters on which one is happy to give ground in order to gain the real concessions that one wants? If it had not occurred to the right hon. Gentleman that that is how one conducts international negotiations, he would not be a suitable person to conduct them.

Mr. Kaufman: Apart from the last comment, which I reject for personal reasons, I accept what the hon. Gentleman said. However, he did not explain why the Prime Minister said that he had achieved his goals in every respect and why the Foreign Secretary, a few minutes ago, said that the Government had gained what they set out to gain. It is one thing to be flexible in negotiations, but it is another, having given way on issue after issue, to claim that the Government have gained everything that they wanted to gain.

In our debate last month the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—I am sorry that she is not in her place today—devoted special attention to majority voting on foreign policy. She expressed her fears that the Foreign Secretary might be "going a bit wobbly" on the subject. Now, the Foreign Secretary has done a definite wobble. He has agreed to what the right hon. Lady feared that he might agree to, but was beginning to hope that he might not. Is the right hon. Lady still concerned? For a time it seemed that she was not. When the Prime Minister returned from Maastricht last week the right hon. Lady said that she was "absolutely thrilled" with the agreement —majority voting on foreign policy and all. I did not know that the right hon. Lady thrilled so easily. I thought that she was made of sterner stuff. I am sure that by now the right hon. Lady has become unthrilled again. When the right hon. Member for Chingford was speaking about foreign policy in yesterday's debate she was nodding her head like one of those dogs that people put on the ledge in the back of their car.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) might have studied the provisions of the treaty more carefully than the right hon. Gentleman, who has just given a misleading account of the matter to the House. He will know, and if he had listened to my speech he would have heard again, that qualified majority voting on foreign policy would be permitted only if all member states agreed by unanimity in advance. That is a double lock that is entirely consistent with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have told the House.

Mr. Kaufman: I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman studies a little more carefully the treaty to which he has put the country's name. I am referring to article c of

"Provisions on a common foreign and security policy",

particularly to the declaration on page 106, which says:

"Member states will, with regard to Council decisions requiring unanimity, to the extent possible avoid to prevent a unanimous decision where a qualified majority exists in favour of that decision."

That is what the right hon. Gentleman has put his name to.

If the right hon. Member for Finchley was concerned about Community competence on foreign policy, she was perhaps even more concerned about defence. On that subject she had the right to hope that the Government would not disappoint her. After all, in June the Foreign Secretary said:

"Defence should not be embraced by the European Community . . . any European defence identity must be distinct from the Community".—[*Official Report*, 26 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. 1011.]

One of his ministerial colleagues told the House:

"We do not believe that the common foreign and security policy . . . should be expanded to include defence."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 94.]

Nothing could have been clearer. Yet, article d of the Maastricht treaty says:

"The common foreign and security policy shall include all questions related to the security of the European union, including the eventual framing of a common defence policy which might in time lead to a common defence."

That is what the right hon. Gentleman signed after having told the House that

"Defence should not be embraced by the European Community."

Game, set and match? That is what the Prime Minister signed and it is one of the objectives that he said he had achieved in every respect.

On one of the subjects on which the Government opted out, or, in the Chancellor's new phraseology, did not opt in or have not opted in so far, the Prime Minister caved in. Last month the Government made it clear that on the single currency they wanted at Maastricht a general opt-out clause for all 12 Community countries. No. 10 Downing street announced on 2 November:

"We think it is much more sensible to have a general opt out."

That is what the Prime Minister wanted from Maastricht, and what he did not get.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister described that defeat in a peculiar way. He said that Britain had won a "unique right" not to join the single currency. The problem was that the right hon. Gentleman had set out for Maastricht determined not to have a "unique right" to opt out of the single currency. It is as though, at the declaration of the poll, the Tory candidate in Langbaurgh had said that his objective had been a "unique right" to come second. I do not know how much success of this kind any man can stand!

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No.

On Wednesday last week, after the conclusion of the Maastricht summit, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry declared:

"The Foreign Secretary's job this week has been to sell his grandmother—for the best possible price."

It is true that the Foregin Secretary set out to sell, if not his grandmother, then another lady—much younger, of course. He sold her, but the price was not very good.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister boasted that he did not change his position. He said that we did

"not change our position at the very end of the negotiations."

—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 276.]

I cannot fault that—the Prime Minister changed his position time after time in the middle of the negotiations.

On all these issues, the Community survived the negative attitudes of the Government. It has emerged stronger from Maastricht. On economic and monetary union, it is Britain that has emerged vulnerable. On the social chapter, the Government have damaged the Community because, although the other 11 will proceed without us, a single market of 12 is inevitably flawed if only 11 agree to the protections for employed people that are required in all 12 countries. Those protections are certainly

needed. A European Community report published this week shows that Britain has the highest proportion of low-paid workers in the whole Community. Although low pay itself may not be part of the social chapter, low standards are inevitable companions of low pay.

Sheer dogma drove the Prime Minister to opt out of the social chapter. Already, the Government have had to begin paying the price for that opt-out. The Prime Minister got the opt-out because of the grace and favour of Chancellor Kohl. On Monday this week, the German Government began cashing the cheques that the British Government owed them for that favour. That is why the Foreign Secretary—against his will and against his wiser instincts—was dragged along behind the German Government in agreeing a date for recognition of the Yugoslav republics.

Mr. Knapman: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No.

In doing so, the right hon. Gentleman defied not only his own wiser instincts but the advice of the United Nations. As he reminded us today, we hold a permanent place on the Security Council.

In the run-up to Maastricht, the Foreign Secretary said that he was against qualified majority voting on foreign policy, although he has now accepted qualified majority voting on foreign policy. On Yugoslavia, there was no vote —qualified majority or otherwise. On Yugoslavia, the Foreign Secretary gave in to a minority view—the German view—in the ministerial council. That was his unwise pay-out in foreign policy for an unjustified opt-out on social policy.

The Foreign Secretary and his colleagues were aware that they could suffer serious political damage from their refusal to extend the protections of the social chapter to employed people. That is why the Government, including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, have resorted to imaginative fiction in their effforts to avert political damage. First, they claimed that Britain's adherence to the social chapter would place jobs at risk. It is touching to find the Chancellor worried about losing jobs in Britain. He was the man who said that

"unemployment was a price well worth paying."

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said:

"The Government will not support proposals that would destroy jobs".—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 280.]

That is the man who, we learn today, has destroyed 806,900 jobs during his period of office at No. 10 Downing street. On unemployment, the tears shed by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer make a crocodile seem sincere.

Then, last week, came the next excuse. Yesterday, under pressure, the Prime Minister admitted that the right to strike was excluded from the provisions of the social chapter. That of course is true. It was equally true last week. Why, then, did the Prime Minister last week quote the number of days lost in strikes in 1979 and compare that figure with the number lost last year—a recession year, a John Major recession year—and why did he go on to say after Maastricht:

"I was not prepared to see that record"—

the record on strikes—

"put in jeopardy"?—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1991; Vol. 200; c. 861.]

If, as the Prime Minister admits, the right to strike is excluded from the social chapter, how could acceptance of the social chapter increase the number of strikes? Even by the Prime Minister's standards, the argument is totally illogical.

That is why the Government have been retreating on this issue, abandoning their claim that the social chapter would affect trade union legislation here while trying to leave an impression that it would. The latest form of words was provided in an address to Tory candidates last week by the Foreign Secretary—a master of obfuscation if ever there was one. The right hon. Gentleman told the Tory candidates:

"The trouble about the social chapter is not that it tells us to repeal our industrial relations legislation but that it once again edges industrial relations into that field."

It's the way he tells 'em, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Adley: I do not know whether just Conservative Members have been wondering vainly whether the right hon. Gentleman will say something about his party's policy, or whether he will continue doing that at which he is best—waspish criticism of everything that the Government do.

A few days ago, I contemplated asking the right hon. Gentleman to give me a photograph of him to include in my election address, on the basis that it might help me. Having listened to his speech, I am sure that it would. Will the right hon. Gentleman be so kind as to let me have a photograph so that I can put it in my election address and so that the people of my constituency can see that the choice that they have to make at the next election is between the right hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Kaufman: I have been in the House of Commons with the hon. Gentleman since we were elected on the same day and I must resist making the right response to what he said.

It is on flimsy derisory arguments such as that made by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary that the Government try to justify what, last Thursday, Sir Fred Catherwood, a Tory MEP and Vice-President of the European Parliament, called "Britain's empty chair" on social policy. It is on the sheerest prejudice that the Prime Minister is jeopardising his party's chances of ending Tory MEPs' isolation in the European Parliament.

The Tories want to join up with the Euro Christian Democrat group—the European People's party—but Karl Von Wogau, the economic spokesman for that party, said of social policy this week:

"We believe very strongly in a model that leads to consensus. A social consensus is economically advantageous, as well."

The Foreign Secretary said today that the social charter may suit others, but not this Government. The others whom the social charter suits include those Tories in Europe with whom the Government's MEPs are vainly trying to join.

The Government have lost all hope of running a competitive economy on the base of good working conditions and good pay. They do not seem to understand that the most successful industrial economies—Germany and Japan—thrive precisely because they provide their workers with good conditions and good pay, but Britain's economic success and prosperity are the last considerations in the Government's mind. The Government are ready to sacrifice the country's best interests inside the Community to buy off a few right-wing Tory Back Benchers.

[Mr. Kaufman]

At Maastricht the Prime Minister's preoccupation was not European unity but Tory party disunity. In our last debate before Maastricht the Foreign Secretary perorated about our constituents—"Our constituents want this" and "Our constituents want that". It is time that the Government enabled our constituents to say for themselves what they want in Europe and enabled them to vote in a general election for a Labour Government so that Britain can go forward in Europe and can get a new start.

6.2 pm

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): The kindest thing that I can say about the speech that the House has just heard from the spokesman for the official Opposition on an occasion of such importance is that it filled me with disgust. At the beginning of his speech the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to a rare venture by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary into party politics. I had hoped that the right hon. Gentleman was going to venture out of party politics, but, once more, we found that that is the only subject on which he can speak.

It was perfectly clear to the House that the right hon. Gentleman had never gone through serious international negotiations. The way in which the Government have conducted the negotiations is as successful as any international negotiations that I have seen in nearly 40 years of experience of international affairs. I shall refer in particular to three British initiatives, which have not been much discussed by the House, but which were all successful—and they are just three of a number of successful British initiatives.

I have supported closer European unity for most of my life, but I wish to say something critical about the Commission. I believe that its actions over the years have been responsible, perhaps more than anything else, for the suspicions in the minds of many of our compatriots about the European Community. I believe that one of the Government's achievements has been to get an agreement which holds out the prospect of reducing the power of the Commission. The Commission has demonstrated an insatiable appetite for expanding its power. I will give the House some examples.

Why should the Commission think it right to legislate as to when British farmers may shoot pigeons which might ravage their crops? The Commission would allow them to shoot pigeons for only two months in the year—and the wrong two months. Why should the Commission wish to legislate to limit the amount of water in our lavatory cisterns? Why should it wish to legislate on the flavour of the potato crisps that we produce? Why should it wish to legislate about which side of one of our country towns a bypass should go—north or south?

Such matters have absolutely no relevance for other countries in the European Community. That is not federalism, but something much worse—it is centralism. In the United States, those matters would be subjects not for Washington, but for Wisconsin, Massachusetts or California. Here, however, in a Europe of 12 separate countries, the Commission is trying to legislate in a centralised fashion. If it were a question of migratory birds which visit many countries in Europe, or acid rain spreading from one country to another, that would be a proper case for Commission action.

The Government are to be congratulated on the successful insertion into the agreement of the reference to decisions being taken as close as possible to the citizen, and on the inclusion of article 3B which spells out the principle of subsidiarity.

I also congratulate the Government on establishing the concept of the three pillars in relation to action on foreign policy: crime, immigration and home affairs. I hate to think what would be the prospect if we had Community action on those subjects. There was at one time a proposal that that should be the case, but the Government succeeded in having it removed. In general, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary explained to the House, unanimity will be required in relation to foreign policy. The right hon. Member for Gorton clearly misunderstood the arrangements that have been made.

I believe that the agreement is better than the former proposal under which, in foreign affairs, decisions on policy would require unanimity but implementation would be subject to a qualified majority vote. I believe that that arrangement would have led to complete confusion. I draw the analogy with the understanding that has existed between my wife and me during 37 years of marriage as to who takes the decisions. I take the big decisions and she takes the little decisions, but we have still not decided after 37 years how we decide which are the big decisions and which are the little decisions. We are still working on that. On foreign policy we would have faced a similar situation under the original proposals in the earlier Dutch draft.

I believe that we have a satisfactory arrangement as a result of the Government's initiative. It is likely to be more effective in practice because in matters of foreign policy the major European countries would not have accepted foreign policy decided by majority voting if they had been in a minority. In addition, the agreement is more suitable if we wish in future years to see the accession of European Free Trade Association countries and the countries of eastern Europe.

The Government's third success deals with another factor which causes annoyance to an increasing number of our citizens, as they realise that while we obey the rules laid down by the European Community other member countries do not. It is significant that, at the end of 1989, only one out of 80 cases before the European Court of Justice affected this country. I refer to the agreement reached, on a British initiative, that in future the European Court will be able to levy fines on countries which fail to carry out their obligations.

Her Majesty's Government have been right on monetary union and the social chapter. They also deserve credit for the three achievements that I have mentioned —limiting the power of the Commission, the arrangements for foreign policy and Home Office affairs, and the European Court's ability to levy fines on errant member states. Those were all British initiatives, and I congratulate the Government on them.

6.11 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The right hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) gave us a touching example of partnership in his account of his relationship with his wife, but he may not have realised

that in so doing he touched on one of the fundamentals of another matter that he mentioned—the question of subsidiarity.

I was privileged to be present at the congress—the so-called assize—in Rome a year ago and I related a well-known story about the very effective partnership between Mr. and Mrs Webb. A friend asked them, "How is it that you get on so well? What happens if you disagree?" Sidney Webb replied, "Very rarely do we disagree. If we do, we have a good rule: I decide on matters of principle and my wife decides on matters of execution." "Well," said the friend, "suppose you disagree about which is which? How do you decide then?" "Ah," replied Sidney, "That is a matter of principle."

The right hon. Member for Blackpool, South rightly raised the subject of subsidiarity. My charge is that the Prime Minister and the Government have, either advertently or inadvertently, misled themselves or misled the nation on the nature of article 3b of the treaty that we are being asked to approve. I raised the matter yesterday with the Prime Minister, because in his carefully prepared speech he referred to

"an article that specifically enshrines the crucial concept that the Community should undertake only those measures that could not be achieved at a national level".

Then, in response to my intervention, he said:

"If it can better be done at national level, it ought not to be done at Community level."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 278.]

Few people would disagree with that.

I believe that the CBI and others interpret the whole concept of subsidiarity in the nutshell of the phrase that the Prime Minister used. Indeed, there has been a successful campaign—I shall not say a sales campaign, although it has been something of the sort—all round the world. It has gone so far that the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) said last night:

"The ready and instinctive way in which our constituents reach out for rulings from the European Court illustrates the way in which the man in the street benefits from the principle of the separation of powers, of which the Community treaties are a manifestation."

The right hon. Gentleman declined to give way to me at that point—understandably, in view of the 10-minute limit on speeches—and continued:

"The principle of the separation of powers, which is enshrined in what we are currently negotiating, gives real scope for not less but greater freedom."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 341.]

In other words, the right hon. Gentleman claimed that there was a principle of the separation of powers. I think that he was wrong, but many people outside the House hold the same view.

I shall quote from Mr. Baker—not the right hon. Member for Mole Valley, but the United States Secretary of State—as he was quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) last month:

"Thus, the architects of a united Europe have adopted the principle of 'subsidiarity'—something like American 'federalism'—that is, the devolution of responsibility to the lowest level of government capable of performing it effectively."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 380.]

I put it to the House—and to anyone else who wishes to challenge me on the point—that that is not correct. Even the United States Secretary of State has either been misinformed or has not read the treaty.

There is no separation of powers in the treaty of Rome, in the Single European Act or in the treaty before us. There are, of course, provisions which permit powers and vires to be exercised, but there is no topic, "separation of powers", as there would be in a true federation.

Through some process which I cannot define, describe or analyse, many Conservative Members—several of whom have spoken in the debate—and the United States Secretary of State believe that a principle exists in the treaty, although that principle is not there.

I quoted from the treaty yesterday, but I shall do it again because this is such a crucial matter. In the words of article 3b, subsidiarity, such as it is, will apply only to

"areas which do not fall within its"—

that is, the Community's—

"exclusive jurisdiction".

When I asked the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), last night if he could define or find out where the exclusive jurisdiction lay, he was unable to do so and quoted a broad part of the article. As the House will hear, he gave an ineffective reply. He quoted this passage:

"Any action by the Community shall not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objectives of this Treaty."

There lies the clue.

Article after article of the treaty says what should be decided centrally and that regulations relating to such topics which bypass Parliament entirely should be applied throughout the Community, including this country.

I am glad that the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) is with us tonight. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) is not here. When those two were advocating our entry into the Community, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said that the Queen would not be affected. However, every central power and every regulation issued from Brussels bypasses Parliament. It does not go with the advice and consent of the Commons and the Lords Temporal; it does not go to the Crown for an initial. It is as though this place did not exist.

In 1973, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East and I spent hours arguing in the House about section 2(1), which contained the words, "without further enactment". We heard yesterday from the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), who had been involved with the common agricultural policy. I wonder whether he realised that from the moment the treaty came into effect on 1 January 1973 there was no longer a British agricultural policy. The drab uniformity and detailed regulations which he rightly criticised in his interesting speech last night applied from that moment on to the United Kingdom in the realm of agriculture—to the way in which man relates to the soil. That could hardly be more fundamental to our basic existence. It was as if a rural byway had been constructed round the House which was not noticed. Nor was it noticed that the control had gone, because after that qualified majority voting applied to all agricultural matters. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food did not come back and say, "I am sorry, I was outvoted", but we are getting to that stage now. That is what happened in agriculture and fisheries negotiations from 1973 onwards.

The Single European Act continued the trend because the scope of central decision making was widened still further. In the debate on 21 November 1991, I charged the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) with

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

misunderstanding the Act. I said that she may have misunderstood it, or she may have been misinformed, or she understood it and did not tell the House about it.

Perhaps we shall have some enlightenment from the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, who was the Foreign Secretary at the time. He introduced the Single European Act at the Dispatch Box and spoke about streamlining and getting things through quicker. He knows that the criterion for the single market was the elimination of frontiers. If frontiers are eliminated in relation to any commercial matter, to any matter of specification or to any matter concerning markets, adjudication and the source of law are transferred from 12 centres to one.

I think that the right hon. Member for Finchley did not understand the importance and power of articles 8A and 100A. I must confess that, despite being a member of the Select Committee on European Legislation which studied the Act, I did not spot the explosive mixture of article 8A and article 100A. I charge the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East—I am glad that he is here tonight—first, with supporting the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup in saying that the Queen was not affected when in fact the Queen in Parliament was eliminated, and, secondly, with coming before the House with the Single European Act without either fully explaining it to us or, if he did, not knowing the effect of it.

We now come to the third instalment in the dismemberment of the United Kingdom Parliament and the power of its people—the so-called "treaty of union". The treaty of union may be called the Maastricht treaty, but, as the House may know, it should really be called the treaty of Rome-Maastricht because in the two green volumes containing the treaty of union and the treaty on economic and monetary union, almost all the articles relate to amendments to the treaty of Rome. We shall have one small treaty of Maastricht and one much enlarged, beefed-up and fundamental treaty of Rome which will really be a union treaty. It will be the treaty of the constitution of the European union which is why it refers to European union.

I come back to my earlier point about Sidney Webb. The treaty will have almost entire power over almost everything that we can think of which has been so far the ultimate responsibility of the House. One day we shall ask the Attorney-General where the scope of the treaty does not run. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) efficiently gave us the list of areas affected which included culture, education and health. One can have reports on health and desirable standards, but how far does that go when it comes to voting money? In the Select Committee, we have seen what happens. We receive a report about the topic, then we get a programme of research, then a programme of co-operation and then legislation.

We see the assumption of powers to an unprecedented and unforeseen degree. Just as I believe that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup misled us about the powers of the Crown and the constitution, and just as I think that the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East—I leave him to comment on this—may not have described fully and in a legal way the impact of the Single European Act, so I believe that the Prime Minister, either voluntarily or involuntarily, through bad briefing or through tactics, is trying to tell us that the magic word "subsidiarity" will save us from the final and absolute power which we shall now transfer to the European institutions.

When people come to us in our surgeries to ask about prospective legislation about which they have read in the newspapers, they will say, "What can you do about it?" We shall say, "We will go to the Scrutiny Committee and to European Standing Committees A and B. We will tell the Minister what we want, but there is qualified majority voting." They will say, "How can you stop it?" We shall say, "I am sorry. We cannot stop it." They will ask what they can do and some hon. Members will have to tell them to go to their MEP because in the new treaty there is a long-stop in co-decision. How many people will come to us when they have heard that? We all know that people will go where decisions are made.

We have here a treaty whose consequences I have tried to paint in a fair and objective way. However, just as in the past we have had two versions and the results have been unexpected, even by those who promoted the treaties, so it will be with this treaty, if it is endorsed. The House will lose its powers and so will the voters who sent us here.

6.26 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) in a European debate. As a member of European Standing Committee B, the material for which is supplied by the Select Committee on European Legislation of which he is Chairman, I take the opportunity to pay tribute to his tremendous work for us and for the House as a whole in that context.

I add my most sincere and warmest congratulations to the Prime Minister and to the Government on the extraordinary and remarkable treaty which they brought home from Maastricht. I cannot recall any major international negotiation on which one party came away with 100 per cent. of his desiderata. That appears to have happened on this occasion——

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Come on!

Mr. Davies: I will demonstrate the truth of what I am saying if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me.

That great achievement is clearly the result of two factors. The first is the remarkable negotiating skill of the Prime Minister and of my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The second, which is no less important, is the willingness of our European partners to go a long way to accommodate us. That in itself is a reflection of the tremendous success of the personal diplomacy in which the Prime Minister has been engaged in Europe since he took office a year ago.

As a result of those two factors, we have not only a treaty which allows us the two major derogations that have played such a major part in our debate so far, but a treaty whose architecture and contents have British fingerprints all over them. The architecture is the intergovernmental structure on which I know that the Government set so much store.

Let me take three important elements from the contents. The first is the convergence criteria for economic and monetary union, which is an extremely well worked

out British proposal which has been accepted by our partners. The second is the proposal that, for the first time, non-compliers with Community directives should be fined for their non-compliance. That has also been accepted. That, incidentally, gives the lie to the suggestion that British proposals are always of a centrifugal nature when they are not deliberately obstructive. This is a very integrationist proposal, but one which, I am glad to say, is also characteristically pragmatic and sensible. The third is the concept of subsidiarity which we, as the whole world knows, were instrumental, together with the Germans, in bringing into the treaty.

I should like to highlight four aspects of the treaty, of which the first is subsidiarity. The subsidiarity clause establishes a new and promising basis for the evolution of the Community. One thing that will flow from that is that the institutions of the Community will be able to concentrate on their own extremely important jobs instead of feeling that they have to justify their existence by continuing to extend indefinitely the periphery of their activities and interfering in the competence of individual member states. I hope that we shall shortly see an end to the kind of nonsense with which European Standing Committee B had to cope yesterday morning when we were discussing draft resolutions and recommendations on sexual harassment. I cannot think of a less justifiable waste of the Commission's bureaucratic resources than that, or of a more inappropriate interference in the area of proper competence of nation states.

I hope that from now on we shall begin to get from the European Court of Justice what I call "negative jurisprudence" and that the court will feel able, on the basis of the subsidiarity clause, to throw out initiatives which are inappropriate to and inconsistent with subsidiarity. I hope that we shall then not only have the existing positive jurisprudence, but negative jurisprudence also, with clear guidelines to remove the possibilities for mutual suspicion and disagreement between the member states and the European Community and its institutions, from which we have already suffered too much.

In that context, I hope also that subsidiarity will begin to reduce the suspicion that some hon. Members of all parties continue to have about everything that comes out of Brussels. I hope especially that that will help people to see that there is no fundamental conflict between our role and our constitutional importance and those of the European Parliament.

Under subsidiarity, it is clear that we, the individual member states, decide what functions should be devolved to the Community and what functions should be properly exercised by it because they can be exercised more effectively at Community level. Once the essential decision on giving a certain function to the Community has been made, the question of the weightings between the different institutions of the Community in the way in which they take decisions and carry out responsibilities within their area of competence is not a matter involving any further loss of competence or sovereignty of this House. We and the European Parliament exist on separate planes. We each have our own roles. It is fundamental nonsense to believe that there is some kind of zero sum game between ourselves and the European Parliament and that an increase in its powers is made necessarily at the expense of ours, and vice versa. I hope that we shall be able to discard that illusion.

The second aspect that I should like to highlight is foreign policy. That must be the pre-eminent area in which we can be most effective as a Community. As an individual country, our scope for bringing our influence to bear and affecting the future course of events in different parts of the world is minimal and, in many cases, non-existent. However, as a Community we are enormously powerful. We are potentially one of the world's superpowers. If anybody came to this globe from Mars to study human affairs, especially in the political area, he would be enormously struck by the contrast between the economic Community which has been an economic superpower for some time, and the fact that, as a political power, the Community remains a minnow. That can and must change.

In the next century, I should like to see the European Community or the European Union—as we may come to call it—become one of the world's superpowers. Along with the United States and Japan, it should form one of the three essential poles of stability, prosperity and civilisation on this earth. To me, that is a noble and worthwhile goal, but we can achieve it only by developing effective mechanisms for a common foreign policy.

I do not pretend that I am totally satisfied with what is in the treaty on that subject or that I regard it as the last word. I am not totally confident that the Presidency acting alone will, in all cases, be able to provide either the resources or the continuity to enable us to develop that effective and coherent foreign policy. Although the Commission is not totally excluded from that area of the treaty, its restricted role introduces an element of artificiality. In foreign policy, it is unnatural to distinguish between the political and the diplomatic on the one hand and the economic on the other. Given that the Commission has responsibility for economic and trade policy and, if need be, for trade sanctions, it cannot be sensible to keep it out of the formulation of a common foreign policy. However, one must be grateful for the substantial step forward that has been taken, and I am.

I hope that we can celebrate the introduction of limited qualified majority voting by overriding the unacceptable Danish veto which, at present, is preventing the European Community from lifting its sanctions on South Africa.

Through my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, who is now on the Treasury Bench, I should like to express to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary my hope that we can inaugurate a common foreign policy by bringing our influence to bear on the events in Yugoslavia rather more effectively than we have up to now. Serbian aggression against Croatia has, up to now, been unrestrained and unsanctioned. Tens of thousands of people have already been killed. If it continues, the figure may be hundreds of thousands before long. The cities of Croatia have been destroyed, including Split and Dubrovnik, which are among the most historic in Europe.

The third aspect that I wish to highlight is the social chapter. I believe that the 11 have scored an own goal and that we have scored a remarkable coup—*[Laughter.]* I have great regard for the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice); he laughs, but I hope that he will listen to what I am about to say, with which I believe that he will find it difficult to take issue. I shall outline three simple propositions and should like to know with which one, in practice, he or any of his right hon. and hon. Friends wish to take issue. The first proposition is that one cannot regulate oneself into prosperity. The second is that

[Mr. Davies]

if one starts to regulate the conditions and the maximum hours of work, one starts to affect the cost of labour, the demand for labour and how competitive one's businesses are. By definition, if one reduces working hours, one also reduces productivity, output, the demand for labour and, therefore, the country's level of employment. Those are simple propositions.

My third proposition is that if the Community as a whole decides to reduce its average productivity it will be less competitive than not only the other industrialised countries, such as Japan and North America, but the newly industrialised countries, and investment, whether from foreign or Community investors, will tend to go to other places. We shall thus undermine the basis of our future jobs and prosperity.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Could one not argue that Germany regulated itself into prosperity? By making generous social provisions, Germany created the industrial climate that has enabled it to be highly competitive.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. Germany achieved, through free market policies—policies which this country began to implement only in the 1980s—the highest productivity levels in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. It then decided to appropriate some of those productivity gains by means of social legislation. I accept that Germany has the least to fear from the introduction of the social chapter. The Germans, Dutch and other northern European countries are imposing on the rest of the Community the industrial costs which they have already accepted and which they can withstand because of their high productivity.

Anyone who seriously wants the Community to move forward to monetary union and a single currency must think seriously about the consequences of the social chapter on the potential viability of a single currency regime. Once a country denies itself the weapon of devaluation to compensate for lower average productivity, it is particularly important that economies within the Community with lower average productivity should be able to compensate by using their natural advantages. If those advantages are in the form of cheaper or more flexible labour, they should be allowed to utilise them. An effective integrated economy cannot exist without more flexible prices, markets and labour markets. History will pay great tribute to the judgment and resolution of the Government in fighting the nonsense of the social chapter which, in retrospect, will be considered a mistake.

I shall not list the potential advantages of a single currency because I spoke in the House three years ago about the advantages for trade and business and, therefore, output and wealth creation, and the advantages in terms of beating inflation. Those are now generally accepted. I had some difficulty following the Government when they said that there were political disadvantages. I see no threat to the sovereignty of the House through having a single currency or common monetary institution—far from it. After all, the fight for the sovereignty of the House in the 17th century was about this place being able to determine not monetary policy, but fiscal policy, which I shall continue to defend. Monetary policy was always a matter for the King and the responsibility of the executive branch. I pay tribute to the executive branch in this country because it has already given up the devaluation weapon and said that it is a self-defeating way of compensating for failure in the economy. Therefore, we lose nothing by enshrining that policy.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): My hon. Friend is quite wrong on this. The Government may have decided that membership of the exchange rate mechanism should be managed in such a way that we do not devalue, but if we wish to devalue, we can. My hon. Friend's remarks about a single currency alarm me greatly because I much admire his intellect, not to mention the fluency of his speech. But I urge him to accept that a single currency, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) made clear the other day, means a massive transfer of political and economic power to the centre.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend and I share many ideas, including, I believe, those on monetary policy. Although the gold standard is no longer practical, it was not a bad thing. It was not a destructive episode in the monetary history of humanity. When we adhered to the gold standard, the House had no say in monetary policy because the money supply was dictated arbitrarily and objectively by the volume of gold discovered in the world. I doubt whether our predecessors in this place before 1914 thought that the powers of the House were compromised or undermined as a result.

If we are to adopt a single currency, we must achieve the theoretical advantages which are there to be grasped. If we are to achieve those in practice, we must first prepare the ground carefully. I pay tribute to the convergence criteria, which were largely a British proposal. Secondly, we should consider carefully the statutes of the monetary institution. The document before us goes a long way towards providing for the independence of the monetary institution, which will be a crucial element in the success of a single currency. However, I should like to go further and suggest that the minimum term of appointment of the governors of the institution should be eight rather than five years, to ensure that it goes way beyond the electoral cycle of any member state. I should prefer that the appointments are not given to the governors of the banks of individual member states. It would be undesirable if governors from the central banks of member states felt that they had, in some way, to be the advocates of the interests of their own member states. If the project is to be successful, it is vital that, as with the Swiss national bank, when the board of that monetary institution meets, it has only one consideration in mind—how to reconcile the requirements of price stability and liquidity in the Community as a whole.

Having achieved this excellent treaty of Maastricht and secured the derogation on monetary policy, by which the Government have set so much store, may I make a plea to them? In the morrow of great victory, will they show some equanimity and, above all, not give business in this country or abroad the impression that in practice we are any less committed to a single currency than any of the Twelve or that we are any less likely to be a part of it? If that impression were unfortunately given—I am sure that it will not be—investment from both British and international investors, would be deflected from this country and it would go to the continent to other areas likely to adopt the single currency. Moreover, in that

event, it might become difficult to manage our parity in the years leading up to 1996-97. Those currencies which currently belong to the exchange rate mechanism and are not perceived by the markets as likely to join at least the first echelon of a single currency may come under pressure in the market. People will be reluctant to hold them, and that would have unfortunate consequences in the form of higher interest rates.

It is also important for the City to ensure that the central bank and monetary institution come here. I totally accept the assurances that I have received that the derogation negotiated at Maastricht does not reduce our chances of having the central bank in the City of London. I take great comfort from that assurance.

I look forward to this country being in the vanguard of the single currency because of the advantages that it will bring us and the Community. We shall be there thanks to the excellent monetary and economic management that we have enjoyed in the 1980s and will continue to enjoy for the rest of the 1990s under a Conservative Government.

6.48 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I shall mention some of the issues to which the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) referred, although there seemed to be a lack of logic in his remarks because he cheered the Government on while encouraging them to be careful.

Unlike the Labour party, my party was at least prepared to table an amendment to the motion, so I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. People sometimes think of Northern Ireland Members as isolationists, but we have always played a role within the United Kingdom. Although the United Kingdom is on the continental shelf, it has played a positive part in Europe's history. Our people have regularly rallied to save Europe from military and political dictatorships.

Religiously, to go to the other extreme, we were partners in giving Europe a living Christian faith. Northern Ireland, as part of the United Kingdom, shared in that significantly as the old Celtic Christian church sent missionaries throughout the continent, and there were Ulstermen in the Napoleonic war and both world wars. We are not isolationist, but we question whether incipient integration is actually the way forward.

Reference has been made to economic and monetary union, which have played a role in the discussions. Closet federal Europeans earlier maintained that the EC was merely a gigantic free trade area; now they boldly affirm that political and monetary union were always at the heart of the treaty of Rome. The Prime Minister has returned from Maastricht and claimed that federalism and the opening of the door to a delayed decision on monetary union is the successful result of his able negotiations. What is the reality? Although the countries of the European Free Trade Association had worked out trade arrangements with the Community, recent decisions of the European Court ruled them to be incompatible with the treaty of Rome.

I shall take up some of the comments of the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding on a single currency. I do not believe that it will necessarily enhance trade opportunities; I think that those who have argued that have done so superficially. Japan has not found the fluctuations of the yen against the dollar and European currencies a serious barrier to its ability to increase exports. The United Kingdom sharply increased its volume of exports to the United States in the 1980s, when the dollar gyrated wildly.

Let us compare that with our experience in the EC. I am glad that two Treasury Ministers are present. Perhaps the Chancellor, when he winds up, will he confirm that we have maintained a huge, if diminishing, trade deficit with the EC, amounting to a total loss since 1978—if my figures are correct—of £54,270 million, as against a profit in trade with the rest of the world of £75,186 million. Therefore, is it surprising that the Ulster Unionist party pleads for a wider vision and a clear protection of our interests and those of the old Commonwealth countries in any new European arrangements?

During those 23 years, what one might term our membership fees in Europe have shown net outflow of at least £15,036 million according to the 1991 HMSO Pink Book. The Government regularly claim that they want value for money. Are we obtaining that in Europe? The Confederation of British Industry has stated that the agreement is good for business. British business and industry must sell itself better, certainly in Europe, and maintain its markets with the rest of the world, which may turn away from us as we turn more towards Europe.

Some might well say, "Ask not what Europe can do for the United Kingdom, but what the United Kingdom can do for Europe." However, it might be more salutary to ask: what part of Europe? Perhaps we can be of greater help by standing further apart from the new colossus, bridging the world with our American, African and Asian connections, as well as greater European contacts.

We should bear in mind one narrower aspect: the principle of subsidiarity, through which democratic processes should be devolved to Northern Ireland—and I also echo the cries from Scotland and Wales. The European grants, correctly assigned to Northern Ireland due to its isolation within the market and its relative poverty, should not be gobbled up by parsimonious Treasury Ministers as they hide behind the concept of additionality.

I have for a long time been suspicious of the doctrine of gradualism in politics and the foibles of the Foreign Office, which uses the double-speak of diplomacy, as I saw in the Anglo-Irish diktat and now smell in Maastricht. We have been assured that major European policy decisions, especially on foreign affairs, will have to be unanimous. However, as has already been mentioned, Germany quickly broke ranks with the rest of the EC and the world over Croatia, which led, in the words of our Foreign Secretary, to "an acceptable compromise".

Perhaps we can find some hidden logic if we compare Chancellor Kohl's statement of 28 November when he said:

"European economic and political union is irreversible."

His headlong flight to recognise Croatian independence also helped lead to the fragmentation of Yugoslavia—a part of Europe. Will other "acceptable compromises" be imposed?

What is the Government's view within the European family on those countries that have accepted and signed the treaty of Rome and the Helsinki agreement? Those treaties accept the territorial boundaries of member states, yet the countries that sign them blithely ignore their undertakings. Gibraltar is one such glaring example and, nearer home, the false claim of the Irish Republic is another. It broke the international agreement of 1925 and,

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

in its 1937 constitution, made de jure claim over Northern Ireland. For years, that was shrugged off merely as an aspiration or dismissed as Unionist propaganda, not to be taken literally or seriously. Now the Belfast newspaper, the *Irish News*, argues for the retention of such a claim in articles 2 and 3, while the Dublin Supreme Court described the matter as a "constitutional imperative".

We have referred to promises and understandings given in the European context. Promises were given at Sunningdale in 1973 that articles 2 and 3 were to be withdrawn and were repeated before Hillsborough in 1985. The improper claim remains as a spur to terrorists, proxy bombers for those who see the claim as a "constitutional imperative".

What is the position in Europe, where we recognise each other as partners? I believe that the Irish Republic should join the democratic countries in the new Europe and renounce such a claim, as Germany did over Alsace and Lorraine. The reunited east and west Germany had to endorse the Oder-Neisse line before it was recognised. The Ulster Unionist position on that is clear from our amendment. We maintain the integrity of our nation as we promote better relations between neighbours. At this season of the year we should remind ourselves of the parable that neighbours are not simply the people who live next door, rich friends, or even merely those with whom we agree. In that context, I trust that we as a nation will continue to maintain our integrity and influence.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): It is now almost 7 o'clock and the Standing Order limiting speeches to 10 minutes must be applied.

6.58 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): It is an honour to follow the remarks addressed to the House by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). Like him, I am a member of a union. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is formed by people with one language, with sentiments in common and by their feeling and will to make it work. That is the union that I understand.

Today we are considering a union of Europe, and I do not know how to relate to it. I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), who almost conveyed the impression that he had been parachuted in to an Amazonian jungle in which democratic accountability plays no role, and that we needed the benefit of a judgment on arbitrage and merger policy from New York city. Ours is a democratic country, in which democratic accountability lies at the heart of the relationship between the citizen and the state.

The House will have noticed how assiduous the Leader of the Opposition was yesterday in not speaking one word about democracy and how the peoples of this land hold their Governments to account. Nor did he raise one word about the history of his own great movement, about the fact that the working people of this country were urged to organise and to use their vote, through which they could change the policies under which they lived. In our democratic age, that is essential to the concept of our rule of law. We expect the law to be enforced, we expect it to be held because every citizen who lives under that law may change it.

In the treaty of union, where is the mechanism by which we may change the law? Where is the mechanism whereby we may hold Ministers accountable? We have witnessed the reduction of a great Department of State—the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—to a branch office in Whitehall. Our farmers, seeking retribution or justice, and our consumers, who are equally seeking those concepts, now have to go to Brussels, for there is no way in which we may satisfy their aspirations. We have handed over that power.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), the former Foreign Secretary, advanced some curious concepts of constitutional independence. If constitutional independence is what sovereignty is, I do not know how one can reduce it by pooling it. That is a contradiction in terms. Sovereignty says nothing about the state one lives in, whether it is a democracy or an autocracy, but it means constitutional independence. That is what has been at issue since the Single European Act—I was not here before that—and today with the treaty of union.

I cannot give over any of the powers that I, as a Member of Parliament, elected by the citizens of Aldridge-Brownhills—and each of us elected by our respective constituents—was given when I came to this Parliament. Yet every leading member of the Government and the Opposition talks as if we were merely bankers. Our country, as a nation, has a spirit and will—it is much bigger than merely the mechanisms of markets. We are humbled and brought low by them, but the spirit of man—and I now have to say woman—and the freedoms that we enjoy lie within our grasp as long as we hold this House.

That is what we have lost, in the sense that the people scorn us because of the way we march to tunes through the Lobby. We can no longer represent their wills or their expression. Of course we scorn that. We came here knowing that, if injustice existed, we could set it right.

The Leader of the Labour party—of all parties—yesterday stood there and talked about passing away the power to redress the grievances of our citizens. The speed limit on our motorways was reduced the other day, and I give a cheer for that. For years, I have wanted the Government to reduce the speeds of lorries and buses going down the M1 and the M6, but Europe did it. It imposed it on our system of government, and now we cannot change it, whether it was right or wrong.

Since John Locke and the formation of our constitution through the late 18th and the 19th centuries, the question has been, where does authority lie? We do not have sovereignty in this House; it is a shorthand for the sovereignty of the people. That is who we represent, and those are the arguments that we have to judge.

Is it not shaming that the leaders of great parties cannot tell us that they are asking us to set aside our ability to live under laws that we set? Hitherto, when they asked us to obey those laws, we have known that we could change them, but hereafter a combination of people with different languages, understandings and cultures can set, and are by combination setting, upon us standards, rules and laws which may be suitable for Greece, central or northern Europe, France or Spain but which are not right for us. We have a choice.

So many hon. Members have poured scorn, but what makes a political society work? The greatest level of polity—political organisation—is democratic self-government. There is no higher form of government. One can expand

the boundaries, and because it is the sentiment of the people that one should expand the boundaries, it has manifestly worked for nearly two centuries in the United Kingdom. We break that trust by handing over power to unelected people without any mechanism for changing their decisions. How can people have faith in us if we hold our job to redress the grievances of those who set us here as unimportant?

I urge those on both Front Benches to reflect on how they can make up for that democratic lack. The great Labour party—which brought together militants, because it thought that they knew what they could do for the working people of this country—is scornfully setting democracy aside. I watched its bemused leader struggling with economic concepts which he can barely grasp. I say this with scorn, because the leader of the Labour party can no longer hold out to his people the prospect that they may change the law through this place.

Were the Labour party to have the trust of its people, it could legislate for every item in the social chapter tomorrow. It could make that the central point of its election manifesto if it is so profoundly excited by it. Then it could justify to the people the costs and benefits associated with it.

Why does the Labour party want others to introduce those measures? Is it because the Labour party does not believe that it could convince the people, on its own terms, that those are meritorious things to do? We must ask the question, why? Is it because the Labour party feels that it could not convince the people but could achieve its objectives through a centralist bureaucracy in Europe—rather than through argument and persuading its own people?

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Mr. Shepherd: No, I shall not give way.

How do we control that process? No one is tackling that. Ministers are saying, "We good fellows will talk together, and we'll come up with a decision." What will happen? Let us assume that 100 per cent. of the people in this country dislike or profoundly object to a law. What do they do?

Let us think back to the proposition of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who reminded us of our history. We changed law by riot. That is not the way. That is not the sort of society that I would wish to belong to. The tensions of racism and fascism are rising in Europe—all the things which we resolutely moved armies to defeat in the past. By holding on to that possession, the people of this country would be able to hold on to the banners of freedom.

We have watched eastern Europe grapple for freedom and the liberty that we enjoy, yet I have heard the House of Commons talk solemnly as if this were merely a question of a pile of money at one end of a table or the issuing of financial intruments. It is not—it is about the spirit and life of a nation. I cannot let this go down—sinking—without leastways an exclamation mark and a cry, "It is wrong."

7.7 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who is a near neighbour. I hope that the *Hansard* writers will be able to capture the spirit in which his speech was given. It struck me as being very 19th century in its oratory, and I compliment him.

In many ways the hon. Gentleman's speech was 20 years too late, because the horse has bolted. The arguments about whether to join the European Community were won or lost two decades ago. I campaigned against continuing British membership in 1975, and we lost. I am not an enthusiastic European, but we cannot turn back.

We must try to meet many of the objections made by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills. Clearly the Community is not a democratic institution. However, the cry for a return to an era of independence and economic autonomy for Britain is not an available option, so we must make the best deals possible in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

It was an interesting debate even before the speech by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills. The introduction by the Foreign Secretary—the thinking man's Jeremy Beadle—was exceptional. Once he got over the task of being his own warm-up man, he settled down to a logical and persuasive speech. He commented on the Opposition's silence in terms of tabling an amendment, but there has been a far greater and more dramatic silence from the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

I am delighted to participate in the debate, which is not part of the ratification process. There will be no treaty to sign for a couple of months, and I hope that the Government do not assume that, having won this debate, the task of getting Parliament to ratify is over, because we have not even begun the process. There is much life left in people who wish to argue further. This legislature does little to impress its views on the process of declaring war or peace or ratifying treaties. We probably have the least effective role of any western legislature. We shall have a greater role to play in the Community, but that role is not being exercised now.

This year has been epoch-making for the European Community at Maastricht, NATO at the Rome summit, and we are now witnessing the collapse of the Soviet Union. We were told that Maastricht was a victory for everyone and that for Britain it was game, set and match. A Conservative Member pleaded for magnanimity by the Government. Having won so brilliantly, perhaps we should throw a few crumbs to those whom we crushed yet again—the French and the Germans who need the solace of being able to tell their electorates that perhaps they got a little from the treaty.

Listening to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and reading the deferential sycophantic press after Maastricht, I was reminded of an imaginary conversation between Napoleon and Stalin about who had the better newspapers. Stalin said that Pravda was better. Napoleon concurred, saying that if he had had Pravda he might have been able to convince Europe that he had won at Waterloo. The Prime Minister had more than Pravda at his disposal to convince the British public—I am not sure how successfully—that he had won the debate.

Maastricht was a benchmark because after 12 years of Conservative government—the Conservatives have been in power for 50 of the past 65 years—we have finally been confirmed as a minor power. At one time we failed to cut a dash in the international arena, which caused a senior American politician to say that we had lost an empire and not yet found a role. We still do not cut a dash in

[Mr. Bruce George]

international relations, and we are lucky if we can now cut a dash in European relations. That is probably the result of a failing economy.

The Prime Minister dug out Eisenhower to support his negotiating style. I looked at Stephen Ambrose's biography of Eisenhower and the Eisenhower diaries, and I urge the Prime Minister to read what Eisenhower thought of the British negotiating style in 1956. I suspect that these versions are rather less charitable than the one that the Prime Minister expressed yesterday. I applaud the Prime Minister for his success in maintaining the Atlanticist tradition of Europe. As the Foreign Secretary said, it was a damned near-run thing.

Two models were on offer at Maastricht. One was the Atlanticist model, in which NATO is the prime security organ for western Europe and north America. That is not a cold war NATO but a reformed, rebalanced NATO with new defence and arms control strategies involving the cutting of our forces and a reaching out to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The alternative model, proposed by France with the connivance of Germany, involved a gradual move towards the European Community being the security organ for Europe. Thankfully, in Maastricht the Europeanists took second place and the Atlanticists won. However, it was not game, set and match because the French achieved many of their objectives. The issue will arise again in a few years when the Western European treaty is renegotiated. Having sustained NATO as the primary security organ, we must not allow those who are unsuccessful this time to win by stealth. We must not allow salami slicing of NATO powers gradually to transfer them to the Western European Union so that the WEU does not function, as we hope, as a bridge between NATO and the European Community. We must prevent the WEU from becoming the executive and military arm of the Community until such time as may emerge in future when we require Europe to be responsible for its own security. That time is not yet.

The French are basically wrong in seeking to embroil Europe in preventing Germany from reasserting its economic and military power. That strategy is bound to fail because it flies in the face of logic and history. History has shown that Germany has been constrained not by Europe, but by external powers—notably the United States. I am not making an anti-German speech—merely pointing to the lessons of history. For military and political reasons, it is vital not to push the Americans out of Europe by over-accentuating the Europeanness of defence. We must keep north America involved in European security because we are kith and kin and belong to the same political traditions as Canada and the United States. It is pivotal to western security and interests that the United States should maintain its commitment to the security of the European continent. Eastern Europeans and the Soviets, or whatever we call them now, see far more clearly than many Frenchmen or Germans the great importance of NATO surviving for the foreseeable future. It is important not to allow what might be a temporary victory at Maastricht to be lost to those who do not want to attack NATO frontally but want to attack it by the back door. Such people have not necessarily lost.

NATO was satisfied with what happened at Maastricht, but the game is not over. NATO must formulate a proper relationship with the WEU. There was a meeting of Foreign Ministers today at which our Foreign Secretary was present. I hope that he was not in the frivolous mood with which he made his speech in this debate. As a result of that meeting, NATO has greater flexibility. It can attend meetings of the CSCE and has an advanced role in humanitarian assistance and emergency aid. I welcome that, because NATO has great relevance to the future. Tomorrow there will be a meeting of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council. It is a NATO meeting not of the 16, but of the 25. The power in security must lie with NATO and not with the European Community.

7.18 pm

Sir Geoffrey Howe (Surrey, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on the quality of his speech, which was filled with passion. We all have a great deal of respect for my hon. Friend. Whatever our views on the matter, we are speaking for our people, for those whom we represent, and in that spirit I congratulate my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary on their achievement at the Maastricht summit. They obtained a result which was in the best interests of all the people of the nation, those in Aldridge-Brownhills as everywhere else. The result was also in the best interests of Europe as a whole. One is essential to the other and the Maastricht outcome is the fruit of the well-balanced and committed approach to Europe which is the hallmark of the Conservative Government.

While the principal virtues of Maastricht continue, apparently, to cause alarm in some parts of the country —Bethnal Green, Chingford and now Aldridge-Brownhills—they happily command support, as they should, much more widely. The first achievement is the establishment of a stronger framework for a common European foreign and security policy, on the basis that unanimity rather than majority voting should be the norm. The second—the point made by the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George)—is the strengthening of a European defence identity. For the very reasons that he gave, we need to anchor a stronger Germany in a stronger Europe, with the Western European Union as an integral part of the defence component of the new European union, acting in conformity with the position adopted by the Atlantic alliance. I agree with him that we have secured the result that we need there.

Maastricht also strikes the right balance in increasing the democratic legitimacy of the European Community by expanding the legislative and non-legislative powers of the European Parliament because, rather than being in competition with those of this House, they are supplementary to them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said, the House can take pleasure in the success of my right hon. Friend in securing a place for a number of important British ideas. They include the European ombudsman, the enhanced role of the Community Court of Auditors, the greater powers of the European Court of Justice to compel obedience to Community law, and a worthwhile subsidiarity clause. I agree with the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) about the importance of that at the beginning of the new treaty.

Connoisseurs of these debates will relish the way in which these last two changes represent two different

strands of British wisdom over the misleadingly simple and sometimes foolishly simplified concept of federalism. In the first place, the scope of potential federal activity has been limited, exactly as European enthusiasts would wish, by a tighter definition of subsidiarity. On the other hand, the power of the centre, the authority of Community law—probably the most federal feature of the unique Community constitution—has been substantially and rightly increased, exactly as insisted upon by the Euro-sceptics.

I come next to what is by far the most important component of the Maastricht agreement—the acceptance that Europe, with or without this country, will have moved to a single currency by, at the latest, 1999. I say "will" although I agree with the hon. Members who say that nobody can be sure of that. I also agree with what was said by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), which was endorsed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)—that if things go well, a single currency embracing at least Germany, France, Benelux, Denmark and the EFTA countries is very likely by the earlier date of 1997. To establish a legally binding process leading to full EMU, backed by a clear end date, is a truly historic development and if it comes about, it will do more to build Europe as a concrete reality in people's lives than any other policy or initiative since 1958.

The truth is that, for all our rhetoric on either side of the House, Britain's destiny is crucially linked to the success or failure of the new monetary order that has been emerging since the mid-1980s in continental Europe. With every year that passes, those monetary arrangements have become more solid and, with that, Britain has become ever-more dependent on an economic system that lies beyond our immediate control. It is that which should have dictated our early entry into the exchange rate mechanism. Five years too late, we joined.

I am glad to say that, over the past 12 months, we have been more and more effectively engaged in the vital EMU negotiations. My right hon. Friends have been shrewd, pragmatic and effective in their pursuit of an EMU deal that would be acceptable not just to 11 but to 12 members. The form of EMU that has emerged from Maastricht bears the important imprint of United Kingdom priorities in a number of key respects. Making common cause, as we have, with Bonn and Frankfurt and thus forging a powerful alliance, we have ensured that full EMU will be open only to countries that meet strict convergence criteria, that monetary policy will be transferred only in stage 3, that price stability will be the overriding objective of the system, that the European central bank will be politically independent of all outside control, that there will be no EC-wide macro policy administered by what the French called a European economic government.

On all those points, EMU is clearly a project of Anglo-German design. It is difficult to believe that, in due time, an EMU that is good enough to attract a share of German sovereignty, as I believe it will, will not be good enough to attract a share of British sovereignty as well.

Central to our position over several years has been the insistence that Britain should not be obliged to commit itself at too early a stage to take part in the final move to a single currency. The Prime Minister's success in retaining in the treaty an emergency exit arrangement of that sort—the right to take, at the appropriate moment, a separate decision on that point—has been and remains an important reassurance for opinion both inside and outside the House.

However, we must not delude ourselves into thinking that making use of that exit, by deciding not to opt in as it is more comfortably put, would be a cost-free option. Far from it—realistically, opting out may not be an option at all. Economic reality and employment opportunities have long established powerful counter-pressures in the other direction. As 23 prominent business and financial leaders, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), wrote in *The Times* last week:

> "We recognise that there are those, including some in Parliament, who have doubts as to the economic and monetary union agreed at Maastricht. We are in no doubt that it is crucial for Britain's economic prosperity that it be approved."

I agree. Outside an EMU of the core deutschmark bloc countries, the British economy would be vulnerable indeed. With no EMS left to provide a coherent framework of monetary discipline, the pound would have two options—either to attach itself, as a kind of non-playing member, to the ECU-zone, or else to drift aimlessly on the high seas. Either way, United Kingdom interest rates would need to be higher, as a risk premium would attach to holding sterling.

Our prospects of success against inflation, and of economic growth, would be prejudiced. Our factories and firms would suffer the double disadvantage of having to trade in a different currency from that of our partners and of finding that the United Kingdom was no longer an attractive site for inward investment. Whatever employment benefits might accrue from opting out of the social chapter would be more than offset, many times over, by opting out of EMU.

The last date for EMU is 1999, at which point it will now happen automatically. The first key date is December 1996, when the initial votes by qualified majority in the European Council occur. Theoretically, that vote could be taken as early as 1994. Under the treaty, Britain must decide, before the crucial vote takes place, whether it wishes to opt in or to opt out. We are dealing with what may be a compressed time scale. Therefore, it is by no means too early to address directly the central question of whether we want to be part of what is very likely to become the world's largest currency.

We have to make an important choice. Let me pose it again. On the assumption that the conditions for EMU that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done so much to hammer out are fulfilled, do we help to create an ecu that will probably be the currency of the world's largest trading bloc, the most conservatively managed of the major currencies, and likely to displace the dollar as the denominator of world trade, or do we want to plough a lonely furrow, on the outside looking in, losing our practical influence, in the name of a sovereignty that no longer exists, locked on to a conveyor belt, not to federalism, but to economic outer space? The choice that will face us is an important one. I have no doubt what decisions should be taken in the interests of this country.

I am reasonably confident that the Prime Minister knows the answer as well. As he told my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen):

> "If and when the decision is made to move forward, it would be desirable for as many members of the Community as possible to move collectively."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 866.]

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

I agree whole-heartedly with that. The Maastricht agreement is the first proof of the Prime Minister's determination in that direction, and the decision that will follow will be the next logical step.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I would appreciate it if hon. Members would assist the Chair by upholding the Standing Order which has been agreed.

7.29 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), the former Foreign Secretary, who, as always, made a constructive, wise speech. His quiet approach and manner rather belied what he was saying, which was basically that one could not opt out of the single currency and economic and monetary union and that one should not opt out of the social charter.

However, I shall not follow the right hon. and learned Gentleman because I wish to direct a couple of words to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who has just left the Chamber but who, I think all will agree, made an exceptionally powerful and passionate speech. But he is not the only person who is entitled to passion on these questions.

I am a Scotsman. Despite the fact that Her Majesty's Government are but poorly represented in Scotland, Scotland had the poll tax imposed upon it and we could do nothing about it. Secondly, I am a Liberal, and I do not accept that the form of electoral representation that we have in Britain is right for all time or the fairest. I have seen the time when we in the Liberal party had 20 per cent. of votes but no representation in the European Parliament. That is not being particularly democratic. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills was splendid in his rhetoric, but there is another argument that can be put in another way.

Apart from the arguments in favour of the amendment in the name of the Liberal Democrats, on which we shall shortly vote, the amendment also has the intrinsic merit of presenting the House in the clearest terms with the basic choice that Britain faces about the sort of European Community that we want. Across the House and across the parties we are already agreed that there is a range of matters, financial, economic, environmental and social—we need not go over them all—on which it is not just advantageous but necessary for Britain to act in conjunction with its partners in the EC if the people are to retain some say in how the issues are influenced, decided and regulated. They do not have all that much say now in many of those areas.

Liberal Democrats take the view that that is best done by creating institutions of a federal nature which derive their authority directly from all the peoples of the Community, across borders, supranationally. That is a concept of open decision making. It is also a concept which, in accepting the diversity of our peoples, about which I have no agrument, looks beyond the borders of existing nation states to the ancient regions of Europe, such as Wales, Catalonia, Yorkshire, Scotland and Bavaria, and wishes to work for a decentralised structure which is the characteristic of federal structures and entrenches their rights to their cultural identities and the maximum control over their own lives.

"Europe des regions" will not happen quickly, but that is our goal and the decision at Maastricht to establish a council of the regions is a start which we applaud. As against that approach, there is the intergovernmental approach favoured by the Government, the Prime Minister and, I take it, by the Minister for Overseas Development, who is sitting on the Government Front Bench, which wishes to reserve the decisions that the Community makes to intergovernmental negotiation through the Council of Ministers and continues, even in the face of fundamental changes in scale—which they seem simultaneously to accept and reject—to cling to notions of national sovereignty which we contend are now simply unreal.

That was brought out rather well in a short exchange when an hon. Member asked the Foreign Secretary for clarification but did not get terribly much. The hon. Member asked whether our policy on what was Yugoslavia is our policy because it is our policy or because we have agreed with others that we will accept their view. The Foreign Secretary said that it is our policy to agree with other people what our view is. It was all quite interesting. The Minister may shake her head, but we shall go through such a hoop many times in the future. The idea that we must never decide foreign affairs matters by a majority vote is simply not the case.

The Government are seeking to retain the exclusive power of Governments, backed by national bureaucracies, to make decisions in secret, which is what they do now. An advertisement placed in *The Times* last month by the European Movement sums that up succinctly and well. It said:

"There is at present no genuine parliamentary control over Community legislation, either by the European Parliament or by member states' parliaments. Democratic accountability requires that Community laws be approved by the European Parliament as well as the Council of Ministers and that the Commission be clearly responsible to the Parliament. The procedures for unanimous voting and the use of the veto in Council must be reduced to a minimum . . . The traditional concept of national sovereignty can no longer serve the interests of the people of Britain or of other member states. The British Government should promote a sharing of sovereignty through democratic Community institutions in those policy areas which require a common approach while retaining responsibility for matters best handled nationally."

That was signed by a broad cross-section of British society and public opinion, including hon. Members from both sides of the House.

Many hon. Members agree with the Liberal Democrat amendment but feel that they cannot step outside the confines of party, especially since the Front-Bench spokesmen, as we heard yesterday and today, perceive these debates more as demonstrations of unity and occasions for inter-party criticism—leavened, one hopes, by a few good jokes—than as opportunities to examine issues openly and frankly. The Foreign Secretary found how dangerous it was to fall for a moment into frankness when he began to muse on the future of what was the Soviet Union because he was immediately pounced on. But we should be able to do that in a mature democracy.

Sadly, Maastricht widened rather than reduced the democratic deficit, but, paradoxically, at the same time, by the nature of the decisions made and by the depth of common purpose evident among the other 11, it clearly

represented an historic commitment to ever-closer union which, if it is to function with democratic acceptance, will in the end be federal.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, set out plainly and unequivocally why we are so profoundly unhappy about the opt-out arrangements for EMU and the social chapter, arguments underlined by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East. I shall not go over those arguments again. We have gained nothing and on the way have lost, for example, effective involvement in the central bank. We do not accept that investment is best bought by clinging to lower social standards.

I am sure that I speak for many when I say that I did not like seeing my country isolated at Maastricht. It need not have been. Nor, as far as I can see, did it achieve any particular advantages. On the contrary, it produced unnecessary uncertainties and roused old sleeping nationalist attitudes—beware the Germans, watch the French, perfidious Albion.

With great respect to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, the solution to our problems lies not in nationalism or mystic notions of sovereignty, but in constructive bridge building between our similar-sized powers in Europe. Maastricht took that forward, but more despite us than because of us.

7.39 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) will be glad to hear that I do not intend to follow him..I will comment only that I find some divergence between his claim that he is worried about his country, and his advocacy of totally surrendering its sovereignty to Europe.

Yesterday, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party, gave the House a potted history of the bad deeds of England and the United Kingdom in the history of Ireland. Speaking to the hon. Gentleman outside the House, I told him that I regretted that he had not started at the beginning.

The beginning of England's interference in Ireland, if one may call it that, began at the invitation of Pope Adrian, who gave Ireland to the English monarch Henry II at the price of Peter's pence, telling the King to bring the church of St. Patrick into line with the Church of Rome. I regret that the hon. Member for Foyle, who is not in his place, did not start at the beginning. As an Ulster Protestant and planter, I have no apology to make for the presence of the Protestant people in the island of Ireland, or for Britain within Ireland. The most peaceful years in Ireland were those lived under the authority of the United Kingdom Parliament.

Right hon. and hon. Members should take a look at the European Parliament and European Committees, and ask whether they would like to commit their future to that Parliament. I invite them to read the resolutions that were tabled and debated in the European Parliament during the Gulf crisis, and to note the outcome. Resolution after resolution was carried but then thrown out on a consequential vote, yet we are asked to give away our future to the institutions of Europe.

Everyone has something to say about Maastricht, but Jacques Delors has the most to say about it. He claims that the blueprint drawn up by his ad hoc group and tabled at the start of the discussions has taken a great step forward. One Labour Member said that we ought to be careful that gradualism was not pushed by Jacques Delors and his friends in such a way as to release the pressure on any of the brakes that were applied at Maastricht. From the documents before us, it appears that the basis of that gradualism has already been written into the treaty.

The House had a great debate on the social chapter. The rights of the working classes should be defended, and the House ought to legislate in their defence. This is where such legislation should be enacted. We should not hand over that responsibility to some European institution, and let it legislate for better conditions for the working classes of this country.

The House has a record second to none compared with Europe in respect of the battles that it has fought and won in deciding the best way forward for working class people. Powers are given in the treaty to our 11 European partners to use the institutions, procedures, and mechanisms of the treaty to carry forward their own social policies. We were told at the time that they had a treaty outside the Maastricht treaty. When one reads the small print, one discovers the concealed powers that lie beneath its surface.

We are all concerned about national security, but the treaty makes it clear in article D that the common foreign and security policy

> "shall include all questions related to the security of the European Union, including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence."

The platform has been built for further developments along those lines. That article also states:

> "The Union requests the Western European Union, which is an integral part of the development of the European Union, to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications."

That gradual process and vision of a federal Europe is clearly set out.

I was struck by Chancellor Kohl's remarks that the people of Europe must decide whether they want a European Germany or a German Europe. That kind of language should set alarm bells ringing in the ears of the whole of Europe. Yesterday, Chancellor Kohl returned home to celebrate the fact that he had led the Council of Ministers by the nose, in gaining recognition for Croatia. The platform for implementing Jacques Delors' directive is to be found already in the treaty.

As to foreign affairs, I am sure that we all feel concern about the majority voting system. If we had asked for a firm decision from Europe during the Gulf crisis, we would not have received one. I have for years been a member of the European Parliament's political committee, and when I attended one of its weekly meetings during the Gulf crisis, I witnessed nothing but confusion and attacks on those who were fighting to give freedom to the disputed territories. There was nothing but criticism of the allied forces' actions, yet today we are asked at least to say that the treaty is all right.

I admire the Prime Minister's achievements, but he was fighting a losing battle because the Single European Act had already been passed—and thus it leaves no room for any Prime Minister to get something good out of Europe. Perhaps now that the brakes have been put on and warning voices have been raised Europe will proceed a little more slowly. However, if any right hon. or hon.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Members believe that Europe has changed course, they have another think coming. They will soon see by Europe's actions what it intends to do in future.

I appreciate the spirit and passion displayed by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). As he said, we are being asked today to kill the spirit of our nation, and to say to its people, "Your nationalism, sovereignty, and status as a nation have ended: we will give you a new future which does not take into consideration your glorious past."

7.48 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) will understand if I do not follow him on the part played by Pope Adrian in Irish history.

I do not accept that the European Community's development means suffocating Britain as a nation—if it is a nation. My nation is Scotland. We have been part of the Westminster Parliament for a long time, but that does not alter the reality of Scottish history and culture, and of our nationhood. I doubt that the development of European institutions will threaten England's nationhood, undermine the logic of maintaining the United Kingdom, or of this Parliament taking important decisions—at least for the rest of our lifetimes.

Much of the debate—especially yesterday's opening speeches by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition—focused, understandably, on the development of a single currency and the question of the social chapter and the social charter. I shall not say much about those issues, but this evening's speech by a former Foreign Secretary—the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe)—struck me as a powerful demonstration of the extent to which the Government's efforts and their negotiating strength have been wasted in the argument about securing an opportunity to opt out.

The Chancellor's refusal to respond to the challenge issued by the Leader of the Opposition, who asked him whether he could envisage joining a common currency if Germany, France, Italy and other countries went ahead with it—and this morning's television interview—made it clear that he is not prepared to say that, in such circumstances, Britain would not join. Each of us knows in his heart of hearts that Britain would have to participate. It will damage our economy enormously if, in the run-up to the development of a common currency, many years go by in which it is thought that we will not be in there from the beginning.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North spoke of the development of a common foreign, security and defence policy. The draft treaty is an historic document, which lays down important ways in which the European institutions will develop in the years—probably decades—that lie ahead. It covers a wide range of important issues in addition to the social charter and the single currency.

I was glad to hear the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). I do not regard NATO as the holy grail; for years, Labour's policy has been the mutual dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw pact. Now, however, we are faced with the dissolution of the Warsaw pact, along with the elevation of NATO to an important role in the Europe of the future.

No one is suggesting that NATO should be wound up or disbanded in the short run, but we must recognise that events have moved on. There is a logic in developing the Western European Union. Only three members of the European Community are not WEU members. One is Greece, which the Maastricht summit decided will join; that leaves only the Danes—who may well join—and Ireland. According to Prime Minister Haughey, Ireland too will eventually join.

The Western European Union is, in effect, a collective defence treaty. It constitutes a clear agreement that, if one member country is attacked, the others are obliged to help it to resist that attack. Surely it makes sense for us to face up to the logic of current developments. The WEU will develop and grow. Defence policy exists to defend our peoples from attack, but it is also the servant of foreign policy: it is unrealistic to believe that common foreign and security policies can be developed in the Community without implications for European defence policy. We should participate in the relevant discussions, and recognise that the WEU has an increasing role to play.

The Community budget was not discussed at Maastricht, but its distribution is surely important to the Community's future. If, post-Maastricht, the Government do nothing else, they must put reform of the common agricultural policy at the heart of the negotiations in Europe. The matter will not be settled by the Agriculture Ministers; it will have to be settled by the European Council.

Last year, the CAP cost the Community £23,000 million. That is nonsense: 60 per cent. of the Community budget went on agriculture. The CAP has failed the producers, who are in dire straits—particularly in this country. It has raised the price of food above its necessary level, in this country and others; it has caused real damage to the developing countries, and to world trade; it is hugely costly. All in all, it is a disaster, and it should be resolved before anything else is discussed in Europe.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition said that it would be possible to find the money for increased convergence from the reform of the CAP. Does the hon. Gentleman share that view?

Mr. Strang: Yes. I believe that we must shift the budget, and spend more on regional policy. In 1991, our expenditure on the social fund constituted 7·3 per cent. of the total social fund budget. Four per cent. was spent on development aid, and only 11 per cent. was devoted to the regional fund. As I have said, 60 per cent. was spent on an agricultural policy that has been a complete disaster.

The common agricultural policy—originally developed by the Six as a vehicle for European integration—has become the Community's albatross. It must be radically transformed.

Mr. Budgen: How?

Mr. Strang: By collective decision-making; by the European Council. The CAP is not even serving producers in Europe, let alone those in this country.

Now is the time for us to stand back and look at the development of the European Community. We are part of that Community: we shall not withdraw from it. Our future lies in working with other Community member states. We must consider, then, what attributes we want

the Community to develop. In my view, the most desirable quality is a fundamental respect for human rights and democracy: we must enshrine that quality in the Community for the long-term future.

The Maastricht treaty makes a start along that road. According to its preamble,

"The Union shall respect fundamental rights as guaranteed by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and as they result from the constitutional traditions common to the Member States as general principles of Community law . . . The Union shall provide itself with the means necessary to attain its objectives and carry through its policies."

The European Convention on Human Rights is, of course, a Council of Europe declaration; it has its own Commission, Council of Ministers and court. However, it has not the authority to enforce its decisions. The Community needs to develop an institution that will make it impossible for a member state to remain a member if it departs from the conventions governing human rights and our democratic traditions.

It is no accident that it was Spain that advanced the idea of European citizenship—the right of free movement and, above all, the right to defend those human rights and democratic traditions. Turkey must not be allowed into the European Community: countries cannot be accepted as member states unless they respect fundamental human rights, and operate the democratic system enjoyed by this and other European countries.

That is especially important in a long-term context, in regard to the possible accession of eastern European countries. The history of such countries as Romania shows us that, above all, we must ensure that any country that joins the Community and then abandons its democratic tradition must be excluded from the Community and its political institutions. Such a ruling would constitute a firm sanction, and would prevent that from happening.

7.58 pm

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Earlier I gave an undertaking not to detain the House for more than three minutes. If my language is a little attenuated as a result, I apologise.

I wish to make three points. Maastricht, with its mechanistic considerations, did not address the two most serious questions now facing Europe with sufficient gravity and in sufficient detail. What it did address in considerable detail was the movement towards European monetary union; but that may, in due course, become an irrelevance.

First, let me deal with the two questions that were not dealt with in sufficient detail at Maastricht, although they were mentioned in peripheral communiqués. I refer, in the first instance, to the recession that is now worldwide. A growing number of commentators now say that it may become a world depression. We know what is going on in north America; we can all see what is happening in Japan. Moreover, there is the repatriation of capital in the middle east. In addition, there are terrible problems in western Europe and the awesome tragedy that is now unfolding in eastern Europe. Faced with such world pressures, we should be committing an act of supreme folly if the Group of Seven did not take measures to eliminate the possibility of the recession becoming a depression.

On Black Monday, the Group of Seven decided to reduce interest rates at a time when, as we now know, it was important to reduce interest rates. Although the western European, northern European and Pacific basin economies are screaming for a co-ordinated reduction in interest rates, we are, apparently, doing nothing. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has a good track record in identifying key international issues and getting people together to deal with them. I hope that in the very near future he will convene a Group of Seven meeting in London to tackle that question. He is well equipped to do so and London is the place to begin that process.

In addition, we still underestimate the speed with which the tragedy in Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine is unfolding. In 1946 the Marshall plan was put together—an act of supreme generosity on the part of the people of north America to help the people of western Europe to put their war-ravaged economies back on their feet. The problems that face us, in putting together an aid programme for eastern Europe, are much more complex than ones of mere generosity. The people of eastern Europe are proud and talented, but they have never had the opportunity to develop the enterprise culture. They have neither the banking systems nor the infrastructure to deal with aid programmes on the scale that is required now.

Western Europe has surplus manpower and womanpower. Compared with eastern Europe, we have immense resources, skills and all the talents that are required to help our brethren in eastern Europe, yet we are more or less silent. Now is the time, while there is still time, to put together a sophisticated programme, on the scale of the Marshall plan, so that we can help to reduce the awful social problems in other parts of Europe.

Let me give the House an example of just how clever we shall need to be. There is no point in sending large food convoys to Russia unless we ensure that the food is distributed in the hamlets, not in the cities. We must keep the farmers on the land. If we put the food into the big cities, the farmers will be pulled off the land. We shall destroy their capability to feed themselves in the months and years to come. If we are to solve that problem, a tremendous management effort will be required. Now is the time to begin it.

My last point is that economic and monetary union will not happen. It cannot happen. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) referred to the scandal of the common agricultural policy. If we are to achieve economic and industrial cohesion between northern and southern Europe, we shall need scores of billions of ecu to pay the poor economies of southern Europe not to do the things that they could do without economic and monetary union. The concept is flawed at its very heart. We shall see evidence of that in the next few months.

It may be that the pressures on the exchange rate mechanism, starting right now with today's 0·5 per cent. hike in German interest rates at a time of world recession, will pull apart the mechanism which, in effect, is the first stage of the whole movement towards economic and monetary union. The exchange rate mechanism is nonsense. Jacques Delors says that floating exchange rates are the grit in the oil. Floating exchange rates are the oil. They take the strain. It is like the differential gear on the back axle of a car: it allows the vehicle to manoeuvre without tearing itself apart on the back axle.

Within the three minutes that you have allowed me tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the one issue upon which a great deal of time was spent at Maastricht may prove to be

[Mr. John Butcher]

an irrelevance, while insufficient consideration was given to the two issues upon which a great deal of time should have been spent.

8.4 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Harold Wilson once said that a week is a long time in politics. Last week the Prime Minister returned from Maastricht in a blaze of media hype. If we believed what we read in Conservative newspapers, particularly the popular press, we would have thought that it was the greatest British victory since Waterloo. The Prime Minister referred to the result of the Maastricht negotiations as game, set and match for Britain. It was a completely inappropriate metaphor. Many might wonder why the Prime Minister chose to use that metaphor, since the British are notoriously bad tennis players. It was, moreover, an inappropriate metaphor as it conjured up the inappropriate image of Britain as a doughty defender besieged by marauding continentals.

It was the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) who reminded the Commons in his resignation statement—it was good to hear him again today—that Europe is not a zero sum game in which we can only win or lose and that a good European settlement is one in which the interests of all European Community members are taken into account. Above all, it was foolish to use the language of triumphalism when it is so obviously at variance with the facts.

The reality is that the United Kingdom's negotiating strategy at Maastricht was against the best interests of the nation. To opt out once can be put down to misfortune; to opt out twice is not merely carelessness—it is a major disaster for the British people. The first opt-out is the right to opt out of the third stage of economic and monetary union, an achievement of which the Government say that they are proud. It is abundantly clear that the right to opt out of EMU is a device to unite the Conservative party. That is clear not just to the Opposition but, according to the opinion polls, to the British people.

If one talks to most Government Ministers one finds that, whatever they say in public, they accept privately that if the single currency goes ahead Britain will have to join, but that the opt-out protocol was needed to secure the support of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and her friends in the Lobby.

The weakness of having the right to opt out as one's major bargaining objective is that one cannot influence other, more crucial decisions. In particular, the British Government's negotiators were unable to affect the crucial decision on the timing of the third stage. The one real surprise of the EMU treaty, and the great achievement of the French negotiators, was to secure that the final date for the start of the third stage is 1 January 1999. The Chancellor had always said that he was against a fixed final date, but because the whole of Britain's credit had been used up in securing the right to opt out, the Government were unable to influence that decision.

In private briefings, Ministers tell journalists that the fact that the opt-out clause has been secured does not prevent us from joining the single currency at some time in the future. The problem with that argument, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) pointed out yesterday in a notable speech, is that it creates very considerable uncertainty—uncertainty about the intentions of foreign investors and inward investment, uncertainty about domestic investment in this country and uncertainty in the City about whether it will retain its predominant position. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East that it would have been far better for this country if the Government had accepted the objective of a single currency. Such a decision by the British at Maastricht would have lent credibility to our anti-inflation policies, it would have provided the economic and monetary framework within which it would have become possible to promote economic change and convergence and, above all, it would have shown that we were serious about economic and monetary union.

The second opt-out decision was to opt out of the social arrangements. There are two things wrong with that decision. First, it appears to say that Britain, alone of the 12 members of the EC, could not afford the minimum social and labour market arrangements that the other 11 say that they can afford. It also appears to say that British employees, alone among European employees, should not have a stake in the single market. That is an extraordinary thing for the Government to say. Also, the idea that Britain, of all nations, can survive and prosper as the sweatshop of Europe is absurd.

Secondly, that decision is wrong because it goes some way towards creating a two-tier Europe, with the United Kingdom in the second division. Jean Monnet, architect of the European Community, warned against giving the British a special position in the Community. He said:

"Their national character inclines them to seek a special position which will save them from having to change."

It would have been better for Britain if the Government had not, for party reasons, sought opt-outs at Maastricht. In words which seem increasingly hollow today, the Prime Minister once said that he wanted us to be where we belong—at the heart of Europe. He went on to say that we should be working with our partners to build a future. Instead of working with our partners at Maastricht, the Government opted out. At Maastricht, as so often in the past, the British were the reluctant Europeans. We need a new Government—a Labour Government—who are genuinely and without ambiguity ready to participate constructively in the building of the European Community.

8.12 pm

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): In the past 18 months I have been privileged to be the vice-chairman (Europe) of the Conservative party. In that capacity I have had dealings with our Members of the European Parliament. I have watched the negotiations that are proceeding to join the European People's party. I have had dealings with centre-right parties in the EFTA countries —in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Austria. It has been particularly interesting to develop our relations with centre-right parties in central and eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

During all those discussions and contacts, various things have become clear. First, the so-called debate that is supposed to go on about whether the Community should be broadened or deepened is a sham. Both processes must happen simultaneously. As many people have pointed out in the debate, the European Community was designed for six countries and now has 12. Manifestly,

it does not work as efficiently as it might. Therefore, deepening in the sense of improving the process is essential.

As the process moves forward, the greatest need is to inject the necessary accountability. On that I have a great deal of sympathy with the remarks made in the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). We must not just drive forward without improving the degree of accountability to the public. The Commission must be constrained and accountable to the European Parliament, at the very least in budgetary matters. As an instrument of accountability, the Council of Ministers has been shown to be increasingly insufficient. Therefore, deepening in that sense is essential.

During the debate we have heard a great deal about opt out. As was pointed out by Sir John Killick in a letter to *The Times* a few days ago, we do not need any lessons on that from France. France has managed to opt out of NATO in a semi-detached way for the past 25 years. We should bear that in mind.

On broadening, I come to the one overriding problem that I have in the entire debate. While we in the European Community continue to argue, debate and refine, our new friends in central and eastern Europe become progressively disillusioned and, with that, comes a threat to their democracies. In the past year I have been privileged to visit almost all the capital cities of central and eastern Europe and many of those in the former Soviet Union. We must remind ourselves, particularly in western Europe, that, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, in central and eastern Europe there is hardly any democratic tradition and there is none in the Soviet Union. Even in this House we must remember that democracy is not an entirely natural state, however much we might like to think that it is.

On 2 January, the Russian Government plan to release controls on prices. It will mean that prices will rise by about 200 per cent. I understand that, at the same time, they will increase state wages and benefits by about 100 per cent. I have been told from similar sources in Moscow that that could mean that by the spring virtually everybody in Russia will be living below the poverty line.

In the recent elections in Poland there was a turnout of 40 per cent., with a proliferation of small parties and no outcome. A 40 per cent. turnout in the first genuinely free election in Poland for 45 years must raise serious questions for us in the west about whether we are doing the job that we should be doing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) reminded us.

The revolutions in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria are under threat from a rather potent combination of disillusion and a feeling of hopelessness. Many people in those countries still look to the EC as a possible saviour or, at least, an organisation to be associated with and, in due course, to join. Security considerations are important. All those countries were former members of the Warsaw pact and they feel naked and bereft now that they have no collective security arrangements. I hope that the NATO co-operation council will assist in that process.

We can welcome the association agreements announced the other day for three of the countries to which I referred. However, the Government have been a long time in arriving at those agreements. They have been rather grudging and we should accept that, in all those cases, trade is better than aid, even though it will be politically uncomfortable for us. It will mean less expensive products coming into our markets. If we cannot cope with that, given the degree of political maturity that we have in the west, I shall be disappointed. We are not getting this right and it is posing a major political problem in central and eastern Europe.

Our new friends in that region can see that, behind the vision and the rhetoric that is so involved with the European Community, there is horse-trading and deals are being done. They are becoming increasingly cynical. That will be a problem.

If the European Community stands for anything, it is a wider outreach to all those peoples throughout Europe who look to it as the best hope of safeguarding their democracies and improving their economies. If we fail them, we shall be held to account by history and our failure will be very serious.

8.19 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I wish to address my remarks to the Prime Minister's failures of vision and duty in the negotiations at Maastricht—the hat trick of failures in economic policy, social policy and foreign policy.

The Prime Minister boasts of his achievement in winning the opt-out concession in respect of economic and monetary union. I see it rather as the opportunity for us to press our noses to the window, from the outside looking in, while the other 11 forge ahead without us.

The Prime Minister was in fact telling the other 11 and the rest of the world that he did not have the confidence in the future of the British economy to commit himself. If that is so, he can kiss goodbye to any prospect of London becoming the financial centre of the unified European Community under EMU. What concept, what factor is more important than confidence in determining the location of that financial centre? We shall be seen as an offshore island, semi-detached from the mainstream of European development. That is the only message that the Prime Minister is sending to our partners in the European Community.

I make no apology for personalising these matters. The Conservative party and its partners in the press were happy to build a platform for what they were determined to present as the Prime Minister's eventual victory at Maastricht. In fact, they were predetermined to report it as such—as can be seen from the way in which they wrote up the conference in the days and weeks before.

I understand why. The Prime Minister is the only asset that the Government and the Tory party have, in an Administration that is collapsing around their ears. The Prime Minister, although intimately implicated in the policies that have proved so disastrous, must be distanced from any failure and coated with the teflon of gesture after gesture. This week, we have had the definitive example in respect of mortgage repossessions. I have my theory of why the Prime Minister's image is said to be growing greyer by the day—he is now covered from head to toe in teflon.

I was talking about the message that the Prime Minister sends to our European Community partners. He also sends a message to potential inward investors, such as the United States and Japan. During the past week, there has been much accusation and counter-accusation about sweatshop investment. Looking to the future, where will

[Mr. Edward O'Hara]

the quality investment, the high-tech investment, be—high-tech or coolie-powered operations? Will they be inside or outside the EMU bloc? The answer is obvious: inside the EMU bloc, which will not include us.

The Prime Minister boasts about the restructuring of the British economy. Well, they tried it in the early 1980s, and in my part of the country—in the north-west and in Merseyside in particular—they created an industrial wasteland. I am reminded of Tacitus who, referring to the Roman empire, put the following words into the mouth of a Briton: "Solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant"—"They make a wilderness and call it peace". Throughout the 1980s, the Conservative Government have twice created an industrial desert and called it industrial restructuring.

Certainly, the Government are set on restructuring our industrial economy for the 21st century so that it has the status of a developing world economy. Fortunately, that will not happen, because a Labour Government will set us on the right road of participation in developing the economy of the European Community in its world context.

The "will we, won't we" stance of the Government on Europe is like that of a man debating with himself—no dialogue with the other 11, of course—whether to get off a ship in mid-Atlantic; or like a balloon debate with different rules, the object being to get the chance to bail out of the balloon.

The Government have always been out of step with Europe. They have never begun to understand, for example, the concept of regionalism. The big deception of the 1980s has been the accusation that the European Community is centralist—when, during that period, ours has become the most centralised administration, while the European Community does not just pay lip service to regionalism but offers structural funds to develop or regenerate economically depressed regions.

It is impressive to see the results of that policy. I have seen it in, for example, Lille in the Nord-Pas de Calais —grasping that assistance with a philosophy of "go, go, go". I mention Nord-Pas de Calais because it is at the other end of the channel tunnel. There are ambitious infrastructure developments designed, for example, to take full advantage of Lille's position at the end of the route from the tunnel and on the transport routes to be developed between Copenhagen and Barcelona. What a contrast with the philosophy and practice on this side of the channel tunnel. If the train grand vitesse came through the tunnel, it would fall off the rails, because they could not cope with it. That is the two-speed Europe.

What about the structural funds, which are put at risk by the Government's refusal to apply the rules of additionality, to which they signed up? I refer particularly to the withholding of the RECHAR funding, in which my region has an interest. My region suffers as a consequence. What answer did we get the last time that that matter was mentioned in my presence in the House? We were told, "It is our money, and we want it back"—a beggar-my-neighbour policy. That shows that the Government has no commitment to the development of the regions of Europe.

The neighbours being beggared are not in Portugal, Greece or even in Ireland; they are the north-west, the north-east, the north, Scotland and my region of Merseyside. They are the beggars, and they are being beggared by a region in this country—the colonial region of the south-east. We Scouses are used to our city being called the capital of Ireland as a benevolent joke. Believe me, in the light of the Government's attitude to regional policy, in a national and a European context we are a Celtic fringe in the twilight of decline and neglect.

I wish to address myself to social policy, referring first to another great deception—a wilful perversion of the intentions and extension of the social chapter in respect of union rights. The social chapter specifically refers to individual rights, not collective rights, and, indeed, there is the safeguard of the veto in respect of them.

There is another wilful perversion—a deliberate confusion of the failed and discredited democratic centralism of the eastern bloc with the great European tradition of democratic socialism, with which I am proud to associate myself and which underlies the social chapter. The Prime Minister referred to the critical question whether our social policies are made here or in Brussels. The people I represent would be far better off if they were protected from the social implications of unbridled capitalism.

Topically, this week we have seen the casualisation of labour, the destabilisation of an economy based on credit, the effects of that on the housing market—that was an important factor in the great repossession crisis—the fact that the typical mortgage is no longer based on a regular income, and the wider effects throughout the economy.

Who are the first victims? They are the economically vulnerable, who include many of those whom I represent. They lose their jobs, homes, services and welfare benefits. When one is in a hole such as the one in which they find themselves, one looks for another place. There is a better one available, in Europe, with its social dimension to the single market, outside of which we have no future. I refer not just to the people of my region but to people nationally, to the young whose future in the 21st century is our responsibility now. They are in no doubt which is the better place to which to go.

On foreign policy, I agree with the Government—as my party agrees—that we must avoid immediate dislocating effects in terms of NATO in the short and, perhaps, the medium term. God knows there have been enough dislocating developments outside NATO, the EC and the Western European Union. Surely we must look to the longer term, to the converging economic interests of the European Community combined with the megalithic—one might even say megatonic—scale of the EC economic bloc, especially when it is enlarged.

That will bring with it needs and responsibilities commensurate with the influence and power that it will have on a worldwide scale, dwarfing our national significance. We do no good to our people if we ignore that. The vaunting cries of victory over the other 11 in respect of foreign policy at Maastricht did not outlast the week, as Chancellor Kohl demonstrated with his determination over the recognition of the states in Yugoslavia.

There is a new edifice of foreign policy for the 21st century which needs to be set in place. It demands 20/20 vision—a clear vision of the future and not a myopia which can see no further than the narrow electoral advantage of the Tory party in an election campaign which can last no more than four and a half months.

In reverse order, I see the outcome of Maastricht as purblindness to the realpolitik of the 21st century; in social

policy, a betrayal of the rights to a decent quality of working life for our people—unless the Government deny that right—and in economic policy, an admission that the net result of 12 years of Conservative government is abject failure. For all the hurt, it has not worked.

8.29 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): This debate seems to have a quite different character from the debate that we had before the Maastricht conference. In that debate many hon. Members who are not standing for re-election expressed strong doubts and reservations about the countries of the European Community moving more closely together. In this debate, the majority of hon. Members who have been called to speak and who are standing for re-election—the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) is no exception—appear to have far fewer reservations and far less serious doubts about the process of closer union.

I certainly count myself among those who welcome steps towards closer unity in Europe, not because I believe that there is no hope for this country outside the European Community, but because I believe that by becoming part of a partnership in Europe we lose some of our independence but gain greatly in influence over a wider area. I believe that the deal is in this country's interest.

In party political terms, I am not sorry that the agreement that has been reached is one which largely unites the Conservative party and divides the Opposition so much that they could not even agree on an amendment to the Government motion but left it to the Liberal Democrats to table one.

I welcome the fact that the agreement that has been reached will prove acceptable to the overwhelming majority of hon. Members. I shall make three brief points about the terms of the agreement. First, I especially welcome the fact that the terms of the agreement with regard to foreign affairs leave this country free when necessary to take its own initiatives, but also serve to encourage the development of a common European Community policy when that is possible.

Secondly, I welcome the fact that a framework has been found which will retain American involvement in the defence of Europe and, thirdly, I greatly welcome the further powers that are being given to the European Parliament. A sensible use of the powers of this House is to ensure that more useful powers are given to the European Parliament so that it can exercise functions different from those of the House but which will serve to keep the Commission more democratically accountable.

One of the principal criticisms that I have heard from the Opposition about the terms of the agreement relates to the monetary union provisions. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling)—and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) when he wound up for the Opposition last night—implied that this country was likely to be left out of monetary matters as a result of our right not to move to a single currency. That is not so. All the obligations relating to monetary policy and economic convergence up to stage 3 will apply to us just as much as to other members and there is no reason to suppose that we are any less likely than other members to be ready to go ahead with a single currency in 1997. It requires a decision of the United Kingdom Government and of the United Kingdom Parliament if it is intended to move to stage 3 and notification of the decision to the Council places us in the same position as all the other members.

The hon. Member for Hamilton said that a decision was required by this Parliament after the Maastricht treaty was drawn up next year and that that should serve as sufficient ratification by the House of the monetary union arrangements. I believe that Parliament is likely to make a much better-informed decision in 1996, if it is in a position to discuss the matter, than it is in 1992. That is a thoroughly sensible and justifiable way for a mature democracy to proceed.

The other main criticism advanced by the Opposition relates to the social chapter. The legislation extending over 150 years which has been passed by the House has shown our concern for all matters listed in article 118—the improvement of the working environment to protect workers' health and safety, better working conditions, equal opportunities for men and women and so on. This Parliament has shown as great a concern as any Parliament in Europe about such matters.

On the difficulties of the social chapter, article 117 recognises the need to maintain the competitiveness of the economy and to take account of the diverse forms of national practices. Article 118 recognises that directives should avoid imposing administrative, financial and legal constraints in a way that would hold back the creation and development of small and medium-sized undertakings. Therefore, many of the Government's objections are in some way recognised in the drafting of the articles, but I believe that the Government's position was carefully considered and based on this country's bitter experience in the late 1960s and 1970s.

I do not believe that a British Government with the experience of trade union activities which we had in the 1960s and 1970s could be expected to sign an agreement consigning the task of agreeing such matters to an arrangement at European level between management and labour. I regret that the Commission failed to grasp the depth and strength of the Government's objections to such provisions.

It is difficult to believe that other countries would wish to be involved in the troubles that we had in the 1960s and 1970s. It is difficult to believe that Communitywide discussions between management and labour should be the only way to resolve such matters for the purposes of the social chapter. It is clear that small businesses would be left out and that the competitiveness of individual countries could never be assessed if such agreements were the basis for future action. I believe that the 11 countries which have decided to go in a separate direction would not necessarily wish to proceed separately in such matters and I should like the Government to make a further attempt to repeat the argument to the 11 to explain their deep objections to those provisions and try to reach a formula for agreement about the social chapter. Such an agreement should not be impossible given the considerable achievements and negotiations that have succeeded on the rest of the treaty.

I believe that the agreement as a whole marks a new step towards closer European union and that it represents acceptable and sustainable progress towards closer union of the countries of the European Community. I am pleased to note from the debate that the cause of closer union appears to be shared by most Members of the House.

8.39 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I begin by disagreeing with the description by the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) of the Opposition's two major objections. My hon. Friends the Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) were not talking about the discussions on the opt-outs, but were saying that we would not be able to participate in the same way as the other 11 countries, because of the position that the Government have adopted.

Mr. Ground *rose*——

Ms. Mowlam: No, I shall not give way, because I have only 10 minutes.

On the social chapter, it is no use the hon. and learned Gentleman saying that the Government can introduce the changes. We have waited 12 years. To take one simple example, working women in this country do not have the maternity benefits that women working in other European countries consider a basic right. We have waited 12 years —*[Interruption.]* You don't get pregnant, sweetheart. We have waited 12 years for that change, and it has not come. What the Prime Minister said in the Chamber yesterday was inaccurate—we are arguing not about the length of maternity leave, but about maternity benefits. As female Conservative hon. Members know, about 50 per cent. of women who apply for maternity benefit do not get it, because of the stringent qualifications. The social chapter could achieve such basic rights for women. That is why we are pushing for it, and that is why the other 11 countries are in a different position from this country.

Similarly, on the 48-hour limit on working hours, the Secretary of State for Employment has again misled the House with inaccurate statements. The argument is not that everybody should work for 48 hours. There are clear exemptions—for contracts, emergency services and so on. It simply says that people cannot be forced.

Early-day motion 426, which several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar), have signed, describes how a butcher in my constituency was sacked because he did not want to work more than 12 hours' overtime a week—he wanted to spend more time with his family. That would not happen if the directive were in place. That, and not anything else, is the meaning of such directives.

I shall concentrate on the impact of the decisions made at Maastricht on the financial services industry of this country. Hon. Members on both sides of the House know that financial services are a crucial part of our economy —17·5 per cent. of the invisible earnings in our GDP result from financial services, and 2·5 million people are employed in the industry. That is the highest number in any country in Europe, and it means that 11·5 per cent. of people work in financial services in this country.

I am not talking about the square mile alone, but about Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, north Yorkshire and elsewhere. Financial services are a major part of our economy—a part which has managed to keep some vibrancy during the two recessions that the Government have created.

The Government's decision not to opt into the EMU has put a question mark over confidence in the future of London as the leading financial centre. I assure the House that we want to keep the City of London as the lead financial centre. By opting out of the EMU the Government have imposed a backward-looking perspective. They have made the British economy more vulnerable and the future role of the City of London more questionable—not only this year, but for the next decade.

The Opposition still want to fight to bring the European central bank to the United Kingdom, but the Government have played this very badly. They took the European bank for reconstruction and development—that was bad chess playing by any definition. We have that, with a French president, which makes it more difficult for us to argue that we should have the European central bank—but we must do it.

A Conservative Member and several of my hon. Friends argued earlier that a shift is taking place as the EFTA countries come into the Community, locating the centre further away from the east and back towards the north. We hope that that will help to keep the focus on London as a central player within Europe. The Government will have to push for that, but their record on financial services, both at and before Maastricht, is appalling. I will give two or three examples. There is the investment services directive and the capital adequacy directive. The United Kingdom asked for that directive. We tried again on Monday, but Department of Trade and Industry Ministers again failed to secure agreement. Having asked for it, they failed to deliver it. That ruins our credibility and any standing that we have in such negotiations. Such a history makes it difficult for us to argue our corner in Europe.

The insurance industry is another good example. The Government's ideological blinkers for the free market are worn at the expense of that industry. They talk about a level playing field, but our industry has to fight uphill in both halves, so it has its back against the wall, and will have for the next five years.

Takeover policy is another example. The Government care about the free market, at the expense of our industry. We should consider the poison pill in France, the structural relationship of banking to the financial sector and to industry, and the interplay in Europe. That leaves our industry unfairly exposed.

That is what the Government's negotiations in Europe have done, against a backdrop of decisions that have tied the hands of our financial services industry. The example of TAURUS—the transfer and automated registration of uncertificated stock—illustrates the point. It has taken the Government nearly 10 years and they still move the goal posts on TAURUS every three months. France dematerialised in a number of years. The DTI blames the stock exchange; the stock exchange blames the DTI. The outcome is that our stock exchange is working at a disadvantage compared with those in the rest of Europe.

Regulation does not protect the consumer; it is costly to the industry. The record of regulation in this country is appalling. We have regulations, but we do not use them. The Government could have acted on many of the frauds that have taken place, but they have sat back and let those frauds continue. What do we see in the *Financial Times* today? We see Maxwell, Levitt, Polly Peck and Blue Arrow—they are all still up and running. We have regulations, such as the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, but the Government have not used them.

When other people in Europe look at London, they see a host of regulations and a Government who are not

prepared to implement them—a cost without any consumer protection. Who would want to use London? This week there was the London futures and options case. There were six people involved, four of them on the board, and they were fined only £60,000 because, as it said in one of the papers, if they had been charged any more the financial hardship would have been too much for them. With that kind of performance, how can we hope that our futures and options can compete against the Deutsche Terminbörse and other markets in Europe?

If we are serious about our financial services, we have to introduce some changes. The Department of Trade and Industry—with the set of Ministers that it has had year in and year out—has not had the leadership or implemented the infrastructure that our financial services industry needs.

As the next Government, we shall introduce a consumer protection directive during our European presidency in the second half of the year. We shall implement and use the regulations already on the statute book. As we have said elsewhere, we shall make certain auditing and accounting changes. But above all, we shall fight in Europe for our financial services industry, as the French do for Paris and the Germans for Frankfurt. The Government have left our industry exposed in a way that has lost 400,000 jobs in the past two years and will lose more jobs and more of the focus of the industry if it is left to the post-Maastricht attitude that the Government have manifested.

8.48 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Substantial achievements have come out of the Maastricht agreement which are the result of the considerable skills deployed by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary. The first is the exclusion of the social chapter, in which the hand of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment was so evident. That is undoubtedly a great fillip for British industry, as has been widely recognised throughout Europe. Far more importantly, the agreement has established the valuable precedent that, when some member states want to increase Community power, they do not need to dragoon other, unwilling member states to join them but can form an agreement outwith the treaty of Rome and beyond the reach of the European Court.

Secondly, establishing the right of the United Kingdom to decide whether it wants to join the single currency was the result of the stern resolve of my right hon. Friends, especially the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not to be browbeaten or to give in on the issue and risk the accusations of isolation and all the other nonsense.

Before my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister went to Maastricht, he said that he would only bring back to the House a deal that he could recommend and that he would not sign otherwise. Yesterday, quoting Eisenhower, he acknowledged that we in Britain study the fine print before signing. As he and I worked at Standard Chartered Bank and I was involved in international lending, he will readily recall that we did not sign loan agreements until they had been meticulously examined. In the same spirit, I know that he would consider it right and proper—indeed, the bounden duty of every hon. Member—to study the treaties that he has brought back.

That duty is even greater, given that the British public are denied access to the documentation. My secretary has been told today by the Foreign Office—I am pleased to see that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is here—that only one copy is available, and that the only way our constituents can obtain copies is by writing to the printer in Brussels. The House is more fortunate, as my right hon. Friends have ensured that a copy is available in the Library. It is most unsatisfactory that the general public are not clear about the precise technical details that we are called on to study, and the onus on us is great.

I have always been concerned about what my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) described so accurately as the "conveyor belt" to federalism. I have opposed almost every Euro-measure before the House since I was elected in 1983, including the Single European Act. Some may, therefore, describe me as a Euro-sceptic.

I have read the treaties and I have a number of profound reservations. I told my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) that I will stand again at the next election and that I do have reservations. Although I applaud the determination of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to keep options open to allow latitude to a future Parliament to decide whether to join a single currency, I have difficulty in sharing his view that we shall not be compelled by economic pressure to join when the time comes. Our membership of the exchange rate mechanism was partly occasioned by that same relentless pressure. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) made it clear that he would be part of that relentless pressure. I regard our management of membership of the ERM as having prolonged the recession quite unnecessarily.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) made clear last month, a single currency would be the quickest way to a federal Europe, requiring the most massive transfer of political and economic power from Westminster to Brussels. My right hon. Friends may be gambling on convergence not taking place and/or the German people waking up and refusing to act as the principal European paymasters. That is a dangerous policy and I wish that my right hon. Friends would spell out that they oppose the principle of a single currency.

The cohesion fund to be established under article 130d by the end of 1993 is intended to help out our Spanish friends. However, that same article permits the Council to define the

"tasks, priority, objectives and the organisation of the structural funds"

and could become another vehicle for providing United Kingdom taxpayers' money to assist our Spanish friends in taking business away from the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) referred yesterday to the powers to be vested in the presidency. Under article E of the common foreign and security policy:

"The Presidency shall be responsible for the implementation of common measures; in that capacity it shall in principle express the position of the Union in international organisations and international conferences."

Furthermore, there will be an obligation on member states that are members of the United Nations Security Council—ourselves and France—to

"ensure the defence of the positions and the interests of the Union"

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

while accepting the responsibilities of ourselves and France under the provisions of the United Nations charter. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) pointed out in an intervention in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, there is at least a recipe for confusion there. The article seems to require the United Kingdom and France to act as agents for other European countries, and in the long run it can only lead to pressure for the removal of France and ourselves from the Security Council, to be replaced by whichever nation happens to hold the six months' presidency of the union.

Above all, there are two other issues about which I feel profoundly unhappy. The treaty on European union provides for the introduction of "citizenship of the Union". I thought that all Conservative Members were against anything other than voluntary membership of unions. Whatever my right hon. Friends say, that seems to mark a clear intention to establish a federal Europe. I am not a citizen of the union, and I do not wish to become a citizen of the union. I shall remain a citizen of the United Kingdom, a status which, I suspect, the vast majority of my fellow countrymen wish to maintain.

Ms. Mowlam: It is not a union.

Mr. Howarth: It is indeed a union. I will explain how a union works, and why I am opposed to federalism. I will quote Professor A. V. Dicey. He said that two conditions were required for federalism to work. He said that there must first exist

"a body of countries . . . so closely connected by locality, by history, by race, or the like, as to be capable of bearing, in the eyes of their inhabitants, an impress of common nationality."

That seems as true today as it was in the 1880s.

Another important issue is subsidiarity. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary says that there has been a sea change in Europe. Would that he were right. It is common ground that in this country we want to limit the power of the Eurpoean Commission severely, but given that the definition of subsidiarity will most probably be tested in the European Court, which has a record of seeking to extend Community competence, what assurances can my right hon. Friend give us about the advice that he has received as to how the European Court would be likely to construe what is at best a very vague clause?

My right hon. Friends have done well to remove the word "federal" from the text of the treaty, but we should delude ourselves if we believed that we had stopped federalism in its tracks. Many of our continental partners have made it clear that their federal ambitions remain undiminished, and they will simply come back at the next opportunity to gain some of the territory that they failed to take at Maastricht.

Most people in this country are happy to go along with a Common Market in which the United Kingdom has led the way. However, seeing the break-up of the Soviet Union, and seeing what is happening in Yugoslavia, they ask themselves what on earth is the merit in the nations of Europe trying to put themselves into a similar straitjacket, which could lead to all the difficulties to which Conservative and Opposition Members have drawn attention.

The people of Britain will not accept a United States of Europe. My fear is that we are still on the European conveyor belt and that each attempt to deepen the Community will frustrate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's admirable determination to widen it. My own view has consistently been, "thus far and no further". We have nothing to gain from the new treaties and we should, in my humble opinion, have been better off rejecting them totally. In so far as we have not been able to do that, I much regret that I shall not be able to support the Government in the Lobby tonight, but in recognition of my right hon. Friends' undoubted efforts I shall not vote with the Labour party, whose intellectual dishonesty is apparent in its repeated U-turns on Europe and in its fawning subservience to every socialist measure emanating from Brussels.

The House and the country will be most interested to see that there is no amendment on the Order Paper tabled by the Leader of the Opposition. The Labour party cannot get its own people united in the Lobby, so it has not had the guts to table an amendment. The people of Britain should be warned: the Labour party is so supine and devoid of policy that, if elected to office in this place, it would probably hand over the rights of this Parliament without a whimper.

8.58 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): In the two minutes that have been allotted to me before the Front-Bench spokesmen reply to the debate, I should like to make a few points. I hope that I shall not work over the same territory as other hon. Members have explored.

Despite all the party politics, many hon. Members of all parties are deeply concerned about some elements relating to the concept behind this debate. Although many hon. Members have touched on the fear of a deficit of democracy, I have not heard any hon. Member refer to how Britain will try to do something in the new Europe to correct that deficit. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) will say something about their ideas for correcting that deficit of democracy.

There is perhaps a common purpose in the House in that we all feel that minority groups in the new Europe of institutions may face danger. I speak about minority groups because I represent a Birmingham constituency, as does the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who will reply on behalf of the Opposition. Minority groups in this country might have something to fear, because I do not get the impression that the new Europe is becoming more tolerant. In fact, I get the reverse impression—that as a result of proportional representation, racially intolerant parties are now emerging in Germany, France, Denmark and Belgium. Although we all need to guard against that intolerance, that result leads me to take issue with Liberal Democrat Members on the subject of proportional representation.

I turn now to the concept of the two models of Europe, to what has been referred to as the "Atlanticist Europe" on the defence side and to the concept of "Fortress Europe". I am glad that we have adopted the Atlanticist approach because, despite the impression that one gets from Paris, all attempts to convert us into Fortress Europe will lead to disaster.

The Commission has distorted some of the better aims of the European Community. Its gradualist and centralist approach has converted the idea of a federation into

something with which many of my hon. Friends take grave issue. However, as some hon. Members recognise, other parts of Europe have a totally different understanding of the word "federal".

Turning to the concept of subsidiarity, I should like to outline the benefits of the pillared structure or approach. That is a safety valve for the impetus to centralism. If individual Governments feel that pressure points are building up, the pillared structure enables them to do something concrete about it within a framework that is co-operative rather than compulsory or based on coercion. Many of my hon. Friends are worried about much of what we are being "persuaded"—on the basis of coercion—to adopt in Europe. The pillared structure would lead to greater co-operation, not coercion. In that respect also, subsidiarity acts as a safety valve for those who seriously doubt——

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hargreaves: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman because I have only a little time and wish to conclude on this point.

Subsidiarity acts as a safety valve for matters about which many of us have serious doubts. Despite those doubts, I feel that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has achieved a masterly stroke at Maastricht by providing us with those structures.

9.3 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): Until my act of brief but uncharacteristic generosity to my neighbour, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves), I had hoped to speak immediately after the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) because I wanted to make two comments about his speech. First, I was touched by his faith in the communication of the media when he said that every person in the country would be speculating tonight why the Labour party had not tabled an amendment. They are worried about inflation, unemployment, the collapse of the manufacturing industry, bankruptcies and mortgage foreclosures and the hon. Gentleman thinks that they will be worried about why the Labour party has not tabled an amendment. Secondly and more importantly, I wanted to reminisce with the hon. Gentleman a little. He concluded by saying that it would have been better if the Prime Minister had not put his signature to the treaty. When I acted as a PPS—admittedly some years ago—I always considered it my duty to reflect the views of the senior Minister on whose behalf I ran the errands. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman was doing exactly the same.

May I apologise first on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who should have wound up the debate but who, regrettably, must attend a family funeral. My second apology is more personal—it is for my influenza, which makes me sound almost as much like my "Spitting Image" puppet as the Home Secretary behaves and looks like his. I may fail to convert Ministers this evening, but I shall almost certainly infect a few.

The Prime Minister went to Maastricht with a single ambition—to paper over the cracks in the Tory party. In the pursuit of that aim, the national interest was neglected, the real chance to be at the heart of Europe was thrown away and the right to influence the inevitable progress towards monetary union was sacrificed. All that mattered was preserving the illusion of Conservative party unity. The Prime Minister has failed to achieve even that sad little objective. That is not surprising, for any sensible person would have realised that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) would glory in biting the pathetic hand that tried to feed him. Anyone who watched him gesticulating when the Home Secretary spoke about the unity now sweeping through the Conservative party would have realised that, for reasons of psychology rather than ideology, he was bound to do what he will do this evening. Yet to obtain a few extra votes, the opportunities were missed and Britain was voluntarily relegated to Europe's second division.

The Prime Minister went to extraordinary lengths to accommodate the ungenerous little Englanders in the Conservative party. His most disreputable tactic was to attempt to make their flesh creep with the pretence that to join their partners in Europe in endorsing the social chapter would promote disputes over pay and encourage strikes. That was his clear message to the country on at least two occasions. It was his clear message to the House on 12 December, recorded at column 982 of *Hansard*, and when he was tackled on it by my right hon. Friends he wrote back saying that he did not mean strikes or disputes, but objected to other aspects of the social chapter—mainly the increase in costs that it would impose on British industry.

A week ago the Prime Minister spoke in the House about strikes and implied that they would be promoted by the social chapter, so he must have known that article 118(6) of the protocol makes that impossible. I shall read it to the House in case the Prime Minister has another lapse of memory, as he does when they suit his political convenience. It says:

"The provisions of this Article shall not apply to pay, the right of association, the right to strike or the right to impose lock-outs."

Had the Prime Minister had the courtesy to attend the winding-up of the debate, he would no doubt have tried to justify why, only a week ago, he intentionally pretended something quite different.

No doubt when the Chancellor of the Exchequer winds up he will summon up all the sincerity of which he is capable—*[Laughter.]* I make no comment on how much that is. No doubt the Chancellor will say that what was done last week was all for Britain. If he wants to convince us of the Government's integrity, he had better begin by answering the question which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked him yesterday and which he so shamelessly refused to answer. The Chancellor has had 26 hours to think of a reply that should take only a few seconds, for all that he has to say is yes or no.

I shall repeat the question in exactly the form that it was put to him yesterday and ask whether there are

"circumstances in which, despite the achievements of convergence, despite the establishment of monetary union by our neighbours, he would come to the House and recommend that we still stayed out?"—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 291.]

Earlier today, in the absence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary essayed an excuse and said that it was only sensible to decide at the time and that we should make up our mind when the time comes. If that is the Chancellor's position, we should be told what the test will be when we get to 1995, 1997 or 1999. The

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

Chancellor should explain the criteria against which he would personally measure the question: do we go in or stay out?

We already know the four criteria of convergence. What are the additional ones that the Chancellor has in mind and that lead him to believe that he should make up his mind then rather than now? If his answer is that, yes, there are circumstances that might lead him to say that Britain should remain outside despite the union being created and the single currency being in place, I hope that he will explain those circumstances.

The Chancellor might oppose our entry in principle—an honourable and plausible position. I do not hold it myself, but if the Chancellor were to say that we must stay out whatever the price and whatever the cost to Britain's prosperity, as a matter of principle, we could at least applaud his frankness. He might even be suggesting that, at the end of the decade, even if convergence had been achieved, the economy would be so weak that we dare not join the monetary union. I understand why the Chancellor might take that view.

One of the measures of convergence, article 1, is the requirement of price stability. The Government are pursuing that objective by collapsing the real economy. Unemployment has increased massively according to today's figures. Manufacturing output is 5·3 per cent. down, and manufacturing investment 12 per cent. down, on last year. There have been 110,000 company liquidations this year—more than ever before and more than the number of new companies created. I understand that that decline has been confirmed in a report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development published at 6 o'clock this evening. If the Chancellor is really saying that he needs time to worry and wonder about membership as, after 12 years of Conservatism, the economy cannot stand it, he had better tell that to the country and the House here and now.

I suspect that the Chancellor's honest answer to the question of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is no. I suspect that there are no circumstances in which, despite the achievement of convergence and despite the establishment of monetary union by our neighbours, he would come to the House and recommend that we still stayed out. However, to admit that would not only alienate some Conservative Back-Bench Members, but expose the Maastricht negotiations as a pathetic sham.

The Chancellor must know—of course he knows; he admitted it yesterday—that there is no question of our going in before convergence has been attained. If we would or should go in when convergence has been attained, the opt-out becomes wholly meaningless and the pretence of negotiating success cobbled together to impress the gullible 1922 Committee has no meaning. Selected newspapers declared it a triumph, but none of us should be surprised by that. It struck me as I read some of those newspapers that some hon. Members might like to play a word game with their families during the coming Christmas recess: describe the circumstances which could make the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* turn against the Prime Minister. Those who fear that the answer is too horrible to contemplate may accept my answer—he could revoke the editors' knighthoods.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Would the right hon. Gentleman care to describe the circumstances in which the *Daily Mirror* might turn against the Labour party?

Mr. Hattersley: No, I cannot. I cannot recall the circumstances in which genuinely independent editors of any political persuasion have thought it right to accept knighthoods from Governments, because it means that they no longer occupy that position.

I am pleased to welcome the Prime Minister to the debate with the news, which I was about to give to the House in his absence, that when the election comes, as long as he can still blink the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* will be on his side.

The way in which the newspapers behaved after Maastricht demonstrates how shoddy the whole operation was. I take my example from the *Daily Mail* simply because I welcome any excuse to quote its headline of 9 June last year—the day after the Prime Minister made his daytrip to Saudi Arabia, an event heralded in the *Daily Mail* with the headline, "The grey fox of the desert". The Prime Minister is many things, but Lawrence of Arabia he is not. Last week the *Daily Mail* told us, "Major wins a knockout." That reminded me of an earlier *Daily Mail* recording of an international triumph on 9 April, "Major's plan saves Kurds." I hope that that headline is a comfort to the refugees who are now dying of cold, disease and hunger.

The reason why the Prime Minister triumphed in those achievements is that he lives for the moment. He has no vision of the Britain or the Europe that he wants to build. When he used the word "vision" at the end of his speech yesterday, it had no credibility and carried no conviction. He talks about being at the heart of Europe, not because the idea inspires him, but because his advisers have told him that it is a profitable thing to say.

Yet one day the United Kingdom will join the single currency: I have no doubt about that. Tory dissident after Tory dissident has warned of it. In the past two days Government supporters have predicted that Britain will join. Now that the Eleven have signed the treaty, progress towards a single currency is inevitable and I rejoice in that. The tragedy is that, as the others make progress, we shall not go with them but shall be dragged along behind.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Can my right hon. Friend envisage no situation in which a Labour Government might have reservations about a single currency and a central bank and about economic decisions being taken which might be inimical to their interests?

Mr. Hattersley: I made my position clear and I am happy to repeat it. I rejoice in the progress towards a single currency and in a few moments I shall talk about the sort of system that I want and that will benefit the country.

Earlier the Foreign Secretary said that it was wrong to suggest that by opting out of the single currency we would not continue to influence policy. Is he suggesting that the Eleven, committed to making progress, will even contemplate the bank or the institution coming to Britain? As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) said in a notable speech, we have already lost the chance to determine the date on which stage 3 will be implemented and we are losing influence all the time.

By committing ourselves to the objective that I have described, we will not reduce or lose our sovereignty. I do

not want to add to the Chancellor's problems, which seem to come not singly but in battalions, and with that in mind I ask him whether he was totally unmoved by today's announcement of an increase in the German base rate, or did he feel that somehow that increase might be of concern to us, might influence us or might have a determining effect on some of our economic policy? I have no doubt that, formally or informally, we are now locked into the European economic system. That is why we should be part of the process that brings about the single currency. We should have chosen to influence the inevitable union in a way that benefits Britain, but instead of that we have abdicated.

The cliché is that we missed the bus, but that is only part of the problem. The real tragedy is that we are destined to run along behind it and one day scramble on board even if it is then deviating from the route that we would have chosen. We should have learnt the mistake of that posture from the common agricultural policy. Now that the tyrannies of eastern Europe have collapsed, the CAP is perhaps the world's worst example of the centrally managed market. This year it will cost Britain £1·225 billion net. If we had joined the EC earlier and had been signatories to the treaty of Rome, when the CAP proposal came along I have no doubt that we would have been able to moderate the absurdities which cost this country so much money and which so discredit the whole operation of the Community. We are making the same mistake again by letting others take the decisions and then following on later.

The Prime Minister should have gone to Maastricht with a positive message for his European colleagues. The message should not have been that we would sign up for a single currency at any price. He should have made it clear that Britain would join when the Community co-operated in creating the conditions that made the single currency an unqualified benefit for this country. In a phrase, that means the ability of all member states to sustain adequate rates of growth and employment without incurring unsustainable current account deficits.

Among other things, that requires the Community to develop and adopt a more positive regional policy. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, it should do that in part by financing it from the funds that now subsidise incompetent and inefficient agriculture. But there are other funds available in Europe, some of which we understand the Government are refusing to accept. If the Secretary of State for the Environment is to be believed—and who in the world ever doubts a word that he says—the Government have rejected £100 million of regional aid in what the Secretary of State for the Environment calls a monumental own goal. The Government have rejected that money for wholly doctrinaire reasons. I understand that other EC grants are likely to be withheld until the Government respect the rules that they agreed in 1988—until they stop treating Community money like Government income to be set against rather than added to additional expenditure.

Will the Chancellor tell us when this silly squabble among Ministers will be over? When will the Government accept the rules that they signed and when will the Chancellor be able to accept the grants which the Community wants to pay to the hard-hit regions but which, for reasons of pathetic dogma, the Government refuse to accept?

The Prime Minister should have gone to Maastricht arguing for a positive union policy. Unfortunately, he went to Maastricht arguing for nothing. He had a clear idea of what he was against, but no idea of what he was for. For reasons which combined a lack of faith in British industry with party political prejudice, he was against the social charter.

No honest person now pretends that the social chapter would supersede domestic industrial relations legislation. However, it would promote a wide range of social benefits, many of them vital to part-time workers and women workers. How does the Prime Minister defend himself against the charge that he has missed an opportunity? He says that the costs of the social chapter are too great for British companies to bear. We are entitled to ask, and the country is entitled to know, why, after 13 years of Tory Government, and constant claims of a recurring economic miracle, we cannot afford for our workers what Germany, France and Belgium can afford for theirs.

The truth is that the Government regard the provisions in the social chapter—improved maternity benefits, which have been referred to, and the extension of redundancy payments, which are equally important—as, in the words of the previous Prime Minister, "socialism by the back door". It happens to be the sort of socialism which appeals to Helmut Kohl and every European Conservative leader with the exception of the Prime Minister. That is why the Prime Minister was excluded from the meeting of European Conservatives which preceded Maastricht. He was allowed to tag along at the end. The tragedy is that tagging along at the end has become the Prime Minister's habit and his preferred position.

By opting out of the social chapter and offering as an excuse for this that it is too expensive, the Prime Minister has designated this country as a low-cost economy which tries to attract investment by promising minimum labour costs. Fortunately, Britain cannot succeed in that role. If we try to attract investment by talking about low labour costs, other countries will do it better than we will do, will undercut us and beat us at that game.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No, I have only two minutes left and I must go on.

Our pitch should be not for low costs, but for high skills of labour. Fifteen years ago, when the Ford motor company established a new plant in south Wales, Henry Ford told Ministers in the Labour Government who had helped in those negotiations that what he was looking for was not low wages but high skills and highly skilled workers who expect, for instance, decent redundancy rates. They even expect decent maternity leave because, whether Conservative Members know it or not, some highly skilled workers happen to be women.

The other thing about the social chapter that the Prime Minister does not understand, which means that he may never speak for Europe in the way that we need someone to speak for Europe, is that the social chapter has given the Community some meaning, some importance, some relevance for the typical family and the average citizen. It has meant that the Community is no longer simply the bankers' and brokers' Europe; it is not simply a Community of unrestrained free enterprise which does not care for living standards and employment opportunities. It

[Mr. Hattersley]

has given it a meaning and to sacrifice that importance is to do the Community untold damage in the eyes of the typical British family and worker.

We have heard a great deal, this evening and yesterday, about the importance of widening the Community rather than deepening it. Let me make my position clear. I want to see the EFTA countries as members. I want to see the new democracies, as they emerge in eastern Europe, pass through association status into full membership, but if that is going to happen, and if the Community of 12 is to become a community of 18, there has to be a deepening and strengthening of institutions or the Community will disappear under the weight of numbers.

Some Conservative Members may want to recreate Europe in terms of a free trade area. I believe that Europe is something more creative, more positive and more dynamic than that. If it is to be more than a free trade area with Austria, Sweden, Switzerland and Hungary in it, the institutions have to be strengthened. That is why every European leader with the exception of the Prime Minister believes that strengthening the institutions and accepting new members are two related processes which must go on at the same time.

We have heard a great deal this evening about democracy. I dare say that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will tell us that he cannot commit himself now to even the principles of monetary union in the third stage because of the democratic necessity to obey and respect the House of Commons. Because of changes in the world and the way in which the world has evolved, Britain has, during the past 25 years, whether we like it or not, lost a great deal of its independent sovereignty. By joining a democratic Europe we can regain a great deal of our influence and that is what I want to see.

The idea that a man, an honourable Gentleman, who has been a Minister for the past 12 years should tell the House that the Government cannot tell it what they want to about Europe because of their respect for parliamentary institutions and the votes of the House of Commons is ludicrous. Britain has seen 12 years of what Lord Hailsham called an elective dictatorship before he joined one by becoming Lord Chancellor to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). The idea that the Government should hide behind that excuse shows their pathetic inability to mount a credible case for what happened last week. It may have impressed the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*, but the more people think about it the more shoddy it seems, and the price will be paid in April, May or June.

9.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I listened carefully and with interest to the first part of the speech of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). After having heard half of it, I was going to say that, although I disagreed with it, the right hon. Gentleman had at least set out a clear position; a clear difference between the Labour party and the Conservative party.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he was prepared to commit the Labour party to move to a single currency provided that convergence was achieved, that he would give that commitment irrevocably now and that he did not understand why we would not. The difference was crystal clear—black and white.

Then the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) intervened to ask whether there were any circumstances in which the Opposition would not move to a single currency. Those of my hon. Friends who were present will know that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was completely unable to give a straight answer. The right hon. Gentleman started off pretending that he was clear about the single currency, but then he could not answer his hon. Friend. He then went on to attach many more conditions which he thought should be included in the treaty amendments, making his attitude to a single currency even less clear.

Four weeks ago, the Government came to the House and set out their objectives in the negotiations. We were clear about what we would propose, what we would agree to and what we would reject. Now we are able to return to the House with an agreed set of treaty amendments that accords exactly with the objectives that we set out.

The agreements reached by the 12 member states of the Community at Maastricht are widely recognised as an historic step forward. They point the way for the future of the Community. But, as the right hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the development of the Community must not stop at Maastricht. More and more over the past few months, people have come to realise that Europe is not just the Twelve. The challenge for the Community over the years to come is to extend prosperity and the benefits of Community membership across Europe.

That is why we have strongly supported the creation of the European economic area, but we have made it clear that in years to come the Community must embrace not just the well-off countries which may be able to join and whose entry will pose few problems for the Community, but the countries of eastern Europe.

I am glad that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook confirmed that he supports Community membership for eastern European countries, but he did not mention that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the first leader of a Community country publicly to say that he wanted that to happen.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman at least that the association agreements with Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia are just the first step. The countries of eastern Europe made it clear that they see full Community membership as their ultimate objective, and we must all work for that.

In last month's debate, I pointed out that the individual countries of the Community and their foreign policies have different interests—and that, for that reason, we had to retain the freedom to act alone. The agreement that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs reached on defence and foreign policy does just that. At the same time, it provides the right framework for European foreign and security policy in the 1990s.

I certainly want to respond to some of the points raised by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, and I will answer more frankly and directly than he did when responding to the question posed by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich.

I will focus my remarks on economic and monetary union and on the agreement reached at Maastricht. In the last debate, I set out our four key objectives in the

negotiations. First, Britain should not be committed to move to a single currency without a decision at the appropriate time by the United Kingdom Government and Parliament.

Secondly, in the next stage of monetary union, responsibility for monetary and fiscal policy in the second stage should remain firmly with member states—something that was pressed on me by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, but not of course by members of Labour's Front Bench.

Thirdly, any future monetary union should be soundly based and should rest firmly on durable economic convergence.

Fourthly, even within any monetary union—even when a single currency was established—member states should have the maximum possible freedom to make their own economic policies, including fiscal policy. That point is important to this side of the House and to some Opposition Back Benchers, but apparently it is not in any way important to members of Labour's Front Bench.

I am glad to tell the House that, after the negotiations at Maastricht—difficult and intensive though they were—the agreement reached met all the objectives laid down in our last debate. First and foremost, Britain is not committed to move to a single monetary policy or to a single currency. That is clearly spelt out by the United Kingdom protocol, which is an integral part of the treaty. It was drafted by the United Kingdom to meet our specific concerns, and was agreed by the 11 other member states.

Not just the United Kingdom but all 12 member states clearly stated:

"the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by its government and Parliament."

That was our objective, and we achieved it.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Personally, I cannot envisage any circumstances in which, were a single currency to be formed, Britain would not want to be part of it. However, the Chancellor's case is that only the opt-out clause provides that option. Surely it is the case that nothing in the treaty compels Britain to join economic and monetary union. Assume the case in which it went ahead on one or other of the prescriptive dates, and in which Britain fulfilled the convergence conditions. Surely there is nothing in the treaty that compels us to join at that moment—is there?

Mr. Lamont: I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman misses the point. As a result of the changes made between the last text presented to the House and the final text, it is now agreed that people are committed—provided that they meet the convergence conditions—to move, irrevocably and without a separate choice, to a single currency. That is there. The right hon. Gentleman, who takes a close interest in those matters, ought to look more closely at what was agreed.

For us, the main point was that this country should be given a choice. The House will recall that, earlier in the negotiations, the Dutch presidency circulated a text that would have permitted every member state to enjoy the same right—a general exemption clause. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) attempted to make out that that represented some great reversal for the Government; the important point, however, is having that choice, not the form in which the text exists.

While the general exemption clause was acceptable to us, other member states made it clear that they had difficulties with it. I must say that I am sometimes puzzled by the fact that other countries do not want to consult their Parliaments. It is not for me to speculate about the reason—it is a matter for them—but, in our opinion, that is not an acceptable route for the present Government to take, even if it is acceptable to the Opposition. We feel that this is a profound and important decision which should be made by the House of Commons.

Mr. Hattersley: I am distressed to find myself suspecting that the Chancellor imagines that he has answered the question that he was asked yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. We all believe that this is a profound and important decision, and one that the House must make. The question is this: if convergence had been achieved by this country, and if the other countries had moved to stage 3 and the single currency, can the Chancellor imagine himself recommending that we stay out of it? I cannot imagine myself doing so.

Mr. Lamont: I believe that there are certain conditions —*[Interruption.]* Let me make two points. First, I believe that we are discussing a matter of principle which ought to be decided by the House. Secondly, let us suppose that only three member states met the convergence conditions. In fact, only three Community countries meet them at present. Suppose that three small countries were irrevocably committed to a single currency, as they have to be under the treaty.

Germany does not meet the convergence conditions at present. Suppose that we had a proposed monetary union of three small countries—or of three countries, excluding Germany. Does the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook think that we should have signed a treaty committing ourselves now, irrevocably, to becoming a party to monetary union? [HON. MEMBERS:"Answer."] The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook asked me a direct question. I have given him an answer; why does he not answer my question?

Mr. Hattersley: I am glad to see that the Chancellor has learnt at least one thing from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

The answer is that the right hon. Gentleman's question is too stupid to need an answer. He knows perfectly well that to hypothesise that monetary union could be built around Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg is simply ridiculous. The fact that he used that example shows how defensive the right hon. Gentleman is about his failures yesterday.

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Of course I will answer: I am rather better at answering questions than the right hon. Gentleman seems to be.

The right hon. Gentleman invited me to hypothesise, and then refused to answer a question, saying that he would not hypothesise. What he apparently does not

[Mr. Lamont]

realise is that, as I have said to him, as of this moment only three countries qualify for the four convergence criteria that are laid down. They are Denmark——

Mr. Kaufman: Nineteen ninety-seven.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman clearly does not understand the treaty. He says that a mass of seven countries is required. The whole point is—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman said that, and the whole House heard him say it. The point is that, under the amendments to the treaty, we do not need to have a minimum of seven countries.

Mr. Kaufman: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Lamont: I will give way in a minute.

It is perfectly possible that the monetary union of only three countries could take place in 1999. Only three countries meet the conditions now. Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that we should irrevocably commit ourselves to joining a currency union, however many countries there are in it and regardless of the conditions? The right hon. Gentleman will not answer that question, but I shall answer it for him. He wants to say yes. That is his policy. He wants to commit this country irrevocably to joining monetary union. Our position is clear: that we wish this House of Commons, this Parliament, to have the say at that time. I believe that that is right.

Mr. Kaufman: No doubt because of the noise in the House, the right hon. Gentleman misheard what I said, so I shall now tell him what I said and ask him to answer my question. I said nothing about seven countries. What I spoke about was the year 1997. Has the Chancellor, together with the Prime Minister, signed up to transition to the third stage of economic and monetary union, which they accept is irreversible and irrevocable, by the end of 1997, the date of the beginning of the third stage? That is what we want to know. Of course convergence has not been reached in 1991, but what about 1997? What would his answer be then?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman has totally missed the point: that if the European Council cannot set the date for stage 3 in 1997, it happens automatically in 1999. As a result of the clause that we have negotiated, to which the Opposition are opposed, we have a choice. We and Denmark are the only two countries in Europe that will not move automatically to a single currency. I am afraid that the Opposition do not understand that.

Mr. Kaufman: It is the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who do not understand what it is that they have signed. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor have signed a protocol on the transition to the third stage of economic and monetary union in which they, not just the other 11, declare the irreversible character of the Community's movement to a single currency. They agreed that the Community shall enter the third stage irrevocably. That is what the British Government have signed up for.

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman should know —[HON. MEMBERS: "Tebbit knows."] I know that the right hon. Gentleman does not want to hear the answer, because he has got it all wrong and his party is in an impossible position, but the answer is that our protocol takes precedence over the language in the main treaty amendment. *[Interruption.]* Of course that is absolutely right. That is why this country has the option to opt out. That is why, as a result of our negotiations, we have the choice—rightly, I believe—to decide whether to move to a single currency.

The Leader of the Opposition made a very forceful and good speech yesterday. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it was a very good speech indeed, but I think that he was a little bit inebriated with his own enthusiasm. In his brilliant speech yesterday, he seemed to forget what he had said four weeks ago. On 20 November, he said:

"there is no possibility of any Government . . . certainly no British Government and certainly no Labour Government, not referring to their Parliament for a mandate before taking a step into entering monetary union".—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 284.]

Yesterday, the right hon. Gentleman was so carried away that he reneged on that. He made it crystal clear—the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has made it clear again today—that, if the United Kingdom met the four convergence conditions set out in the treaty, that would be the end of the matter.

The Leader of the Opposition should explain why, had he been Prime Minister, he would have given one undertaking on 20 November and gone back on it three weeks later. Will he explain why he is prepared to see a single currency automatically imposed on this country regardless of the wishes of the House? That is an abdication of responsibility that Conservative Members are not prepared to make.

The Labour party wants to put the future of Britain's currency on auto-pilot. It wants to sacrifice for no gain Parliament's right to take the final decision about a single currency. That is also what the Labour party would like to do on the social chapter, as the debate has demonstrated all too well. Nothing separates our attitude to this treaty more clearly from that of the Labour party than its willingness to sacrifice the rights of the House.

As the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) so rightly said last month, that is the real issue. It is not whether their social policies or our social policies are right. It is more profound than that. The issue is whether the Community should have the right to impose social policy measures on this country or whether the way we work should remain primarily a matter for the House. It is whether measures opposed by the Government and the House can be imposed on this country by qualified majority voting.

The Labour party's attitude is an illustration of its lack of confidence in its ability to persuade the British people at the polls. Why does it have so little confidence in its ability to win the argument or to win an election that it wants to chuck the power away and give it to Brussels?

If the Community is to have a social dimension, the top priority must be job creation—*[Interruption.]* Our policies in the 1980s gave us a job creation record as good as any in Europe. Between 1983 and 1989, the United Kingdom created more jobs than any other member state. The OECD has recently noted that, between 1984 and 1990, the United Kingdom—*[Interruption.]* We all heard the Labour party's ritual demonstration about today's unemployment figures. It does not seem to know by how much unemployment is rising in France.

The social chapter proposed at Maastricht had nothing to do with job creation. We know from experience that an inch of Community competence means a mile of red tape. We know that our attitude is supported by British business. We know that British business men know that what we are doing is right for Britain. Six leading business men said in a letter to *The Times* that Britain must

"strive to prevent the excesses of regulation"

in Europe.

The Association of British Chambers of Commerce said:

"The Government was quite right to stick out for an exclusion on the Social Chapter. All 800 Chambers of Commerce in Europe have rejected the Commission's plans to legislate in areas such as hours of work. There will be many continental businesses today envying their UK competitors for the comparative flexibility in labour costs".

Because we have a more flexible labour market and because of the reforms of the 1980s, this country has attracted inward investment in Europe far more than France and Germany.

What was depressing about the debate was the emptiness of the speech of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). He did not make a single constructive suggestion. He did not give the faintest outline of the Labour party's policy—30 minutes and no suggestion whatsoever of the way in which the Labour party believed that it would have handled the negotiations.

The revealing feature of today's debate is the Order Paper, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) said. Where is the Labour party's amendment spelling out its attitude to the negotiations? We have a Liberal Democrat amendment, a Welsh nationalist amendment, a Scottish nationalist amendment and even an amendment from my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), the longest amendment of them all. But we do not have an amendment from the Labour party.

Labour's policy is a blank sheet of paper. Labour Members are not usually at a loss for words. Perhaps they lost their amendment; perhaps they were at a Christmas party; perhaps even at this late stage they will table a manuscript amendment; or did the Labour party just calculate that, after its failure in the last debate to get its members in the Lobby, it was best not to spell out any policy? A blank sheet of paper is the only way to unite the Labour party. There is no doubt that the federalist views of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook are not shared by Labour Back Benchers. He felt that the only way that he could unite his party was by not tabling an amendment.

We returned from Maastricht having met all the objectives which we set ourselves. We said that we would secure defence arrangements compatible with NATO, and we did. We said that we would preserve the freedom to act alone in foreign policy, and we did. We said that we would retain the right to decide whether, as well as when, to move to a single currency. We did, and we believe that we were right to maintain that condition.

We said that we would persuade our partners that monetary and fiscal policy in stage 2 should remain with member states, and we did. We said that we would create a treaty which, even in the event of monetary union, left each country with the maximum freedom to conduct its own economic policy, and we did just that. We said that we would require improved enforcement of the implementation of Community agreements, and we obtained it. We made it clear that this country could not accept the so-called "social chapter" in the treaty, and we secured its removal.

The Government have done exactly what they said they would do. The result is a treaty that strikes the right balance between European co-operation and national independence. It is a treaty that allows the Community to progress while opening the door to the expansion of its membership. It is a treaty that this country has played the fullest role in shaping.

The key difference between the two sides of the House in this debate is that we are absolutely determined to retain for the House the right to decide whether to move to a currency union. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, speaking for the Labour Front Bench but not supported by his Back Benchers, seems prepared to commit his party irrevocably to moving to a single currency regardless of the circumstances. We reject that approach.

Our success has been the reward for pursuing practical proposals and consistent objectives. That approach is in the sharpest possible contrast to an Opposition—and especially the right hon. Member for Gorton—whose attitude to Europe has been inconsistent, impractical and dictated first by blanket hostility to the Community and then by fanatical adherence to every proposal which comes from it.

We have protected the rights of this Parliament, which the Opposition would have signed away. We have secured the best possible agreement for Britain, whereas they would not have bothered to try. That is why it is this Prime Minister and this Government who enjoy the confidence of the country and who should have the confidence and support of the House in the Lobbies.

9.59 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): When the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary returned from Maastricht, they——

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) *rose in his place, and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 18, Noes 364.

Division No. 32] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carr, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Livsey, Richard
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*

Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David

Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put:—
The House divided: Ayes 339, Noes 253.

Division No.33] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*

Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan

Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*	Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Wilson, Brian	
Winnick, David	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Wise, Mrs Audrey	**Mr. Frank Haynes and**
Worthington, Tony	**Mr. Ken Eastham.**
Wray, Jimmy	

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Prime Minister on achieving all the negotiating objectives set out in the motion that was supported by the House on 21st November; and warmly endorses the agreement secured by the Government at Maastricht.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

RATING

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Appropriate Fraction and Rateable Values) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft European Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 25th July, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the draft European Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents).

MEN AND WOMEN AT WORK

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Employment on 25th November 1991, relating to the protection of the dignity of women and men at work; believes that policies to combat sexual harassment at work are for development and implementation of Member States acting individually; agrees that the Recommendation and Code of Practice provide a basis for such policy developments; welcomes the Government's support for the need to spread awareness; and approves of the Government's support for the Declaration.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question agreed to.

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL

Ordered,

That Mr. Keith Mans, Mr. Robert Hayward, Mr. Stuart Bell and Mr. James Callaghan be members of the Select Committee on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Mrs. Rosie Barnes be discharged from the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and Mr. William Ross be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

PETITIONS

Overseas Adoptions

10.28 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I beg leave to present a petition on the adoption of children from overseas, organised by the Campaign for Inter Country Adoption. The petition has been signed by 6,500 people from over the length and breadth of the country. Those people have themselves adopted, wish to adopt or support those people who are prepared, for humanitarian reasons, to adopt a child whose future might otherwise be bleak in the extreme.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of supporters of the Campaign for Inter Country Adoption sheweth that the welfare of children for whom inter-country adoption is in their paramount interests, as the only way that they can be brought up in a family, requires greater facilitation.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will call on Her Majesty's Government to take measures to provide adoptive parents with all necessary information and advice, counselling and guidance; and ensure full co-operation from local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies, social workers specialising in inter-country adoption, U.K. embassies abroad, the Foreign Office, the Department of Health, the Home Office and Immigration Officers, in accordance with the 1989 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Rights (Kashmir)

10.30 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I beg leave to hand in a petition signed by about 1,950 people, mainly from Burnley, Lancashire and the north-west, regarding Kashmir—a situation that must be worrying to many people. While people may not agree 100 per cent. with what is contained in the petition, I am sure that everyone is anxious for a peaceful solution to that problem.

The petition reads as follows:

To the honourable, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of former Kashmiris and friends of Kashmir, sheweth

That whereas the United Nations Security Council passed Resolutions declaring that the final disposition of the State of Jammu and Kashmir will be made in accordance with the will of the people expressed through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations; and whereas the Indian security forces now occupying Kashmir have perpetrated gross and persistent violations of human rights of the people of Kashmir.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will condemn the systematic mass murders, torture, arson and rape by Indian forces of occupation in Kashmir; promote international efforts to help refugees fleeing Kashmir and to relieve the hardship and suffering of the people who remain in the territory; demand that India permit Amnesty International and other independent human rights agencies to enter Kashmir, with a view to investigating and reporting on human rights violations; and calls for the withdrawal of India's armed forces and security forces from the state of Jammu and Kashmir and their replacement by an interim United Nations Administration, with the task of restoring law and order, and as soon as practicable, conducting the said plebiscite.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Education, Lewisham

10.32 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I beg leave to present a petition concerning the resourcing of education in Lewisham. The petition carries the signatures of more than 1,000 people who are residents of the London borough of Lewisham and of parents with children in Lewisham schools who live in adjoining boroughs.

The petition sheweth that:

Her Majesty's Government broke up the Inner London education authority without a mandate from the electorate, and against the explicit wishes of a large majority of inner London parents, expressed in a properly conducted ballot.

The inadequate time scale and funding of the transition from the Inner London education authority to London Boroughs has caused serious difficulties in every London Borough.

These difficulties have been compounded by the community charge and by Government cuts in spending.

Lewisham has been unfairly treated by an under-assessment of the social needs of the borough, and by the deliberate discriminatory policy of the Government, for example, to fund Haberdashers' City technology colleges far more generously than LEA schools.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the Honourable House do agree that Her Majesty's Government should increase the funding to education in Lewisham, by restoring transitional funding to 1990-91 levels and by increased standard spending assessments for the borough's services.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Abortion

10.34 pm

Mr. Michael Carr (Ribble Valley): I beg leave to present a petition from the Roman Catholic parish churches of St. Anthony's, Fulwood; Our Lady and St. Edward's, Fulwood; St. Claire's, Fulwood; Our Lady and St. Michael's church; St. Peter's Stoneyhurst college and other Lancashire parishes. The petition contains some 1,600 signatures.

The petition deals with the abortifacient mifegyne, known as RU486, which causes the death of unborn human beings. It reads:

The humble petition sheweth That we the undersigned wish to note with regret that the Abortion Pill Mifegyne (known as "RU486") has been granted a product licence. We believe that drugs and medicines should be used only to save life. We deplore the fact that this drug causes the death of unborn human beings, and we express our grave concern that it will damage women physically and psychologically.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your House, which is committed to upholding respect for human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable, will do everything possible to prevent the distribution and use of Mifegyne (known as "RU486") and any other drugs which, like it, are produced with the deliberate intention of destroying innocent human life. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Adoption and Fostering

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

10.35 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): It is opportune that I should have the Adjournment debate today because my daughter, Sophie, returned last night after working in an orphanage in Romania with the most harrowing account of the problems in that crisis-struck country. She had been working at Ionaseni orphanage for irrecuperables and also at the adult psychiatric hospital at Podriga 40 miles away in Moldavia near the Russian border.

Children who are born to the inmates of Podriga are removed at birth and taken to the baby orphanage in nearby Botaseni. Untouched and unloved, there is nothing wrong with them, but they are left in cots until they are three years old, at which time they go to the Ionaseni orphanage as irrecuperables. If they survive to the age of 16 they are transferred to an adult institution such as Podriga and the whole cycle is repeated. The way to break that cycle is for the children to be adopted, but little attempt seems to be made by the Romanian authorities to have those children adopted and the new Romanian adoption committee appears to be just another barrier to prevent these children from having the chance of a family life either in Romania or abroad.

Romania is only one of many countries where problems have overwhelmed the capacity to cope, so that orphan children are cruelly abandoned, if not to die, to live a bleak and loveless life in an institution or even on the streets, in many cases to die of AIDS which could have been prevented.

The Minister will remember that I raised the issue of inter-country adoption in an Adjournment debate on 29 October last year when I called for a proper helpline in the form of an independent but officially recognised and supported advice and information centre for couples wishing to adopt a child from abroad. More than a year later would-be parents are still having to organise their own informal ad hoc helplines. Deborah Fowler, author of "The Story of Michael", is privately helping nearly 100 couples who are on the mailing list for her fact sheets. I do not know whether the Minister has had a chance to read "The Story of Michael", but I have a copy of this excellent book to give her. In the epilogue to the book, Deborah Fowler says:

"Around the world there are many thousands of couples who would make wonderful parents and who are only stopped from being so because, for whatever reason, they are not able to make a child. Similarly, across the globe, millions of children eke out their miserable lives without love, care or proper food, and with no hope for today and little hope for tomorrow. Surely the sensible, practical humanitarian answer to this problem is to put the two together.

If you have room in your heart, in your home, for a child, then think seriously about the plight of the Romanian children and, if you decide you have something to offer such a child, then fight and kick and scream against the red tape, against the system, as we had to do. And go to Romania, find your special child and give him or her the love that he or she would never have had but for you."

The Fowlers are going to Romania for an interview with the Romanian adoption committee on 9 January. They have written to the Minister and I hope that she will give them all possible assistance in their quest for a second child to adopt. On 6 December, they wrote:

"What I am asking is that you use us as a test case—we have DOH clearance in a form which was acceptable to the Romanians, and we have an appointment made with the Committee at the highest level. Please could you try and find a formula to enable the DOH to present our case to the Committee for that date. This request is not just for us—we are lucky enough to have five happy, healthy children—it is also for all the other prospective parents waiting desperately for the 'all-clear'."

I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure that the Government help the Fowlers in their meeting with the Romanian adoption committee on 9 January.

Many other countries have specialist agencies to advise and assist couples wishing to adopt from abroad. It is agreed by all concerned that what is needed here is a proper advice service for parents, so that they find out the right way to go about adopting from abroad. I hope that my hon. Friend can tell me tonight of her progress in helping to ensure that there will be a proper helpline for would-be parents.

The local authority social services departments would also benefit from such an expert source of advice and assistance. Many local authorities have been helpful and sympathetic to would-be adopters, but I regret to say that a few local authorities have been the opposite. I suggest that my hon. Friend places a statutory duty on local authorities to provide this help if she does not wish to go so far as to set up a separate overseas adoption agency, as is done in many other countries.

Local authorities should have a duty to complete home studies in, at the very most, six months, and they should not charge more than £1,000. This duty should be part of the Prime Minister's citizens charter, since the United Nations charter of human rights refers to the right to found a family, as well as the rights of the child to have the best possible life.

I have three points to put to my hon. Friend. I have already mentioned the first—the need for an independent helpline. The second is that there should be a statutory duty on local authorities to carry out home studies, and the third point follows. The would-be parents must have an adequate means of appealing against the absolute power of these local authorities. Surely the parents should be able to appeal to the Secretary of State rather than have to go through the cumbersome and expensive procedure of a judicial review in the courts of law.

Because there is no proper helpline, let alone a comprehensive system for inter-country adoption, abuses can develop, and then attempts are made to stop inter-country adoptions. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that, rather than stopping couples giving a loving home to such children, we should help them to adopt in a proper fashion.

My hon. Friend is rightly opposed to a two-tier adoption system, with inferior standards for overseas adoptions, but I would raise two questions. First, since it is not possible to foster a child from abroad as the first step towards adoption, is there not an inherent difference between adoption here in the United Kingdom and adoption from overseas? Secondly, should not all children adopted from overseas really be regarded as special needs children, as so many of them have suffered severe deprivation in their earliest life? Parents need special counselling and advice for children adopted from overseas, and because fostering is not possible, more and not less care is needed in ensuring that the adoption process is

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

successful. For these reasons, for children overseas not to be discriminated against, couples wishing to adopt them need extra help, not less, as is the case only too often.

In this country, the leading source of advice and information on adoption is the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. It was through BAAF that my wife and I adopted Stephen, who had been featured for 18 months in the "Be My Parent" book. BAAF has traditionally focused on the needs of British children, but I hope that it will widen its horizons, because it has been regarded as unhelpful and ill informed by many would-be parents who have contacted it for advice on overseas adoptions. Romanian orphans coming to Britain do not reduce the chance of British children being adopted, they stimulate the whole process, so that more families come forward wishing to adopt special needs children. Inter-country adoption is here to stay, and trying to stop inter-country adoption will not help the British children who need to be adopted. Furthermore, it should stimulate the Romanians and others to adopt their own children in the first place.

Some people have resisted inter-country adoption on racial grounds, but my hon. Friend may be interested to see the reports in the papers today about Professor Tizard's findings, announced yesterday, that

"it is wrong to think that colour should be the central consideration when placing children with foster parents."

A successful independent helpline should be a co-ordinated and effective service able to respond to the needs of children in crisis-ridden countries such as Romania and to the needs of parent-led groups such as Stork, the Association for Romanian Children, Families International and the various family associations for El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Chile and so on, not to mention informal ad hoc groups led by parents such as the Fowlers and the Marriotts.

The organisation should be independent with background and experience in children's families and adoption and fostering work, not a Government Department in which the key workers are career civil servants who do not necessarily have parent-child client contact or professional experience.

The staff themselves must be positive and enthusiastic, but not under the influence of Labour-controlled authorities such as Camden, Lambeth and Haringey where there has been such misguided resistance to inter-country adoption.

The Children Act 1989 introduced by the Government sets high standards for children. We cannot just take the Labour party's line of throwing money at children in crises overseas and then turning our backs.

BAAF has a good record of helping children with special needs in Britain. It should now play its part in helping children with special needs overseas. We should have a worldwide "Be My Parent" book for children who cannot be adopted in their own countries.

Many thousands of couples in Britain and abroad could be encouraged to adopt a child with special needs if given the right advice and support. That is the challenge which faces us all and one which I know that my hon. Friend will do her utmost to resolve so that families can be found for children whose needs are so great.

I should like my hon. Friend the Minister first to set up a positive and properly funded helpline to assist would-be parents with advice and information; secondly, to impose a statutory duty on local authorities to provide home studies within, at most, six months at a cost of no more than £1,000; thirdly, to establish an appeal procedure for people aggrieved by local authority decisions; and, fourthly, to regard overseas adoptions as special needs cases where the parents need encouragement, not discouragement, when they are acting out of the best humanitarian instincts.

10.46 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The House is once again indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) for raising a subject of great importance and significance. He speaks with great authority on questions concerning children, particularly the adoption of children. I pay tribute to his campaign to ensure that there is proper recognition of the significant part played by inter-country adoption.

In my constituency, I have been involved in helping to establish the inter-country adoption of a child from Romania for two families. Since those adoptions were completed, I have met the families and have been impressed by the dedicated care of the parents, the warmth of their home and the welcome for the children, both of whom have had considerable problems in settling after difficult experiences.

Britain has a proud tradition of adoption; a record which has led the way in many respects. My hon. Friend mentioned British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, with which he and his family have had contact over the years. There is no doubt that its work in establishing homes for hard-to-place children is remarkable. There are many children in Britain who in other parts of the world would be condemned to a childhood in an institution but who BAAF, by its remorseless and determined approach, has succeeded in placing in families who have adopted them and given them long-term security and care.

But as the number of babies available for adoption in Britain has diminished—perhaps only 1,000 babies a year now under the age of one are placed for adoption compared with about 7,000 a year 20 years ago—and with the increasing concern about crises in other parts of the world of which television has made us increasingly aware, there has arisen a desire among those parents unable to adopt a child at home to fulfil a humanitarian need and provide a home for a child from overseas while meeting their need for a family at home.

However, it is important not to let that understandable desire to provide a home for a child override concerns that proper safeguards are in place in inter-country adoption. It would be wrong for lower standards to apply for children from overseas. There have already been tragic cases where children have been brought to this country for adoptions that have not been successful. As my hon. Friend said, fostering is not an appropriate first step in such cases—so it is all the more important that proper safeguards should be applied. It is a matter of judgment whether a safeguard is seen as a form of bureaucracy and red tape.

It must be right that a child is free for adoption and has not been secured as a result of bribery or trafficking. Also, the parents must be suitable, with the necessary stability and maturity to adopt that important responsibility.

As my hon. Friend knows, since his Adjournment debate on the subject a year ago, my Department has been actively involved, and I am happy to report a considerable improvement between local authorities, adoption agencies, and would-be adoptive parents. The chief inspector of social services issued firm guidance making it clear that home study reports must be completed—and it should be the norm that they are completed in advance—in making special arrangements for children who are the subject of inter-country as opposed to domestic adoption.

Any cases that have come to my Department's attention where there has been resistance from local authorities have been the subject of urgent discussion between it and the particular agency concerned. I am impressed by the speed with which many authorities changed their practices and policies to provide precisely the service that my hon. Friend requires.

My hon. Friend will appreciate that there are always difficult cases in which, for one reason or another, would-be adoptive parents have not been thought suitable for inter-country or domestic adoption. It is not possible to go into detail, because such cases are confidential. However, it could never be right that any family wishing to be involved in an inter-country adoption should have their application automatically rubber-stamped.

My hon. Friend made particular mention of the establishment of a helpline, and I consider that to be a high priority. Parents who have an understandable desire to adopt a child from overseas should have a source of independent advice, encouragement, information and counselling.

At this stage, it is not my view that we should pursue the option of an agency devoted exclusively to the assessment of suitable families for inter-country adoption. Such assessments should be part of mainstream adoption work. After all, in those sad cases where something goes wrong, it is likely that the local authority will have to pick up the pieces, and secure and safeguard the child's welfare.

The other argument for a helpline is that it could offer advice to local authorities and adoption agencies. In cases where information is sought about adopting a child from Thailand, Pakistan, Paraguay, or Romania, not all local authorities—despite their many skills—have up-to-date information about the circumstances in those particular countries. Recently there have been developments in, for example, Romania, with the establishment of the Romanian adoption committee. Local authorities would benefit from a helpline to which they could refer for the latest advice on the state of play in particular countries.

This debate comes at a particularly opportune time, because this week the United Kingdom ratified the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which is a landmark for children. It enshrines the principles of the Children Act 1989, and shares its underlying ethos that children should be seen and heard, and have their interests properly respected. The convention embodies important aspects of relevance to inter-country adoption.

Article 21 endorses the principles of the 1986 United Nations declaration on social and legal principles relating to the protection and welfare of children. Essentially, it requires the signatories to recognise that inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of child care—if the child cannot be placed in a foster home or an adoptive family, or cannot in any way be cared for in a suitable manner in its country of origin; to ensure that the child affected by inter-country adoption enjoys standards and safeguards equivalent to those existing in the case of national adoption; and to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the placement does not result in improper financial gain for those involved in it.

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that those principles underlying the United Nations convention are exactly the principles that I have sought to illustrate. There are, however, further international developments, which will, I think, reassure and encourage parents who believe that there is a proper role for inter-country adoption, but recognise increasingly that it must be properly regulated and controlled. I refer, of course, to the Hague conference.

The United Kingdom is playing a full part in the special commission set up in 1990 by the Hague conference on private international law. The commission is working on the development of an international convention in international adoption, which will incorporate the principles set out in the convention. Between 3 and 17 February, senior officials from the Department will be in the Hague, where they are playing a leading part in the discussions.

I can also report to my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom is undertaking a review of adoption law. Much of our adoption law dates back to 1976. Since then, traditions, expectations and patterns of adoption have changed—not least the development of inter-country adoption, which ran at some 50 cases a year until December 1989, and is now running at over 300 cases a year. We should, I think, expect the rate to grow.

The fourth paper in the series of reviews of the law concerning the adoption of children is on inter-country adoption. We hope to produce that consultation document early in the new year. It is important for my hon. Friend, with his specialist knowledge—together, of course, with the Campaign for Inter-Country Adoption, and many of the other organisations that he mentioned—to scrutinise the document, and to give considered responses.

My hon. Friend's second point took the form of a request for a statutory duty to undertake a home study; such issues could certainly be considered in that context. According to our latest information, local authorities and agencies have been prepared to undertake home study reports. Parents have not always received the reports for which they hoped, but, in our experience, there is no resistance to the undertaking of such reports—although I am well aware that there has been in the past.

I know that my hon. Friend will agree that—although in some cases families have beaten the rules and evaded the regulations, and in some instances the children concerned have settled happily—that cannot be a proper, effective or right way for us to pursue what is an understandable and, in many respects, laudable aim and aspiration. I am certain that the time has come for us to find ways—both through our domestic rules and regulations, and internationally—to streamline the process of giving people greater recognition and understanding, while also safeguarding children's needs.

My hon. Friend has spoken of children having special needs. I appreciate his point: many of the children involved have particular difficulties. Those who have spent many years in an institution may well have emotional, developmental and, in many cases, medical difficulties. That is why our advice recommends that a child has a medical assessment before an inter-country adoption proceeds. Once again, my hon. Friend will be aware, from

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

the experience of his daughters, not least, of the difficulties involved, in all too many cases, in securing a medical report.

My hon. Friend has more up-to-date information than I about the position in Romania, but there is movement there. Senior Department of Health officials have made a second visit to Romania. They are trying to help the Romanian Government to develop their control and regulation of inter-country adoption. Once it is appreciated in most countries that a significant number of children are leaving, it is understandable that there should be a domestic reaction and that pressure should be put on the Government to ensure proper safeguards and regulation. The Romanian adoption committee has made it clear that it does not anticipate that it will be able to agree to inter-country adoptions before March of next year.

My hon. Friend referred to the Fowler family. They have written to me and I have responded to their letters. I regret that I can add nothing to what I said in my latest letter at the end of November. The Romanian Government are committed to ensuring that proper arrangements are in place before they are prepared to embark on any further inter-country adoptions. I shall continue to look carefully at the case to see whether there is any further advice that I feel able to offer.

I believe that very considerable progress is being made in an area of great sensitivity and growing significance. We live in a world where increasingly it is becoming the concern of us all that children throughout the world should be offered a safe, stable and happy home. None of us accepts that children should grow up in institutions, particularly those of the nature that my hon. Friend described. Where inter-country adoption is appropriate, it must be effectively regulated, with proper safeguards.

Parents cannot be said to be entitled to a child. Nobody has the right to a child. However, wherever possible, children have the right to a safe and happy home. I hope that we can continue to work closely with my hon. Friend, and those organisations which in many cases he has established and certainly befriended so effectively, in order to ensure that the high standards of child care and adoption practice to which we are accustomed in this country are developed and modified properly to incorporate the growing work of inter-country adoption.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 20 December 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Royal Regiment of Wales

9.35 am

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I beg leave to present a petition signed by over 33,000 people of south Wales protesting at the decision to cut the Royal Regiment of Wales Territorial Army strength in south Wales from eight to three companies. It asks the Secretary of State for Defence to reconsider the decision, in view of the valuable role played by the 4th battalion, not only in its duties but in a wide range of community activities:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will support us by seeking assurances from the Goversnment that the Fourth (Volunteer) Battalion Royal Regiment of Wales is not disbanded and that Wales is not treated unfairly.

To lie upon the Table.

RU486

9.36 am

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker), signed by more than 200 of his constituents and some of mine, who are members of the Shafesbury Life Group expressing their concern at the licensing of the drug RU486, which remains an experimental drug with unknown risks to women. The signatories

"deplore the fact that this drug causes the death of unborn human beings, and we express our grave concern that it will damage women physically and psychologically."

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House, which is committed to upholding respect for human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable, will do everything possible to prevent the distribution and use of . . . RU486 . . . and any other drugs which . . . are produced with the deliberate intention of destroying innocent human life. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Business Car Taxation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

9.37 am

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I am pleased to have this opportunity to initiate a debate on the subject of business car taxation. As hon. Members will be aware, the motor industry is especially near to my heart, not only because I represent a constituency with a large car factory, but because the west midlands is largely still dependent on a successful and viable motor car industry in the United Kingdom.

It is relevant that I should draw attention to the news in the United States today that General Motors has decided to reduce its work force by 75,000 by closing 20 factories. That shows that there exists a difficult problem in maintaining viable car production in the quantities to which we have become used.

Revenue taken from the road user in the United Kingdom is nearly £20 billion a year, only a small proportion of which is spent on the roads. Those who say that the business car user does not pay his or her track costs should look closely at the total take from the motorist. It is abundantly obvious that the motorist pays a great deal for the track costs of running a car. Nor should one overlook the commercial sector, which also pays substantially for the privilege of running its vehicles on our roads.

In asking the Minister to look carefully at the way in which the business car is taxed, I shall deal with a number of areas which the Government should examine. I do not say that all of my suggestions should be adopted or that they offer a panacea to a difficult problem, but perhaps the Government should look carefully at how that sector of our business community, which is now well overtaxed, can be helped so that there is an immediate knock-on effect to resuscitate home market demand for cars produced in our factories.

I regret that help in any form for the business car user is unlikely to come from any other political party. The Liberal Democrats do not approve of such equipment for business use. I presume that they would like everyone to travel by bus or bicycle. Given the Labour party's recent track record when in government, I cannot imagine that it would try to tackle some of the anomalies of business car taxation that have built up in recent years. Labour's attitude to the business car is that it is a perk rather than a business tool.

For some 70 per cent. of those with access to a business car, it is an essential part of day-to-day business life. It is not a perk, a symbol of their position within a company, or a vehicle to drive home and to the golf club, but a business tool. The present taxation system, which was set up many years ago, fails to take into account the changing circumstances and the different emphasis on how the business car is used today. Some 55 per cent. of all car sales in the United Kingdom are to the business sector. I stress that figure because, without a buoyant and dynamic business sector, the British car industry is set for a difficult time. At present, our car industry is one of the most successful parts of our economic environment. In the past few years, our car industry's balance of payments deficit of £6 billion has been reduced to about £1 billion, which is a tremendous turnround. It is partly as a result of Japanese

[Mr. Roger King]

investment but mostly because some of our existing car companies, such as Ford and Vauxhall, have been able to export in substantial quantities. Eighteen months ago, Ford commenced exports for the first time in 12 years. The achievement of the industry in helping our economic progress is second to none.

May I issue a word of warning. Although the manufacturing sector of the United Kingdom car industry has been doing well, the retail sector is almost a disaster area, with home market demand down to about 1·5 million units a year. That is a considerable drop from three years ago, when it was well over 2·1 million. With a home market showing little sign of life, the way forward must be to consider a stimulus to return customers and fleet owners to the marketplace. In the recent past—the last Budget did not help—they have been subjected to swingeing increases in taxation which has caused a dearth of orders in the business car market.

Since the 1988 Budget, personal taxation on company car drivers has increased by 280 per cent., including the introduction of appalling national insurance contributions on company cars and fuel introduced in this year's Budget, against which some of us spoke vehemently. We fail to understand, even now, why business cars should be singled out for an NIC surcharge when desk-top computers, telephones or other essential tools needed for the operation of our commercial sector are not treated in that way. It has compounded all the problems and caused the business car sector to hold back from purchasing new cars.

I sometimes wonder whether we fully appreciate why we have a business car sector, as it is sometimes considered an unnecessary part of United Kingdom business life. Until recently, it did not exist in a comparable way in any other European country, but more and more European countries are now beginning to realise that the establishment of a proper fleet of cars for business use can result in increased efficiency for the company concerned and can cut costs. We are all in the business of more efficiency and productivity, and this country has a very good track record in managing the fleet car sector. Many other European countries now enjoy that position as a result of British know-how being exported to the rest of the European Community.

Industry and commerce are scattered throughout the United Kingdom. We have welcomed overspill towns and the redeployment of businesses, sometimes in areas where public transport will never be viable or efficient. Companies have plants all around the United Kingdom which require up-to-date maintenance and visits throughout the year, and it is the task of the business car to conduct that exercise. We also have one of the world's most efficient distribution systems because our representatives can visit every high street in the country, taking orders, discussing with companies their type of market and establishing further business efficiency throughout the land.

I cannot imagine the impact of a sales director turning up to seek business with a British Rail "Supersaver" or "Awayday" bargain ticket. It would not fit in well with the image that his company was trying to sell. Moreover, if he were using a "Supersaver" ticket, he would have to leave the town well before three o'clock to use the remaining portion of his ticket, so public transport is not a viable alternative.

Another factor that appeals to the business car user and fleet providers is that, by updating their cars frequently, they can buy safer and more fuel-efficient models. Regular servicing and decent insurance ensures that the cars on our public highways are well maintained and insured. If employees are asked to provide their own cars, they may encounter all kinds of problems. Quality standards in terms of safety and maintenance are likely to be overlooked as employees seek to make cost savings. Difficulties would probably arise over insurance requirements because individual as opposed to fleet insurance may make the operation of the car extremely expensive. If individuals had to provide their own cars, they would want an enhanced salary to compensate for the extra overheads. In addition, there would be the thorny problem of constantly trying to establish an adequate rate of return for the use of the owner's car. A satisfactory arrangement is never arrived at and everyone feels that he is not getting the best deal. It is far better, therefore, to provide a car for business use.

Given the present state of the business car market, taxation has become extremely excessive. As the Government start to draft next year's Budget, I beg them not to entertain the concept of increasing the burden of taxation on the business car sector. Will they please lay off it, because it has been singled out for penal rates of taxation in the past few years? If we want to maintain a viable car industry, we must introduce changes in the business car taxation system. If we maintain the present level of taxation, the prospect of the British car industry producing wealth, goods and employment in the next few years will be open to question.

I have no qualms about asking the Government to come down heavily on the perk car. There is no role for the simple perk. If that means taxing the perk car more heavily in any reform of business car taxation, I shall not object. However, I cannot for the life of me understand—nor can anyone else to whom I have spoken—why there is a difference in treatment between the self-employed and those who are employees. The self-employed are subject to schedule D taxation on the business car, but the employee is taxed under schedule E. Why cannot both areas of the business community be treated in the same way? I hope that Ministers will address that puzzle, if not today then at a later date.

Let us consider benefit in kind and especially the existing mileage limits. I am sure that hon. Members know that the present system has a cut-off at 18,000 miles per annum of business use at which there is a reduction in the tax payable on benefit in kind of 50 per cent. Some 47·6 per cent. of business car users drive fewer than 18,000 miles but more than 2,500 miles a year. Some 45·2 per cent. drive more than 18,000 miles a year. Some 7 per cent. drive only up to 2,500 miles a year. The last figure applies to the genuine perk car.

Thanks to leasing companies, which keep a careful check on the mileage done by contract cars, there is growing evidence that drivers deliberately use their business cars in the early part of the year to get over the 18,000-mile limit and thus to attract the 50 per cent. discount. The loss to InterCity must be considerable as drivers elect to use their cars to qualify for the 18,000 business miles per year figure. What could be more

environmentally damaging than people saying, "I am going to use the car because I must clock up 18,000 miles to get the 50 per cent. discount"? In this day and age when we have green thoughts about everything, that is a crazy system to maintain.

It is also worth noting that people who drive round our cities may spend all day in their business car. They may be delivering or servicing computers, or servicing washing machines and will probably clock up only 12,000 miles a year. They do not benefit from personal tax reduction.

I remember debating the issue with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury in the Finance Bill Committee and she said that such people should use a van so that they would not have to pay tax. That is an absurd answer. It is true that such people could use a van to go to some places, but that would only add to costs, because the user would still have to have a car. If he took his van home, there would be all kinds of problems about whether he was driving it for private use. I suggest that drivers who only do 12,000 miles around a city and who do not qualify for the reduction of taxation on benefit in kind may drive a private car to the works to pick up the van, use the van to drive back to near where they live to start their servicing work and in the evening go back home in the private car. That is very ungreen and complete nonsense.

I suggest to my hon. Friend that in the scale charges for benefit in kind, the arbitrary figure of 18,000 miles is complete nonsense. I know that many solutions are advocated by different people, which is one of my hon. Friend's problems. Everyone has a different solution to those matters and I am aware that my hon. Friend works under the great difficulty of having to listen to many representations.

It seems to me that there should be two categories. The first is the genuine perk car which should be clobbered fairly hard. After that, all business cars should receive a discount on benefit in kind taxation and there should be no mileage limit. To qualify for a discount, it should not matter whether a car is driven for 3,000 or 50,000 miles a year. That would stop some motorists seeking to do as many miles as possible to qualify for the artificial 18,000 mile barrier.

The scale bands at present are decided by the cubic capacity of engine size. That is complete nonsense and is as old fashioned as the horsepower rating which was once used to tax cars under the road fund licence. It is anti-environmental and discriminates against technical improvements. The present cut-offs are from up to 1,400 cc, from 1,400 cc to 2 litres and from 2 litres upwards.

As my hon. Friend knows, because I have talked about this in Finance Bill Committees on several occasions, the scale bands discriminate against the diesel car which is known to be more environmentally acceptable. By virtue of its engine system it has a to have a larger cubic capacity to get a similar power rating as a smaller-sized, petrol-driven car. We seem to be saying, "For goodness sake, do not worry about fuel economy of the car. Just go for arbitrary cubic capacity limits."

Vauxhall is building a factory at Ellesmere Port to make a new V-6 engine. The technology of that engine is very advanced and it is anticipated from early test results that its fuel economy will be especially attractive. However, as it is a 2·5 litre engine, it will find no use in the fleet car market, although its fuel consumption may be lower than that of a comparable 2 litre engine. What sense does that make in this day and age when we are anxious to ensure that the motorist carries out his environmental obligations? I hope that my hon. Friend will pay particular attention to stimulating a new regime for scale banding which is based on fuel economy.

I suggest that the present three bands could be replaced by new bands for cars that do up to 20 miles per gallon, cars that do up to 30 miles per gallon and cars that do up to 40 miles per gallon, although I should prefer four bands with the fourth band being for cars that do up to 50 miles per gallon. How would we arrive at the figures? Every car sold has to have Government fuel consumption figures attached to it. It has to be tested and the figures have to be prominently displayed. However, we cannot just take those figures. We could devise a better system which takes more into account the commuter mileage. We need to reduce as much daily commuter traffic as possible by arriving at touring fuel consumption figures.

The weekly magazine *Autocar and Motor* has formulated the figures over the years and it gives a useful guide to the fuel consumption characteristics of cars available in the United Kingdom market. The formula is arrived at by using 50 per cent. of the urban cycle, and 25 per cent. each of the 56 mph and 75 mph steady speed cycles which are already available, thanks to Government requirements. That would enable business car users to make a choice. If they wanted a more fuel-efficient car, we would reward them by placing it in a lower scale band so they would pay less tax.

If we are serious about reducing the amount of carbon dioxide emissions, such a scheme must be the way forward. We must not simply remain wedded to the idea that brute power cubic capacity is the be-all and end-all of internal combustion efficiency. It is not, and it is time that we redrew the scale charges to take into account improvements in technology and new forms of cars such as the diesel car.

My hon. Friend may say that it is a little difficult to start tinkering with the bands. The Government did that a few years ago when they were anxious to help British Leyland which had an engine that did not fit conveniently into the existing scale band charges. The Government moved the scale band charges so that the nationalised company's engine fell into the new category. There is no reason why something similar cannot be done again, but I hope that it will be based on touring fuel consumption so that the Government send a clear signal that they are serious about environmental matters and the company car.

Now I shall address corporate car taxation. The £8,000 writing down allowance has remained static since its introduction in 1979 as a luxury car limit. Even though powers were taken to enable the figure to be altered by statutory instrument, that has never happened. The average cost of a new car used for business purposes is now in excess of £10,000 and the major proportion of cars financed by way of lease and contract hire now falls within the £8,000 restriction.

As I have already said, Britain has an enviable track record of fleet management which has been exported to other European countries, yet in this case there is evidence that the Government's fiscal measures have not caught up with the changing pattern in the provision of cars for fleet use.

Now that the private usage of the business car is taxed in excess of its realistic value, the £8,000 luxury car limit has become an anachronism. The limit should be indexed or scrapped, because the compliance costs have become a

[Mr. Roger King]

considerable burden to businesses which must maintain two sets of figures to acknowledge real depreciation and the tax allowances after caculating the £2,000 per annum maximum limit.

The £8,000 restriction in deductibility of lease rentals must be addressed. The allowance does not apply to cars purchased outright or to those financed by other means such as bank loans. It applies exclusively to cars financed by means of leasing and contract hire. That is clearly unmitigated discrimination against the leasing contract hire business.

The car user's position is now being seriously affected by out-of-date legislation which is creating an unnatural situation in favour of purchase as opposed to contract hire for cars costing above around £12,000. Many users would prefer the administrative advantages of a hire agreement but are forced into purchasing due to the inequality of treatment of their car cost by the Revenue.

I welcome the enactment of section 61 of the Capital Allowances Act 1991 which removes the previous area of doubt in the interpretation of the 1990 Act as it applies to the HP case. My acute concern about the discriminatory treatment of leasing nevertheless remains. That serious anomaly is long overdue for review in order to avoid the proliferation of hybrid schemes which attempt to circumvent the problem.

On several occasions Ministers have committed themselves to the general principle of fiscal neutrality and the avoidance of artificial distortions in the tax system. The rental disallowance is such a clear case of discrimination against the leasing contract hire business that, in equity, its retention cannot be justified.

Another anomaly is the £19,250 price barrier, which has also remained unchanged for years. Unless it is moved upwards technological improvements cannot be featured in the modern company car. Nowadays, with anti-lock braking systems costing about £1,000 to fit in the average car and better security, the challenge of fitting cars with such essential devices—anyone who has driven a car without a skid brake will know that it should be a standard fitment on all cars—and keeping company cars under the £19,250 price barrier is becoming well nigh impossible. Are we therefore to say to the business car sector, which accounts for 55 per cent. of car sales in the United Kingdom that we are sorry but we do not want it to fit the latest technology because it is too expensive? No, we should raise that figure, certainly by 10 per cent., in order to encourage greater technical improvement in the average company car.

The non-deductibility of VAT is another strange anomaly. We understand that the Government take the view that there is a trade-off for the undertaxation of the user's benefit arising from private usage, which may have applied not so long ago, but does not now. There is surely some opportunity for about 50 per cent. of VAT to be deducted from the company car in line with other European countries. That is one way in which the manufacturing sector could be stimulated. It would be a major step forward if businesses were allowed some deductibility of VAT.

But a word of warning to my hon. Friend. There is much fashionable talk that the vehicle excise licence should be scrapped and passed on in the cost of fuel. In principle, that is not a bad idea, but doing it instantly in one fell swoop would be disastrous. It would throw up all kinds of anomalies, pain and anguish throughout the country. The Government could allow the £100 vehicle excise licence to wither on the vine during the next few years so that it becomes less and less important. They should not sweep it away in one go or it could result in an unwelcome backlash in the marketplace.

Finally, I should like some reduction in the special car tax. I should like that to go in one fell swoop. It may not be possible, but I could not sit down without making a further plea for the special car tax to be considered as a candidate for reduction in order to help the United Kingdom car industry.

I am sure that my hon. Friend is more than a little sympathetic to some of the points that I have made, because she has said as much on previous occasions. I do not expect all my proposals to be embraced and carried out, some perhaps, but I hope that the Treasury will start thinking along some of the lines that I have suggested on behalf of the industry. That would be more than welcome and would send out a clear signal that the Government recognise the role of business car users. They have an important role to play within the community. Their jobs, which require business cars, provide wealth and employment, principally in the west midlands but also in the British car industry generally which employs nearly 1 million people.

10.6 am

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I welcome the opportunity to reply to the range of interesting points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King). As the House knows, he has considerable expertise in and knowledge of these matters and is a valiant campaigner on behalf of the United Kingdom motor industry and the west midlands motor industry in particular. Such was his eloquence and such is his detailed knowledge of the matter that I shall have to be fairly brief in replying to his separate points.

The Government have no quarrel with a number of fundamental assessments made by my hon. Friend. First, we fully recognise the key importance of the motor industry to the United Kingdom's manufacturing base and to national prosperity. We have a successful motor industry and our policies during the past 12 years have played no small part in that.

At the end of the 1970s, the motor industry illustrated everything that was going wrong in our industrial life. It was overmanned, strike-ridden, to a large degree nationalised and, for the most part, had an unattractive product range. However, since then the position has been transformed. The industry has seen huge productivity gains, it has much more harmonious industrial relations and it produces superb cars, the qualities of which are constantly sung by my hon. Friend and his colleagues in the west midlands.

The British car industry is growing. The United Kingdom is seen as a good place in which to build cars. Motor analysts continue to predict that United Kingdom car production will reach the 2 million mark by the late 1990s.

I would not argue with my hon. Friend's point that the recession has brought difficulties for the car industry. He is right to draw attention to the important role played by

the business car in Britain. There is no doubt that the business car is an integral part of modern business. Many businesses could not operate efficiently without cars. Of the total stock of 20 million cars, it is estimated that 5 million are owned by businesses and 3 million owned by individuals are used on occasions for business purposes.

For a variety of reasons, not least that in the past they were very much undertaxed, company cars tend to be more prevalent in the United Kingdom than in other EC member states. That is why it is important to consider carefully the tax regime which applies to them.

My hon. Friend will not be surprised when I say that I can make no specific comment this morning on his suggestions for the forthcoming Budget—clearly, I cannot anticipate what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor might wish to do in his Budget next year—but I assure him that my right hon. Friend and I and other Treasury Ministers will continue to listen carefully to representatives of the car industry as we lead up to next year's Budget.

The Government's broad policy thrust on the taxation of benefits in kind is to ensure neutrality in tax treatment between payments in cash and payments in kind. I know that my hon. Friend opposes the concept, as do the Government, of a business car simply as a perk. The car scale structure, which has been in place in broadly its current form since the mid-1970s, has served us reasonably well. However, it is no part of that structure to tax the business use of company cars; merely their private use. The structure of the tax bands recognises the difference between high business mileage and the so-called perk car.

It is never difficult to point to anomalies, because there are only five categories of car tax scale. However, there is simplicity and certainty in the current regime. My hon. Friend mentioned national insurance contributions on company cars. It was sensible to tackle cars in the light of the Government's overall aim of obtaining neutrality between cash and benefits in kind because cars represent about three quarters by value of all benefits in kind. National insurance contributions also apply to payment by gilts and will be extended to unit trusts and equities. Therefore, cars are not being singled out.

My hon. Friend suggested that car scales should be banded by reference not to engine size but to fuel economy. That would not necessarily remove the kind of anomalies for which the current scheme is criticised. It might lead to more anomalies and, given that the main policy aim is to tax the value of cars to individual drivers, fuel economy would not necessarily be the best way to achieve that. My hon. Friend is enthusiastic about diesel cars and raised the matter in our debate on the Finance Bill last year. In reply at that time, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary explained that the car scale bands cover a fairly wide range of cars and that there were no compelling reasons for distinguishing diesels. My hon. Friend was right to speak about the increase in efficiency of diesel engines and he also spoke about the development of an engine at Ellesmere Port. I shall not dare to enter the fierce environmental debate about the relative merits of diesel fuel and unleaded petrol.

My hon. Friend spoke about cars costing more than £19,250. Such limits are closely examined every year in the budgetary process. He questions the different treatment of taxpayers in schedules D and E. I do not entirely accept that there is a fundamental difference between the two, because for self-employed taxpayers the individual costs of each car are apportioned between private and business use for tax purposes. That is what used to happen for schedule E and the change to scales is mainly to simplify administration and to save arduous record keeping. The substantial discounts that are available for increasing business use give a fair approximation of the individual apportionments within schedule D.

The £8,000 limit on capital allowances is also kept under review, and we are aware of the concern about the effect of these restrictions. My hon. Friend suggests that the 18,000 mile threshold should be reduced. It is, of course, a broad brush threshold in the way that it affects differently those whose mileage is mostly in urban areas and those who have large distances to travel for business purposes. It is kept under review, but it works tolerably well.

My hon. Friend also spoke about the VAT input tax on cars. That has not been recoverable on company cars since the start of VAT in 1973. Most company cars have some private use and if the VAT on their purchase were fully recoverable, a system would have to be introduced to tax the private use and the subsequent sale of the car. That would complicate the administration of the tax.

I reiterate that the Government take seriously the interests of the car industry. I cannot make any commitment about what the Chancellor will decide to do in the next Budget. We shall consider the serious points that have been made in the debate and in the many meetings that the Chancellor and I have had with the car trade. The Government's main concern has been to increase the level of company car scale charges with a view to obtaining parity of tax treatment between those paid in cash and those paid partly in cash and partly in kind.

Rolls-Royce

10.15.am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): About 85 years ago, a business partnership developed which some would have said was the ideal combination. It was almost a business marriage made in heaven, because it was between a Mr. Royce and a Mr. Rolls. Mr. Royce was an inspired engineer, a man of great ability who understood not only how to create a very important and efficient motor car but how to maintain its quality. He also knew that his customers would appreciate that. Mr. Rolls had a car sales shop in London, and they created a building which became synonymous with everything that was best in British engineering. When people talk about quality they say, "This is a Rolls-Royce product," and they are unaware of mentioning anything unusual.

My constituency faces one of the most frightening aspects of the development of the recession in Great Britain. Many companies have faced difficulties, but the Rolls-Royce motor company has always succeeded in returning large profits because, throughout the world, its customers valued each Rolls-Royce and were prepared to buy new models with only minor changes and to commit themselves to large sums to guarantee a first-class product.

That was not really surprising, because the first Mr. Royce charged a great deal of money for his car. The original cost was £900, and Rolls-Royce cars have not become any cheaper. The cars maintain a high standard of hand work. It was not just the coachwork that was important to the customer but the quality of the engineering. Many people were trained as Rolls-Royce chauffeurs and it was customary to find details of such training added to qualifications for a job. Unless people understood the Rolls-Royce, they would not be taken on to look after one of these special motor cars.

It is important for the House to understand the difficulties that face Rolls-Royce and especially what is happening to my constituents. When Rolls-Royce was broken up, the aero engine division formed a separate company and Rolls-Royce Motor Cars was floated and became a profitable concern. Not only do our royals have Rolls-Royce cars in their stables, but Rolls-Royce cars used to be the accepted form of transport for ambassadors and the heads of industry. That should still be the practice, because it incorporates an image of the United Kingdom.

However, Vickers took over Rolls-Royce in 1980. It is a traditional engineering company and, during my time as a Member of the House, it has not only had a direct involvement in defence engineering but has received over the years a substantial amount of taxpayers' money in terms of research and development. Vickers' corporate ethos is different from that of the car company, and it was obviously aware of that, because it took over the services of Sir David Plastow, who joined Rolls-Royce as a young man.

When Rolls-Royce began to produce a large part of Vickers' profits, one hoped that that contribution would be appreciated. However, the recession totally changed Vickers' attitude to one of its hitherto most profitable and constructive manufacturing units. That became clear less than a year ago, when Vickers Precision Engineering—another part of the group—faced real difficulties in my constituency.

With little concern being shown for the unions or the work force, immediate changes were made to that company's work patterns. The principle of first in, last out, was jettisoned without consultation or any attempt at explaining to the work force why it had been done. Many employees found themselves treated with scant respect and little understanding.

I know that, because I made representations to Vickers' management in respect of workers at a particular foundry. It was made clear to me that those workers' loyalty, preparedness to adopt new techniques and understanding of the need for flexibility would not deflect the management from their intention to close that foundry. That was a clear sign of Vickers' new attitude towards many of its engineering units.

What subsequently happened to Rolls-Royce was horrendous and totally irresponsible. When the recession first hit the company, it was obvious that it would grow more severe. The present management has a great deal to answer for in the existing situation. For a long time, there was a feeling that being a member of Rolls-Royce management was something of a soft option. Only a few years ago, the company had not only full order books but a waiting list, with some customers having to wait years to obtain the model that they wanted. Customers in many parts of the world were prepared not only to go on the waiting list, but even to pay a deposit to be able to join it.

There was no question of management having to go out to sell its product all over the world. In effect, it stayed at home and the world came trundling to its door. The result was an incredibly frightening inertia and an increasing inability to understand that, marvellous though the product was, it had to be sold—particularly in countries adopting new engineering and anti-pollution techniques and other innovations.

Rolls-Royce management eventually acknowledged those trends and was prepared to make product changes—but did not recognise the signs that, in future, the company would not have it all its own way, but would need to invest heavily in research and development and invest continually to develop its overseas markets.

It is noticeable that, since the war, there have been only five new Rolls-Royce models. It is not a car that alters every year—and it was that very stability and purity of line that attracted many customers in the past. They understood that they were buying a high-quality car, and did not seek superficial changes to its trim, or new bows fitted in inaccessible places, just to prove that they had purchased the latest model. Rolls-Royce's customers were content in the knowledge that the car's quality represented value for money.

Unfortunately, that is no longer true. Eventually, there were clear signs that the company was in severe financial difficulties, with overseas sales dropping noticeably. Management began to talk about work force cuts, and then imposed a three-day week.

My real complaint about the company's management is that it reacted in the most incredibly panicky way to a situation that is not entirely unusual, and which one can expect to change for the better when the country begins to emerge from the present appalling recession.

With the start of the three-day week, it was also made clear to the work force that there would be until Christmas several weeks of restraint, during which it would be required to work only a number of hours—and that over the Christmas holiday there would be a long lay-off, which

would be economic from the company's point of view. The work force was prepared to accept that, because it believed that the new year would bring not only an increase in work but a return to a stable throughput of cars.

There has been tremendous co-operation with Rolls-Royce management at every level of the unions. Unfortunately, that may have been misinterpreted not as sensible flexibility or acceptance of the pressures on the company resulting from the recession, but a weak-willed inability on the part of the work force to understand the economy. Certainly there was no sign that management would, for its part, exercise tolerance and be similarly prepared to negotiate changes rather than impose them.

In the 1970s, Rolls-Royce was in considerable difficulties at one London plant, which had work force troubles. There were strikes, and clear signs that the unions at the Mulliner Park Ward factory, whose members were producing high-quality, customised vehicles, were ready to fight their corner with intransigence. That has never been true of the work force at Crewe.

I emphasise that, because a high-quality product relies on the quality of the work force that produces it—the two are directly linked. One cannot produce a motor car of such a standard by machine and assemble it like a Meccano set, with pieces bought in from small factories in the west midlands. There may be an upturn in the sale of popular cars, but customers throughout the world willing to pay the kind of money that is asked for a Rolls-Royce do not want a popular car off the production line that has been manufactured by a series of robots—even though such cars may be in their company fleets and be owned by members of their own families. Such customers buy a Rolls-Royce because they know that a substantial proportion of the car has been handmade.

I refer not just to the upholstery. Some of the media seem to believe that a Rolls-Royce is an ordinary car with some nice veneer and expensive hide seats. In fact, it is a very special car, because much of its engineering is handmade. People are quick to say. "How extraordinarily 1910—still to have a quality product made largely by hand."

That is a bizarre attitude to take. If one visits an expensive jewellers on Christmas Eve, one will find people buying high-quality products. They do not make those purchases because they imagine that those items have been turned out by a multiple jewellers' manufacturing flat unit in Birmingham—excellent though such products may be. Those customers will be looking for high-quality hand work and for something that will last them for as long as they wish to keep it. That has always been the type of product that Rolls-Royce has produced.

I return to the point that the work force at Rolls-Royce, apart from being highly skilled, is stable. It has given the management no problems in terms of consistent strikes, an inability to accept new working patterns or a refusal to consider the need for flexibility.

How is the work force to be repaid for its loyalty? Some of the families of those in the present work force have seen every male member working at Rolls-Royce—grandfathers, fathers, uncles and brothers. They were devastated when they were told suddenly during trade union negotiations that the company is in real difficulties and that it intends to impose new Japanese-style working practices.

If the House thinks that I exaggerate, I shall recount exactly what happened. With the company on a three-day week, and the unions having accepted a two-week lay-off over Christmas and the new year, negotiations began with the management. The unions knew that there would be a series of meetings. Without any consultation, however, the management decided that it would close down, as it were, and that it would go for 420 compulsory redundancies.

The unions responded by saying that they were still prepared to talk with the management representatives. They decided that they would offer alternative measures that would not make it less likely that the company would get the economic result that it wanted but would cushion both the work force and the factory against the worst of the consequences of the company's difficulties. In effect, the unions said "Change is best negotiated. Co-operation is won through consultation—the future by agreement."

The company had already imposed what was called a new green book. In effect, it was a one-sided agreement between the management and the work force. It then announced, in the most frightening and panicky move that could ever have been taken, that there would be 420 compulsory redundancies.

I shall tell the House how the management made the redundancies known to the work force. It should be remembered that the management is supposed to understand the needs of modern industry. What did it do? On the last Friday of the month, it suddenly decided that they would issue compulsory redundancy notices. It was so ill prepared that it was forced to use a series of motor cycle messengers and a manager in a Rolls-Royce to go round throwing the redundancy notices at the employees concerned.

When I say "throwing", I am not exaggerating. One man, who was working on the line, had his notice flung into the car on which he was working. That was followed by the man who threw it at him saying, "They've got you." Some employees received their redundancy notice in the post. Some ex-wives were given employees' redundancy notices. In some instances, employees were tapped on the shoulder and told, "Don't report back to work. Leave now and take your things."

The resultant chaos and deep emotional upset had never been seen before in my constituency. I am talking about people who had gone into Rolls-Royce to be trained as apprentices and who had remained there throughout their working lives. They found that everyone they knew was in the same situation. They were given a letter that suggested that they had a right of appeal and that they would have the chance to challenge what was described as an "evaluation" of their working abilities.

Those evaluations caused deep offence. I am sure that they will be the subject of complaints when many appeals are taken to the tribunal. Men who had city and guilds qualifications and many years of practical experience, and who were still comparatively young, were told by people who did not have the same engineering experience, "You are not capable of doing the job. You are not flexible. You cannot move from one place of work to another. You will have to go out on the stones."

The company's position soon became clear to those who were targeted. Some of them had a specific problem. For example, one man looks after his 81-year-old mother. He was told, "You must go because you are not flexible. You can't do night work." There were others who had had minor illnesses in the past. Many of the others who were targeted had one black side that stood against them—they

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

were trade union representatives. That was the worst crime of all. When the compulsory redundancies were announced, 16 shop stewards went out of the door.

It was clear that it was the intention of Rolls-Royce to move from being a responsible, highly regarded and important manufacturer producing luxury cars to one that could be regarded as the worst sort of manufacturer of cheap goods. That has produced real agony in my constituency, and real anger. There were men in tears on the shop floor. Men came into my constituency office and it was clear that they were devastated by being given notice and by the savagery with which it had been done. They were entirely undermined, as were their views of themselves.

Why has the company found it necessary to behave in such a brutal and unimaginative way? Is it a company which has no future? Is the company so poor and have we become so much a third-world country that it has to be sold to the highest bidder, who preferably will be foreign and who will take over a high-quality name and sell the goods elsewhere in the world? Far from it.

One of the reasons for there being so much ill will within my constituency—I was amazed when I was told about this—was that, when the management was behaving in the way in which I have described, there was a growing waiting list for a new Bentley—the Bentley Continental—that will cost £160,000. It seems that the "gamble", as it was described in *The Times* on 1 July 1991, has paid off. Customers have snapped up the first two years of production, placing deposits of £20,000 on each of the 600 Continentals. That has been done well before the first car will be made in November. Deposits alone have raised more than £12 million.

There is a strong suspicion in my constituency that Rolls-Royce is subsidising much of the redundancy costs through the pensions holiday that it has enjoyed over the past five years as a result of the Government's legislation. There is a worry that some firms plan to subsidise redundancy payments on the basis that they have made no contributions to pension funds. What could be greater cynicism that that?

There is a long waiting list for a new high-quality car, the Continental. The company has already taken many deposits. Rolls-Royce said, "If we were choosing a time to launch the Continental, it would have been difficult to pick a more turbulent period to do so." It then talked about sales in America and what has happened to the company because of additional taxation of 10 per cent. in America, and various other problems that have made real changes necessary.

Rolls-Royce has shed about 700 jobs at Crewe this year and a further 500 from the Mulliner Park Ward coachbuilding subsidiary in London. The result is simple. In December 1991, unemployment in my constituency was 4,276—7·9 per cent. That is an increase, from December 1990, of 47·3 per cent. That is happening because Rolls-Royce, British Rail Engineering Ltd. and a number of small companies are going under.

Rolls-Royce has contributed to that number for one simple reason. It said in public that it intended to move towards new Japanese-style work practices and that there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the move among the work force. I see astonishingly little sign of it. I believe that the work force has been betrayed. Its loyalty, its commitment and the many hard times that it has endured in the past have been totally ignored by the management, which thinks that in future it will be able to rip off not just its work force but its customers.

If we move towards a system under which many engine parts are bought in and much of the work that is presented to the customer is said to be acceptable simply because of the veneering, the coachwork and the upholstery, we shall soon find that the marketplace will begin to react. Rolls-Royce customers know what an engine ought to sound like. They know what quality they want. They will not continue to buy Rolls-Royce cars if they are not provided with the same quality of product as they enjoyed in the past.

What has been the Government's role? Some of the legislation has not improved the position. Furthermore, the Government have a great deal to answer for in their handling of the economy. We are in a deep recession which is going on far longer and is doing far more damage to our manufacturing base than was envisaged. There are those who would ask, "What is the loss of one major motor car company compared with the loss of so many of our high-quality manufacturing companies?" I would say in reply that Rolls-Royce has become almost an emblem of what is important to British engineering. It has trained generations of engineers. Rolls-Royce cars have been sold all over the world and have always stood for first-class quality.

Many German manufacturers seem to be better at making a profit than we are. They would be happy to take over this factory and its product. Yesterday, I was asked by Rolls-Royce representatives to speak to them because of their deep concern that the Prime Minister had been seen getting out of a Mercedes car at Maastricht. They were deeply affronted and upset about that. I do not see why that should surprise Rolls-Royce. If the company carries on as it is now, the Prime Minister will be seen getting out of a BMW, if not a Mercedes, and if he is not getting out of a BMW he may even arrive in a Fiat. If we go on for very much longer in this way, the Prime Minister will soon demonstrate his vision of a classless society by arriving in the smallest type of Japanese car.

Incompetent people, sitting in front offices, are not involved in manufacturing. They are not important to the people of this country, but without its work force Rolls-Royce would not exist. Who do the people sitting in front offices think is making their profits for them? They are being made by the men and women on the shop floor who have devoted their lives to this company but who have been treated with contempt by management which is totally unconcerned about their future, or the future of my constituency.

On the spirit of ecstasy—that very beautiful lady, synonymous in line and shape with all that is best in Rolls-Royce, who sits on my desk at home—shadows occasionally move. Sometimes it looks as though the spirit of ecstasy is weeping. In my view, she is weeping for the time when quality, commitment to the work force and, above all, responsibility were something that Rolls-Royce stood for. Those days may be long gone.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I am glad to have this opportunity to reply on the important subject of Rolls-Royce, one of our finest engineering companies. I do not necessarily agree with everything that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, but it is obvious that she speaks with great knowledge of these matters and with great commitment to her constituents. The whole House will therefore be grateful to her for bringing the company's problems to our attention.

The future of the company is a matter of great concern to us all, and the Department is therefore following developments very closely. As the hon. Lady said, the Rolls-Royce motor car is a symbol of British excellence. Without any doubt, it is the best car in the world. It represents our country well beyond our borders. Everyone recognises it for what it is—the product of British skill and craftsmanship. As the hon. Lady said—I have walked around the works in Crewe—it is not just a question of excellent design or good upholstery. Excellence in craftsmanship and engineering goes right to the heart of every component in the car. If hon. Members have any free time, I recommend that they visit that factory. It is a revelation to see just how excellent our engineering standards can be. The hon. Lady spoke in moving terms about that and I endorse everything that she said about this wonderful British product.

Rolls-Royce has enjoyed a decade of success. However, I am just as concerned as the hon. Lady that this company, which is a national institution, now finds itself having to tackle some very difficult problems. A series of events have occurred that have had a serious effect on the market for these luxury cars. World economic conditions, the war in the Gulf and tax changes in the vital United States market have combined to stifle sales. The hon. Lady may be relieved to hear that only last week the Secretary of State wrote to the United States Government about their swingeing tax on luxury cars. We await a reply. We are working with the European Commission on that subject. I assure the hon. Lady that the Secretary of State is concerned about the effect that that United States tax has had and we intend to take action.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am grateful to the Minister for making that point. We are very concerned that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has not visited the Crewe factory and has not looked at any of the other problems that we have encountered. I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry will make representations with real vigour. The Secretary of State certainly does not seem to understand that there is a problem.

Mr. Leigh: I can assure the hon. Lady that the Secretary of State has met the chairman of Vickers and is pursuing the matter with great vigour. She knows that our regional office has done a considerable amount of work. Mr. John Pownall, regional director of the Department of Trade and Industry in the north-west, has had a series of meetings with the Crewe development agency. At the most recent meeting, on 25 November, we offered the agency £40,000 of matching grants to meet half the costs of two projects, to help to develop a strategy for technology transfer and a business in the environment programme for firms in the borough. I hope that the hon. Lady accepts that the Department of Trade and Industry is taking steps to help. I am happy to visit her constituency to meet the borough council with her. It is most important that Department of Trade and Industry Ministers do not spend all their time in London, important though our responsibilities to the House are, but travel around the country, as I do almost every day of the week. I hope that that commitment will help the hon. Lady. I have already visited the works, but if I were invited I should be delighted to visit again.

Rolls-Royce is the last significant domestic car maker wholly owned by British interests and it is therefore right that the whole House should follow developments closely. Vickers acquired the company for £35 million in 1980. It was floated in 1973 after the collapse of its then parent aero-engine maker in 1971. City estimates of its current value vary between £250 million and £600 million. In the following 10 years, investment proved profitable and as late as last year—it is important to make this point, because it puts the debate in perspective—it made nearly one third of Vickers' £100 million profits. With the collapse of sales, in 1991 it will make an estimated loss of £60 million. Its problems are serious, but we hope that the parent company, Vickers, has the resources to overcome the problem; it is clearly seeking to do so.

A brief look at what has happened in the United States is a good, if unhappy, illustration of what Rolls-Royce faces. In a typical year, almost half the cars that it produces are exported to that country. In 1990, it assembled a total of 3,300 cars and, as usual, about 50 per cent. were exported to the United States. Compared with last year, sales in the United States have fallen by half this year. Overall, it seems that this year's total sales for Rolls-Royce cars will be some 50 per cent. lower than in 1990.

I hope that hon. Members will join me in understanding the difficult market conditions that all luxury car makers are facing and the need for them to take positive but difficult steps to secure their future. In the markedly changed circumstances in which Rolls-Royce Motor Cars finds itself, the company has been taking urgent and sometimes painful decisions to restructure its manufacturing operations and to bring costs into line with the new and much lower level of sales.

As the representative of the factory's workers, the hon. Lady dealt with the issue of job losses, which of course are regrettable at any time. I appreciate hon. Members' concern for the employment prospects of Rolls-Royce's work force at Crewe, but manning is a matter for the commercial judgment of the company and it would be counterproductive for the Government to try to intervene in the normal commercial processes. I do not think that the hon. Lady, despite her criticism of the company, suggested that we should do so.

Inevitably, companies sometimes have to adjust or rationalise their structure, employment levels or product lines because of changing market conditions. As the hon. Lady said, the work force has been cut by almost a third. Redundancies of more than 1,200 have reduced it to about 3,000. A three-day week is being worked and there will be an extended Christmas shut-down at Crewe. I am told that the work force is co-operating in the introduction of flexible working practices. The company is 10 weeks into a complete review of the business and how it can be made more efficient. It believes that those measures will reduce its costs by £640 million, and thus enable it to achieve a break-even point at an output of several hundred cars

[Mr. Leigh]

fewer than previously. One regrets any redundancies, but I am sure that the hon. Lady will accept that, through no fault of the company's the market in the United States has collapsed.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Unfortunately, people have come to understand that redundancies, properly handled by union negotiation, are necessary under a Conservative Government. What they will never accept is the brutal ignorance of the manner in which these redundancies were made and the savagery with which all internal relationships have been destroyed. That is why so many union shop stewards had to go. The company will find it almost impossible to operate in the future.

Mr. Leigh: I listened with great care to the hon. Lady's remarks on those matters and I have noted them. She will not expect me to comment on them now, but no doubt inquiries can be made later.

The decision as how best to safeguard the company is a commercial decision for the owners. Vickers plc, which has owned Rolls-Royce since 1980, should look at what avenues are open to secure a successful future for Rolls-Royce. It has said that it will examine all the options and make an announcement at the appropriate time. At this stage, I share the company's confidence that Rolls-Royce Motor Cars will recover from its present trading difficulties.

The hon. Lady referred to speculation that Vickers might want to dispose of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars. There has been speculation in the press that there might be an outright sale or that an outsider might take a substantial shareholding. Companies such as BMW, Ford and General Motors have been mentioned. For the time being, that is only press speculation and the House would be wise to treat it as such. The important point that I want to convey is that Vickers is confident that Rolls-Royce Motor Cars will recover from its present trading difficulties. However, changes in manufacturing methods and working practices may have implications for employment.

The company's commitment to produce the highest-quality cars for the long term is shown by the fact that, despite a difficult year for sales in 1991, expenditure on research and development is being maintained at a similar level to that in 1990. The hon. Lady mentioned research and development. If the company is to retain its competitive edge, it must maintain expenditure on research and development.

Rolls-Royce, in keeping with its reputation for technological excellence, has continued to innovate and refine its products. For example, fuel consumption has been improved by more than 25 per cent. in the past five years.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars also manufactures the Bentley marque. Bentley has achieved much of the company's success, and some 60 per cent. of the company's sales are under the Bentley badge.

Employment prospects for the work force are naturally tied to the continued commercial success of the company and its technology. I have already confirmed my confidence in Rolls-Royce's future.

Despite what has been written by motoring journalists, one could hardly contemplate assembly outside this country being successful without the loss of one of the essential attractions of the car—its unique Britishness. To reassure the hon. Lady, I refer to the trade mark issue, which is important. Rolls-Royce plc, the aero-engine maker, owns and licenses the Rolls-Royce Motor Cars trademark, but Vickers plc owns the company. Under the original licensing agreement, Rolls-Royce plc retains the right to withdraw the use of the name Rolls-Royce in whole or in part if the car business is sold to a foreign buyer. That right extends to areas other than ownership —for example, quality—and Rolls-Royce plc regularly monitors the licence. That is an important protection which the hon. Lady did not mention.

I stress that one of the essential attractions of the car is its unique Britishness. The continuing manufacture of Rolls-Royce cars in Britain is thus of prime importance. I hope that the main assembly facility at Crewe will therefore have an assured future. That future may involve some type of partnership or collaboration, because the cost of development is high. However, as I have already said, what option to follow is a matter for the owner——

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Fisheries Council

11 am

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): With permission, I would like to make a statement on the outcome of the Fisheries Council held earlier this week.

I attended the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 17 and 18 December, together with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, Lord Strathclyde.

I undertook to the House to fight for the application of the Hague preference, mackerel flexibility, better fishing opportunities, where they could be obtained within the bounds of scientific advice, and alternatives to the current eight-day tie-up rule. We achieved all of these.

On the tie-up rule, we were faced with a Commission proposal for 200 days. Some restriction is necessary to conserve the stocks, but we secured agreement that there should be a choice between this year's requirement for eight consecutive days tie-up each month and an option for vessels to tie up for 135 days in total, on the same catch criteria as last year. The exact details of this are for us to work out, so that we can ensure the flexibility which was missing from this year's arrangement.

We shall also be able to give fishermen the choice of using more selective gear instead of all or part of their tie-up obligations. We shall need to put proposals to the Commission under the same procedure as this year. We shall do so early in the new year and the new rules will come into force on 1 February 1992.

These measures, combined with the improvements in technical conservation measures which are being introduced from next June, will be important in safeguarding the cod and haddock stocks which are so important to our fishermen, while covering the range of interests of the United Kingdom's industry much better than this year's rules.

We not only secured the flexibility to take western mackerel east of 4 deg. west but, for the first time, secured agreement to take the full quantity provided for in the Community's agreement with Norway. This will greatly help our fishermen, who have faced considerable difficulties because of the changed migratory pattern of the mackerel, by enabling them to take up to 36,370 tonnes, which is 15 per cent. of the United Kingdom quota in the eastern waters. We successfully resisted the Commission's proposal for national allocations for the western horse mackerel stock.

We succeeded in securing the Hague preference as on the basis of last year. This year it will apply to North sea haddock, and west of Scotland saithe and whiting. If the Commission does not achieve a modest increase in the total allowable catch in consultation with Norway, we shall also have a Hague preference for North sea cod. Following the negotiations at the Council of the 49 TACs of interest to the UK, 14 will increase compared with 1991, 18 will decrease and 17 will remain the same.

In the North sea, taking into account the Hague preference, the demersal opportunities will be very much the same as in 1991, with a small increase in haddock, a drop in saithe and a marginal reduction in cod. Flatfish opportunities will be reduced, reflecting chiefly the passing of the very abundant 1987 sole year class. A new TAC was introduced for North sea nephrops, but was not allocated between member states.

In the west of Scotland, two quotas increase, six are reduced and six stay the same. In the Irish sea, with minor changes in the whiting TAC consistent with the science and with quota exchanges with other member states, higher quantities of cod and whiting will be available to our fleet in 1992. The increase in the nephrops TAC will also be very welcome. In the channel, we achieved better TACs for cod and whiting and for some flatfish than were proposed, as well as the usual quota exchanges with the Netherlands. Overall, we have achieved some welcome changes for every part of the many and varied fisheries around our coasts. No transfers or swaps were concluded with Denmark.

The fishing industry will, I hope, recognise that we have secured a good package on its behalf. Processors will welcome the relaxations on autonomous tariff quotas and tariff suspensions on certain fish imports which are vital to their businesses. Consumers should also benefit from the greater availability with reduced import restrictions.

We have worked hard to secure a good package. We have achieved this. Early in 1992 we shall enter further consultations with our industry on special measures we could take to improve the conservation of the fish stocks of importance to us.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It is fair to say that we welcome many aspects of the arrangement that the Minister obtained in Brussels, in particular the flexibility of days in port and the reduction from 200 days to 135 days. We also welcome the gear option which is to be negotiated, although it is a shame that, as last year, that option was not resolved at the same time at the Council of Ministers, so that fishermen would know where they stood and what was available to them. We also very much welcome the fact that Denmark did not get the 400 tonnes of cod from the United Kingdom allocation which it received last year.

The main problem is that, although this deal is, I think, by far the best that could be obtained in the present circumstances, I do not see how it will meet the target of a 30 per cent. effort reduction on fish stocks in United Kingdom waters. In that respect, although it meets the requirements of this year, it is a sticking-plaster deal which does not provide a long-term framework for stability. When will the Minister make an application for aid to the relevant budgets in the Community for decommissioning grants to restructure the fleets and give some long-term stability?

Will the Minister also apply for aid from the social fund to assist the communities that will be affected? On that point, will he press his hon. Friends to try to resolve the dispute between the Government and the Commission about the application of those funds? Will he also take note of Mr. Marin's comments about fisheries enforcements and the fact that it is up to individual states to ensure that the rules are kept? Will the Minister consider enforcement in this country and the fact that there has been fairly widespread breaking of the rules? In that conection, will he consider a pilot scheme for the satellite tracking of fishing fleets?

It is a sad fact that cheating has occurred in this country, as it has in all member states. Some fishermen say that they cheat because they have no choice—that they are

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

driven to it by economic circumstances and by the level of fish stocks and the pressures on them. The fact that fishermen are driven to do that does not excuse it, but it underlines the Government's failure so far to match effort to available fish stocks and to ensure a long-term future for the industry. When will the Government deal with that problem and introduce the long-term planning and policies needed to ensure that this country has a sustainable industry?

Mr. Curry: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's congratulations on the package. The reduction to 135 days is welcome, and the gear option will be obtainable on the same basis as last year, in that the regulation is the same. We must be fair and say that, with a 135-day tie-up taken across the year and taken in fairly flexibly—we must work out the detailed arrangements—the requirement of the gear option is likely to be somewhat less than it was in the current year. I was also pleased that we did not conclude what I called a "Christmas bonus" for Denmark with a small allocation of cod—I thought that this year we would keep it for ourselves.

The conservation element of the package has to be seen in the light of a series of measures. The package contains the reduction in the TACs, which is in itself an element of conservation. The package of the eight-day tie-up was more onerous. The problem is that if we ask fishermen to do something that they do not consider reasonable—even using that word somewhat flexibly—we shall not get conservation at the end of the day. They are driven to the point at which anti-conservation results.

Therefore, although some people may say that the package is liberal, it is better to ask fishermen to observe the rules thoroughly on something that is reasonable. My appeal to the industry is that many of the arguments at present are about illegal landings. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has raised that issue several times.

There is much talk in the fishing press about that subject and about cheating. Nobody could argue that this package drives fishermen to cheat; it has introduced the very elements of flexibility for which the fishermen asked. If fishermen cheat, misreport and take deliberate decisions not to obey the rules, the inevitable result will be that, in future years, scientists will advise us to have a more restrictive package. We would then be back to the position of tying up the industry in red tape, which is not the way to progress.

Inevitably, the hon. Member for Glandford and Scunthorpe mentioned decommissioning, as he finds the package fairly congenial. He knows that we are having discussions with the industry on an overall package of conservation measures, of which decommissioning could form an element. The package is sensible and sets our relations with the industry on a stable and sensible base. Given our recent success in obtaining the safeguards against Norwegian salmon and the rapidity with which we dealt with the outbreak of paralytic shellfish poisoning that threatened shellfish exports from Scotland, I think that the industry can regard the Fisheries Department as having worked extremely well on their behalf.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that today is a private Members' day. I shall allow questions on the statement to continue until 11.30 am and hope that, in that time, all hon. Members present may be called to speak.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): There are a number of aspects of the package that are welcome, and the Minister should be congratulated on his achievements, particularly the fact that he has managed to obtain the full quantity of mackerel allowed in the agreement between the Community and Norway. I know that that will be especially welcomed by the pelagic fishermen in my constituency. While none of us thought that the package would result in something as bad as a 200-day period, we were realistic enough to know that the period would never be totally eliminated. There has been a significant reduction in the number of tie-up days and, as the Minister said, the flexibility allowed will be helpful.

How many vessels of nations other than the United Kingdom will be affected by the tie-up rules? Did I understand the Minister to say that the new proposals on the gear option are to be the same as this year's? Will he reassure those who are sceptical about the gear option that it will not prove to be a loophole but will be properly enforced? Will he comment on the disappointment felt about the west coast TACs?

Finally, like the hon. Memberr for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), I must mention decommissioning. As we go from year to year, anxiety is felt within the fishing industry every December about the threat and reality of tie-ups, and such worries will continue until we have a decommissioning scheme. The industry has responded reasonably warmly to what the Minister has achieved, and relations between the industry and the Government are perhaps better now than they have been for a long time. Will the Government take this opportunity to talk constructively to the industry about a well-targeted and well-resourced decommissioning scheme?

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. He has always been fair in his observations on the fishing industry. It is true that the package is a good deal for his fishermen and those based in the islands, particularly western land mackerel flexibility. Whichever boat is caught, the criterion remains the same: 100 tonnes and 40 per cent. over the same reference period. It is up to the member states to apply to the Commission for derogation, which the Commission will deal with under a series of criteria, one of which is the extent to which the fishermen might expect to take their quota. Certainly, we expect Danes to be caught under these rules in the Skaggerak and Kattegat unless they can prove to the contrary.

The words on which the gear option is hung—if I may use that phrase—are the same as last year. That does not mean that the gear option as such would necessarily be the same as last year. We must ask questions of and make representations to the Commission. I outlined to the Commissioner in a statement in the Council the sort of options that we might want. I asked him to say whether he agreed on the sort of ball park area, and he said yes, so we shall get those gear options. However, many boats that have taken up the gear option this year will not find the same necessity to do so next year.

It was an extremely useful exercise, as people fishing with 110 mm nets gained practical experience and found

that the nets had greater conservation benefits than they thought and the quantity of catchable fish was greater than they had thought. I hope that some boat crews will ask for a gear option of 120 mm. I know that some Shetland fishermen would seriously contemplate that as a feasible option.

As for the Government's relations with the industry, they are co-operating closely with it, having conducted a series of meetings and are currently discussing a conservation package. We all know what elements that package will contain, and I shall meet representatives of the industry early in the new year to see how we can advance the package.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): May I join other hon. Members in welcoming the more flexible package that the Minister has achieved and which the industry can live with? Does the Minister recall that, apart from one year and small marginal changes this year, TACs have been reduced every year since they were introduced? Is he aware of the pressures on stocks? The problems relate not just to minimum size; the quality of fish now caught is much poorer than it was some years ago.

What long-term studies are the Government undertaking to find out why the stocks are under such pressure and whether the problem is due simply to overfishing or whether there is some serious form of pollution in the breeding grounds that is gravely affecting the stocks? We must have a longer-term plan and study the problem, or we shall merely stagger from crisis to crisis, year after year.

Mr. Curry: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point about the quality of fish. One reason why we were anxious to obtain a cut-off date of 1 August for western horse mackerel stock was that the fish caught are of a much higher quality in the latter part of the year. The fishing is carried out for human consumption, using freezer trawlers, and the catch often goes straight to Japan. The Commission is producing a report on the industrial fishery.

One achievement contained in the package was to reduce significantly the industrial by-catch in cod and haddock fisheries. The Commission is committed to bringing forward a report on the effect of the industrial fishery. The House will know that none of us likes industrial fisheries, and we believe that fish should be used for human consumption. The package should go some way to ensuring that.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I join the welcome for the flexibility of the package. As one who represents a constituency in which 25 per cent. of jobs depend on the fisheries industry, I can say that not a single tear will be shed for the ending of the infamous eight-day consecutive tie-up rule, which was always potentially life-threatening.

As for the retention of the 40 per cent. option on the TACs for cod and haddock, does the Minister recognise that the people who suffered most last year under the eight-day tie-up rule have again been targeted? Why was not total flexibility implemented, so that effort limitation could have been spread evenly across the Community and throughout the United Kingdom? How will the Minister nominate the 135-day rule, and how will it be policed? Will any—

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mrs. Ewing: Will any consideration be given to compensation for the 135-day tie up?

Mr. Curry: We shall write to the industry shortly asking how it would like the 135-day rule to operate—whether it would like it in quarterly chunks and what notification procedure should be used. We were willing to see an amendment in the 100 tonnes and 40 per cent. rule to widen its scope, but our proposal was not backed by a majority, so we were not successful.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I also congratulate the Minister on the successes in the package. Will he ask his colleagues in the Scottish Office to consider the implications of the package for the west coast nephrops fleet? I still believe that a weekend ban on nephrops fishing on the west coast would be effective and desirable.

Will the Minister respond to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) about social fund money from the Commission for the restructuring of the fleet and the possibility of funding along the lines now available for the coal and steel industries and, potentially, for the textile industry?

Mr. Curry: We have a consultation on the nephrops fishery, and a weekend ban is one of the items on which we are asking the industry to give its views. I will raise funding matters with my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister confirm that all he hears from west Cumbrian fishermen is that they want a decommissioning scheme and fair treatment under the Hague preference? Will he confirm that they will still be penalised under the Hague preference as a result of the package that he has negotiated? Can the Minister tell me why we can decommission land to stop the production of agricultural products but we cannot decommission boats to prevent fishermen from fishing? Why is there inconsistency in the Government's view of these matters?

Mr. Curry: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the effects of the Hague preference in the Irish sea. If we get the Hague preference, the Irish do, too; the two go together. We have tried to achieve a proper mean. In the last half-year period, we have operated on the same basis under the Hague preference as we did last year. It is a difficult issue.

Most of the industry talks about decommissioning, but, as a result of our talks, it is increasingly recognising that effort control and limitation go with decommissioning as part of a package, and that has made it a much more sensible dialogue.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Minister say something about the detail of the increased flexibility in the package, which is welcome? When will we know exactly what is and what is not allowable? Will the Minister now consider the availability of compensation because there is to be an increase in the number of restricted days and therefore a decrease in fishing opportunities? Few other industries in the country have a statutory prescription on their earning capacity. Either the EC must come forward with per diem compensation, or unemployment benefit or family credit should be extended to fishermen who are denied their opportunity to work.

Mr. Curry: On flexibility, we will consult the industry on how it wants the scheme to work, and that discussion will include such matters as refits, the necessity to come into port, breakdowns and so on. As the rules stand at the moment, a day in port for any reason whatever counts against the 135 days. We shall have to ask the industry how it wants the scheme to work.

On compensation, I must emphasise to the hon. Gentleman that very few boats in practice fish for more than 230 days a year. Those that need to do so may well be able to benefit from the gear option. I do not see any scope for compensation.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): My first reaction was to think, "Thank God the eight day tie-up rule is to be thrown overboard." When the Minister was in Brussels, did he consult the report that is being prepared by Community officials on the current circumstances of the industry? I believe that that report is part of the gradual process leading up to the mid-term review.

Two important issues arise: the first is industrial fishing and the second is the concept of relative stability by which fixed percentages of traditional fishing opportunities are maintained. May I urge on the hon. Gentleman the need to reject the Spanish demands about an incursion into that relative stability? It must be adhered to and surely there must be a complete ban on industrial fishing.

Mr. Curry: The Commission is to produce a report on industrial fishing by the middle of next year and I hope that, following that, we can begin the process of eliminating it. The report on the mid-term review was not brought forward to the Council meeting, but the hon. Gentleman can be assured that, when it is, I shall argue that we believe that the principle of relative stability is an important part of the policy and should remain.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): May I congratulate the Government on their speedy and effective action over the so-called shellfish ban? Will the Minister undertake to examine very soon the consequences of the package on the village-based fishing industry? In particular—as the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is here—will the Minister encourage his Scottish Office colleagues to take an early and favourable decision in respect of the proposal for improved fish handling facilities and safety at Pittenweem harbour in my constituency?

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his remarks about the shellfish ban. The Ministry and the Scottish Office acted very quickly and that great threat to the industry has now been eliminated. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has heard what the hon. and learned Gentleman said about his constituency.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): May I say a word about the fish processing industry? The industry generally welcomes the flexibility that the new tie-up arrangements have brought, which should lead to some stability and continuity of supply. Some concerns remain, however. The first is the amount of industrial fishing; some 4 per cent. of the haddock quota is to be applied for industrial purposes —mainly fishmeal production. Given the pressure on stocks, I appreciate the Minister's comments on that.

Another cause for concern is the suspension of the import tariff, which appears to institutionalise or formalise imports as the main source of supply for the fish processing industry. About 75 to 80 per cent. of fish processed in some of the larger factories is imported, but small businesses account for a large proportion of the industry and two or three-person businesses cannot afford imported fish and the facilities required to handle it. What proposals does the Minister have in respect of those small firms?

Mr. Curry: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that a by-catch for the industrial fishery—other than an absolutely genuine by-catch—is unacceptable. I do not believe that there should be an industrial fishery if we can possibly avoid it. That is why we argued that people pursuing the directed whiting fishery should not be able to count that as a derogation against their days. We were successful in that and the directed whiting fishery does not constitute a reason to be excused days of the tie-up. We do not like that fishery; we do not believe that it actually exists.

I said that I was willing to accept some liberalisation of tariffs because of the processing industry. There was some tariff liberalisation and the hon. Gentleman will know that, from 1 January 1993, the EFTA agreement will come into force and there will be a further significant liberalisation, which should help the processing industry. That will not, of course, include the main pelagic species, which are particularly sensitive to our industry, especially in Scotland.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): All this good will and congratulation is becoming very depressing, so may I open on a sour note and express the disappointment felt by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation at the cuts in white fish quotas on the west coast? Why was that issue not more successfully prosecuted? Having said that, I join in the cautious support for the view that the greater flexibility of the 135-day ban represents an improvement on the current rigidities of the eight-day tie-up rule.

Now that this measure and the TACs for next year are agreed upon, will the Minister address the question of where we stand on the social measures that are supposed to accompany the conservation policies? I do not know how often the hon. Gentleman tunes into Scottish radio, but in the past week, Lord Strathclyde has offered several winks and nods to suggest that a decommissioning scheme is now a genuine prospect. Is there any substance in those suggestions, because that is the big question still to be answered in Scottish fishing communities before the general election?

Where do the Government stand on compensation for fishermen who are edged out of their livelihoods as a result of the agreement? Surely there must be a social dimension.

Finally, will the Minister take steps to differentiate between fact and fiction on the issues of illegal landings and "black fish"? There is no point in the House asking the Minister questions about what has been presented as a conservation agreement if that agreement is being breached on the scale suggested by some reports. We must have the facts and then, if justified, action commensurate with them.

Mr. Curry: I am grateful. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation described the deal as

"better news than we expected".

Coming from the SFF, that is positively euphoric.

The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations was somewhat more enthusiastic. Mr. Charlie Dawson said:

"This is fantastic news. It sounds like a good deal and is exactly what we asked for. There could be dancing in the streets of the North-east."

I do not wish to refer to "The Cloggies", but if there is dancing in the streets, I hope that I may be invited to participate. I look forward to Scottish reserve breaking occasionally into similar forms of enthusiasm.

Our relations with the industry are extremely good, both north and south of the border, and we hope to pursue those good relations constructively for the benefit of the industry.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the west coast and the Irish sea. In the Irish sea, our swaps with the Dutch and the Irish largely offset the Hague preference and that is a bonus. The Irish sea is in a bad state in conservation terms. My officials have made contact with the Irish Government, and I am in contact with the Irish Minister, with a view to examining some sort of joint approach to the Irish sea and deciding how we can tackle the genuine crisis in stocks.

I have replied to questions on the social measures. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concerns. As for illegal landings and so on, we shall have the maximum enforcement effort. That is an enormously expensive effort and, as I have explained before in the House, we cannot man every boat at every port 24 hours a day. It would not be feasible to try to do that. We do better than any other member state.

It is important, on the basis of the agreement, for the industry to realise that it is its job to make sure that fisherman does not steal from fisherman, which is what a lot of the issue is about. Otherwise, the stocks and the fishermen lose at the end of the day, and we would end up with a return to the sort of dirigiste measures which nobody likes, which are not effective, which are not in the interest of the fishermen and which ultimately also defeat conservation.

University Hospital of Wales

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

Mr. Speaker: I should say to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), that his debate will go on until noon, and the Chair will then call the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), whose debate will continue until 12.30 pm.

11.32 am

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I am glad of this opportunity to discuss the matter of the medicentre at the University hospital of Wales. I have referred to the issue three times in speeches in the Chamber. I also raised it in the Welsh Grant Committee last week. I make no apology for raising it again, and I shall continue to raise it for as long as necessary.

My objective in securing the debate is to persuade the Secretary of State to call in the application for the medicentre. I understand that the Secretary of State's powers to call in a planning application are contained in section 77(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. That provision appears to be so widely drawn that the Secretary of State can call in any planning application. Clearly, it would not be practicable for him to be able to do that, so there must be criteria.

The 1986 White Paper on the subject gave the best definition of the criteria to be used by the Secretary of State for calling in a planning application. The White Paper was published as a response by the Government to a report by the Select Committee on the Environment which pressed the Government to use their call-in powers more frequently. I fancy that the Committee must have been enduring the same sort of frustrations that I feel in relation to the medicentre at the University hospital of Wales. The 1986 White Paper said that decisions on calling in should be taken in the light of the circumstances of each case; that the Secretary of State must not fetter his discretion by the rigid application of any particular policy; that it should involve matters of more than local importance; and that it should apply where the local authority should not to be entrusted with the decision. It went on to refer to departure applications where the development was a departure from the structure plan.

On all grounds, there is an overwhelming case for the Secretary of State to call in this application. However, before outlining that case, I must impart an understanding of what else is going on at the University hospital of Wales. I shall comment on the relevant powers involved and how they are being used by South Glamorgan council, for the way in which it is being done is as important as anything else.

In a parallel case, Mr. Roger Knight, city planning officer for Cardiff city council, was so moved as to describe what South Glamorgan council is doing as being

"an abuse of the planning system."

He said that in the context of Corpus Christi school, and there are other examples occurring now in Cardiff. Apart from Corpus Christi school at Cyncoid, there is the Gardenhurst day centre at Penarth and the centre at Sully in the Vale of Glamorgan. They are not uncontroversial matters. The reverse is the case.

The Gardenhurst day centre is being taken forward despite considerable local objection in Penarth, not least

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

because it is intended to place the day centre in the wrong place for the elderly who are expected to use it. The centre at Sully has members of the Vale of Glamorgan borough council up in arms, saying that what South Glamorgan council is doing is wrong, that it is not the planning authority and that it should not be acting as such. Corpus Christi school in Cyncoid, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist), is another contentious matter. As well as parents being opposed to it, my hon. Friend has lodged objections with South Glamorgan council and Cardiff city council.

I am anxious that the Minister should be aware of the climate of opinion in Cardiff over those issues. The medicentre is not an isolated example. It is certainly not an example of the harmonious use of processes better to achieve a development that everybody wants. It is more another case of something being rammed through despite local objections.

As I said, it is also necessary to understand what else is going on at the University hospital of Wales. It is a large, fine teaching hospital with excellent staff who make a great contribution and who are constantly increasing and improving the health service in Wales. They are a great asset to my constituency, as they would be anywhere, but, much as they are of benefit to all my constituents, I fear that the hospital is the cause of significant problems for its immediate neighbours, numbering perhaps 10,000 people.

Our problems are mainly traffic, parking and pollution. The hospital was sited on the heath about 20 years ago and no special provision was made for traffic to and from it. There has been the inevitable increase in traffic over the years, but that has been exacerbated by the expansion in the health service at the hospital.

In line with traffic, parking has steadily increased, so much so that it has overspilled out of the hospital confines. It now affects many roads around the area. Local residents have not been able to park outside their homes and have often not been able to get into their driveways. It has become necessary again to impose a parking control zone on roads around the hospital, a development which was long fought for by Councillor Tony John, whom I congratulate on his efforts.

Possibly the greatest problem that local residents have had to endure has been that of pollution. That is the most emotive issue, concerning what has been emitted from the stack of the incinerator at the University hospital of Wales under a blanket of secrecy and Crown immunity. Complaints have been legion, involving deposits that local residents have found in their homes, on window sills, on cars and generally in the environment around the hospital.

We hoped that the situation would improve this year as the result of the provision of a new incinerator at the hospital, but, instead, the local community has been horrified to learn of a plan to incinerate not just the refuse from the University hospital of Wales but the refuse from practically every other hospital in South Glamorgan. After the community's experience of emissions from the hospital, there has been the greatest protest about that proposal. Letters have been written and petitions signed by virtually every neighbour living near the hospital.

The objections to the proposal have been led by local councillors, and I am pleased to report that Cardiff city council has refused planning permission for the development. I note that in considering the incinerator proposal, South Glamorgan council argued that it would have involved 20 round trips a day on weekdays and six round trips on weekend days. That obliged that council to tell Cardiff city council that the county council objected to the planning application on highway grounds and that the proposal would result in an unacceptable increase in the use of the surrounding road network.

If those problems were not enough, we have a newer problem—the noise of fans at a new boiler house. That is giving rise to renewed complaints from the local community.

As a response, the elected representatives, including myself, have been pressing for more parking and a new access for the hospital from Eastern avenue. I was heartened in October when I led a delegation to see representatives of the health authority. We came away with the commitment that there would be new parking at the University hospital of Wales and a new Eastern avenue access, but we were told that that could not happen for a least two years, at the earliest.

In an attempt to achieve a better understanding between the health authority and its neighbours—by then the health authority was admitting that it had not been a good neighbour to those living around the hospital—I urged a process of consultation. That was accepted by the health authority. A meeting was held last month and was attended by 300 local residents. We feel that consultation should be a two-way process. On that occasion, it was not a meeting of minds. Instead, it was more like trains passing on opposite tracks. That was not consultation and it has done nothing to improve the reputation of the health authorities among the local community. It is now the general view that those new proposals should wait for at least two years until the promised improvements are in place.

The medicentre application is for a two-storey building measuring 36,000 sq ft, 27,000 sq ft of which would be lettable. It will be 40 ft high and situated near residential properties in King George V drive East and one of the nurses' homes. It will occupy one of the last few open spaces within the site of the University hospital of Wales. It is intended that it will employ about 100 people connected with medical research, but no commitment guarantees that any, let alone all, of those 100 people will be involved with medical research. The project is clearly commercial. The national health service should certainly not be expected to pay or to subsidise the development and, if enough tenants involved in medical matters cannot be found, I can only anticipate that any commercial tenant prepared to pay the rent will be accepted.

Some 89 car parking spaces are to be provided, but there are already doubts about whether those will be adequate for the number of people using the medicentre. The planning application admitted that there was no intention to provide car parking spaces for the customers of the medicentre or for anyone else visiting it. Most incomprehensible is the idea that the traffic generated by the medicentre would be acceptable, because much more traffic will be generated by the centre than the incinerator. When Cardiff city council's planning committee considered the mater, it cited South Glamorgan council's opinion on the earlier matter of the incinerator as a ground for refusing the medicentre. For South Glamorgan council to argue otherwise is inconsistent or, some might suggest, hypocritical.

It is little wonder that when the city council came to a conclusion on the medicentre, it made a strongly worded condemnation that

"South Glamorgan Health Authority be advised that . . . Cardiff City Council . . . is strongly opposed to the principle of developing one of the few remaining open areas within the University Hospital of Wales . . . until such time as an alternative . . . access/egress via Eastern Avenue . . . together with comprehensive car parking arrangements has been produced."

Furthermore, it asks that the director of administrative and legal services write to South Glamorgan council on the use of procedures under regulation 4 of the Town and County Planning General Regulations 1976. That request is most important.

There is a certain familiarity about what the city council's planning committee recorded on the medicentre. It is almost exactly word for word what South Glamorgan's committee had said about its concern about the few remaining open areas within the hospital. At the environment (highways) sub-committee of the county council on 24 October 1990, it was recommended that

"a letter be sent to the Chairman of the Health Authority drawing attention to the problems created by the hospital, recommending that parking provision therein should be significantly increased, if necessary by using the area currently under consideration for a Medi-park development".

So important did the county council regard the medicentre that it was suggested that the area should be used for car parking. Again, there is an element of inconsistency or hypocrisy in that.

It has been suggested that the matter is urgent, but it is not new. The application has been hanging around for well over a year. The first application was made to Cardiff city council on 13 August 1990, but only two things have changed since then. There are now to be a few more car parking spaces and the name on the application has changed. It was originally made by South Glamorgan health authority whereas now it is being made by South Glamorgan county council.

The matter is regarded in Cardiff as a sham, a con and a disgraceful device. It is just a way of getting round the previous intention of Cardiff city council to object strongly to the proposal. People within both councils are expressing their misgivings, but, inevitably, those within South Glamorgan council cannot speak out. A legally qualified council officer has given a serious private warning in a personal note to one of the councillors. He said that what is meant by "carrying out the development" is not clear, but that he doubts whether merely handing out the RDF grant would constitute carrying out the development. He suggests that the county solicitor should confirm that the county council has no interest in the land and that South Glamorgan council does not intend to carry out the building work in a contrived way. He concludes that if South Glamorgan or any other health authority carries out the development purporting to rely on that deemed South Glamorgan planning permission, there will be no permission for the development, and the city council, as the local planning authority, could take enforcement action.

Those important questions have been pursued by Councillor Tony John, who raised them at the South Glamorgan council meeting on 12 December and asked what South Glamorgan council meant by "carrying out the development". He asked whether it was merely passing over the subsidy, but he has received no answers on those important questions.

I am glad that after much lobbying, I was able to persuade my hon. Friend the Minister at least to consider calling in the planning application. In the meanwhile, I thank him for issuing a direction to South Glamorgan council not to determine that application. The planning application was not considered at the planning and public transport sub-committtee on 11 December. Instead, at the South Glamorgan council meeting on 12 December, plenary powers were granted and the resolution was:

"The County Council intends to see this development take place and authorises and instructs the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman of the Economic Development and Strategic Planning Services Committee, to so determine the planning application to give effect to this intention, should the Secretary of State decide not to determine the planning application himself."

That gives power to the very person who made the application. It originally came from the chairman of the economic development committee and he will now determine it. Would that any commercial developer were in that position of being both applicant and he who decides the planning permission.

Meanwhile, substantial objections have been expressed by me, the city council, local councillors in South Glamorgan council, Councillor Tony John and, as would have been reported to the sub-committee on 11 December, from residents of 219, 216, 8 and 2 King George V drive, 8 and 9 St. Anthony road, 30 and 75 Rhydelig avenue, 33 St. Benedict crescent, 20 St. Agatha road and 20 St. Angela road. None of those objections has been considered and there has been no pretence of considering any of them.

That fact has been confirmed. The county planning officer, Mr. Peter Cope, wrote to me on 17 December and told me that that application was not considered at the planning and public transport sub-committee on 11 December but that the resolution that I have quoted was passed. That was a most improper way to deal with such an important matter. The only consideration that appears to have been given was behind closed doors. The Labour group that controls South Glamorgan council has taken a political decision to force the development through in contradiction to the way planning is normally dealt with in Cardiff. Cardiff city council, which determines 99 per cent. of planning applications in Cardiff, maintains that not one of the political parties will ever put a party Whip on a planning application. It is a point of principle among the recognised planning authorities that no political decisions will be taken, but that is not the case for the Labour group of South Glamorgan council, which has total contempt for the objections. There is no chance for those objections to be considered. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State does not call in the application, the council has already granted plenary powers to allow it to go through. It will be a disgrace if the views of all local residents and elected representatives are ignored.

The grounds for calling in the application are that it should include matters of more than local importance; it could be a departure application; and the local council should not be entrusted. It is patently obvious that it must be called in, because only in that way will the objections be heard. Clause 77(5) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 authorises an opportunity for a public inquiry to which I recommend my right hon. Friend to submit the matter. The local council should not be entrusted because, by its behaviour, South Glamorgan council has forfeited its right to be entrusted with the matter. Clause 77(2B)

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

allows for calling in a "class" of applications. My right hon. Friend could make that "class" all the applications that South Glamorgan council is considering.

It is a departure application because in the development plan, the area is designated as the hospital's use of open space. By no stretch of the imagination is the proposed development a hospital; it is a commercial development. I understand from the consultation paper which has been published that not only substantial departures from the development plan but all departures are supposed to be referred.

Above all, it must be a matter of more than local importance when it is clear that there is a process of abuse of powers as cited by the city planning officer. It is part of the climate and this is far from being the only example. It is a gross abuse that decisions are being taken politically behind closed doors. It is a grave abuse in that legal opinion suggests that the decision is a fiction that can be resolved only by the enforcement action of the planning authority. It must be a great abuse that there is not even a token consideration of objections.

All in all, there is the strongest case. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister cannot respond today to my plea for the application to be called in, but I ask him to allow appropriate time to reflect maturely on all that is involved. I know that the three ward councillors, Clive Milsom, Peter Donnelly and Granville Tatham, will probably want to make representations to my hon. Friend, as will Councillor Tony John, who represents the area on South Glamorgan council. Councillor Bernard Rees, the leader of the Conservative group on South Glamorgan council has wanted to come to the Welsh Office to meet my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the matter. There is the greatest disquiet that unless my right hon. Friend calls in the planning application, the abuse of the planning process will continue.

11.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on securing the debate, which is much prized. It is an example of his assiduous, hard-working and caring role as a constituency Member that he has raised this matter which he feels is of great importance to his constituents.

My hon. Friend has raised a number of points in relation to the town and country planning process. It will be helpful to set them in the context of the legislative framework which we have applied for many years. I know that my hon. Friend will understand that I can make no comments about the merits of the proposal which is the subject of our debate or about the case for calling it in for determination by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That would prejudice his consideration of the current application for a call-in and might also prejudice his consideration of the matter if it is called in. As a consequence, I will confine myself to the facts as I understand them. However, my hon. Friend can be assured that I have listened attentively to what he has said and his points will be considered carefully before a decision is made on whether the application should be called in.

Parliament has made local planning authorities responsible for day-to-day planning control, including the determination of planning applications and the initiating of enforcement action. For most categories of development, the local planning authorities are the district councils, but county councils also have limited functions as planning authorities.

Whatever reservations there may be about individual decisions from time to time, the basic premise that most planning decisions should be taken locally has never been seriously challenged. Local authorities are generally best placed to exercise the discretion that Parliament has judged appropriate in taking planning decisions. Development plans drawn up with public consultation provide an important framework. Central Government publish general advice on a wide range of planning issues through planning policy guidance notes and circulars. However, we believe that unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is for people with local knowledge to look at individual proposals and to decide them in the way that best meets local requirements.

My hon. Friend does not, I think, dissent from that, but he has questioned local planning authorities' deciding planning proposals that they themselves have originated and in particular the position of the county council in relation to the district council. Again, that is not a haphazard system, but one which our legislation has recognised for many years under successive Governments. If elected local authorities are fit to draw up development plans and to judge the vast majority of planning applications, it would be odd to say that they were not fit to judge their own development proposals. It is, of course, right to require them to adopt certain procedures to ensure that the public and the full range of interests represented by the authority have the opportunity to contribute to the consideration. The regulations provide for this in certain circumstances and we are considering how to improve the detail of the procedures. As I have already said, day-to-day planning control is for local planning authorities and it is not the role of the Secretary of State to become involved in that as a general rule.

However, there are two circumstances in which Parliament has seen a role for the Secretary of State. The first is in relation to the need for an applicant who is aggrieved by the decision of the local planning authority on his application to have a right of appeal. In practice, the great majority of appeals are now decided by inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State for that purpose.

Again, I think that the great majority of hon. Members would not dispute the need for a right of appeal. Nevertheless, there are people who argue that local planning authorities' decisions best reflect local circumstances and should not be overruled by the central Government or their appointed planning inspectors. That is a point of view which I understand, but which I should not commend against a background in which Parliament, when removing the unfettered right of a land owner to develop his land as he wished, thought it right to enable a land owner to get a second opinion if the local decision on his application was adverse.

Others argue that if developers have the right of appeal to the Secretary of State against a local planning authority's decision, so should other interested parties. That argument minimises the fact that it is the local planning authority's role to represent the general public interest. The more practical implication is that if such a

wide-varying right of appeal existed, the likelihood is that the whole planning system would become totally bogged down.

The second circumstance is that planning legislation has given the Secretary of State the power to take applications out of the hands of local planning authorities and to decide them himself. It is quite clear against the background that I have described that it was intended that it should be an exceptional power and that it should be used only when there are no other ways in which the individual applicant may consider the case himself through the planning process. There is always a danger that if the regulations are overused by the Secretary of State, he will find that his business and duties in planning will become bogged down.

Regulations provide that if local planning authorities are minded to approve a proposal, but judge that it involves a material departure from the provisions of the development plan, they are required to refer the matter to the Secretary of State for him to decide whether he thinks it fit to call in the matter for his own decision.

It is possible for the Secretary of State to direct that a certain category of development should be referred to him if local planning authorities are minded to grant permission. Such a direction has been issued, for example, in respect of a large-scale retail shopping development. The Town and Country Planning (Shopping Development) (England and Wales) Direction 1986 applies when proposals include areas of gross shopping floor space of not less than 250,000 sq ft or 23,325 sq m. The Secretary of State may receive representations in the light of which he may decide to require a particular application to be referred to him for decision.

Successive Governments have adopted the policy that individual decisions should be taken out of the hands of local planning authorities only if they raise issues of more than local importance. It follows that decisions to call in will not be frequent. It also follows that in looking at whether to call in, Ministers do not consider the planning merits of the proposal, but only whether the kind of issues that need to be decided are more appropriate for consideration in a wider than local context by the Secretary of State. I should make it clear that when it is decided to intervene in a local authority's own proposed development, the local authority is required to apply to the Secretary of State for planning permission. The kind of questions that might be asked in the context are whether the proposal could have wide effects beyond the immediate locality, whether it could give rise to regional or national controversy and whether it could conflict with national policy.

I turn, briefly, to the case of the medicentre proposal at the Heath hospital, Cardiff about which my hon. Friend is concerned. The proposal is being processed by South Glamorgan county council under regulation 4 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1976. The project consists of a high specification, purpose-built research centre on land within the site of the University hospital of Wales.

My hon. Friend made certain representations about the proposal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the course of a discussion last month. Following further approaches from my hon. Friend, a direction was issued to South Glamorgan county council on 11 December requiring it not to approve the proposal until the Secretary of State had had more time to consider whether to call in the matter for his own determination.

I emphasise that in taking that step, we have not formed any view on the planning merits of the proposal. What now needs to be established, in accordance with our usual policy, is whether the proposal raises issues of more than local importance or whether the matters in question justify a departure from the policy that matters of local importance should be dealt with by local authorities.

I assure my hon. Friend that we look forward to receiving any further written representations that he has in addition to the cogent case that he has put before the House today. Such representations will be considered as quickly as possible in deciding whether we should call in the application. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising an important constituency point. I look forward to receiving further representations, if he has any, in addition to his important arguments today.

Knives

11.59 am

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I am pleased to have obtained this debate on the important and serious matter of the increasing use of knives in crimes of violence. Christmas is a time of celebration and joyfulness, but there is no doubt that during this time someone, probably more than one, will become over-exuberant, a knife will flash and someone will die. Christmas will be spoilt not just for those involved but for their friends and relatives.

People should not carry a knife at any time and particularly not at Christmas. We have recently seen the horrendous stabbing in Walthamstow which resulted in the death of Sergeant Alan King, a popular Chingford policeman. Police Constables Simon Castrey and John Jenkinson received terrible knife injuries in a similar incident. The Government have expressed their horror at such attacks on the police, but they also need to act.

I planned this debate before that terrible murder. On one occasion, I was cycling with my wife at Whipps Cross when I saw two 14-year-olds with their bicycles. One of them got out the ugliest looking knife that I have seen to cut a piece of string or something on his bicycle. It was a matter of horror to me and my wife that such a young lad could carry that knife. I cycled off quickly, but when I discussed the matter subsequently with my wife she said that to carry a knife was not uncommon nowadays. She cited the example of a model boy from an impeccable family down the road, who I hope will have a golden future, who apparently always carries a knife for his own protection. It is horrific that youngsters should think that that is necessary. The Minister is a little older than I, but when I was a rough and tough lad, we would never have dreamt of carrying a knife and nor would he. It is shocking that that ethos should exist now.

There has been a big increase in the use of knives in crimes of violence. I have asked parliamentary questions about the illegal sale and possession of knives and I was told that 150 people were prosecuted in 1988 for having in a public place such an article with a blade or point and in 1989, it was 2,018—a huge jump. In 1990, a total of 903 knives were seized at ports, airports and other points of entry and in 1991 that figure had risen to 2,082.

I do not want to say that there has been a huge leap in the past year or so, because that would not true, but there has been a big leap since 1980. For example, in 1980 in the Metropolitan police district there were fewer than 2,000 cases of the use of knives in offences of violence against the person and 1,240 cases where knives were used in robberies. By 1987, those figures had shot up to 2,870 cases of the use of knives in offences against the person and 4,630 cases where they were used in robberies—a huge increase.

The figure have dropped a little since then, which I welcome. That drop was a consequence of a campaign against the use of knives in mid-1988 and the effects of section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. But with the new ethos to which I have referred of youngsters carrying knives, allegedly for their own protection, there is a real danger that there will be another explosion of such crimes.

In 1989, it was estimated that sharp instruments were used in one in three aggravated burglaries, one in five robberies, one in 17 offences of violence against the person and one in 100 sexual offences. Knives and sharp instruments are the most common weapons used in homicides and account for one third of all homicides.

An article in *The Independent on Sunday* on 19 May clearly substantiates my point about the danger of an explosion in knife violence. The article was headed

"Death by Stabbing: the new British way of life".

It said:

"Knife attacks are on the increase, with more young men carrying blades.,"

It talks of anecdotal evidence in 1991 that the carrying of knives is on the increase among young people and it quotes Detective Chief Superintendent Roger Stoodley, who works in east London, as saying:

"I have never known so many people to be carrying these weapons."

Barrie Irving of the Police Foundation is quoted as saying:

"There is much evidence that more people are going out with knives. There is a lot of threat and counter-threat in the pubs and clubs. Much of it is display. The knife is produced as the young man slips into a role that has been established in his mind by videos and that sort of thing."

A serious problem already exists and it is becoming even greater. The Government's response has been inadequate and that is why I initiated the debate. I do not say that in party-political terms, because the Government's objective is the same as mine. They want to see the elimination of the use of knives in crimes of violence, but their approach is that the law is adequate to deal with the problem and that nothing needs to be changed. In a parliamentary written answer I was told:

"The sale and possession of knives is subject to a number of controls . . . There will be practical problems in seeking to apply more general restrictions on the sale and purchase of knives which have a variety of legitimate everyday uses."

The answer refers to the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 and ends by saying:

"The Government have no plans to introduce further legislation in this matter."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. *3*.]

When I asked about local amnesties, I was told:

"It is for chief officers of police to consider whether offering opportunities for disposing of offensive weapons would be a worthwhile crime prevention initiative in their own force area."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. *436*.]

Again, the Government are saying that the procedures are there and nothing further need be done. I challenge that. I accept that we do not want to become involved with domestic cutlery and important workmen's tools such as Stanley knives, but there is other action that the Government should take.

In the face of the dreadful attacks on police officers, the Home Office should have put together an urgent review team which should have incorporated other Departments and put forward a package of measures. I hope that the Minister will take that suggestion on board.

I want to put forward some suggestions for inclusion in such a package of measures. I acknowledge that not all will be appropriate, but some will be. For example, there is a case for a further restriction on the sale of knives and for licensing shops. I know that that is not supported by the Association of Chief Police Officers or by shopkeepers, but there is a case for saying that shops should be licensed.

In November 1980, my hon. Friend the Member for Dewesbury (Mrs. Taylor) said:

"It is vital that we ban offensive and useless weapons. I say 'useless' because people buy them for only one reason, which

is to injure or, at the very least, to threaten other individuals. We feel strongly that weapons of this kind have no place, so we support measures to ban them or prohibit their sale."

The key point is that if the knives are used for one purpose and do not fall into the category of domestic cutlery there is a case for a ban. There is certainly a case for enforcing the law more strongly to prevent under-age people buying such weapons. In that same debate my hon. Friend said:

"The proposal that weapon sales be banned completely to people under the age of 16 should stay on the agenda. The Minister is aware that the peak age of offenders is 15 and that it is boys of that age who commit the vast majority of street crimes and crimes involving intimidation or offensive weapons."—[*Official Report, Fifth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.* 10 November 1988; c. 4.]

Butterfly and gravity knives are already banned and there is a case for extending that. I have some information about knives for sale by mail order. I have an advertisement for CIA survival knives which states that it "is a superb high tech fibreglass filled nylon construction knife which weighs just 20 gm. . . . due to its double edge, spear point and double fluted reinforced spine, tremendous plunging power it can literally be driven straight through a telephone directory (remains undetected by airport metal detectors)".

Another one is advertised as a "sabretooth survival saw" and it again is said to be able to pass unnoticed through metal detectors. The advertisement says:

"when you need that 'extra edge'.

An advert for a CIA letter opener says that it can be driven by hammer through ½ in plywood. The OSS sleeve dagger is said to be

"Specially designed to be concealed on arm or leg, especially during body search."

The advertisement says that it is supplied only to military personnel, but these are general adverts and I doubt whether that is the case.

Such weapons should be banned and there should be tighter control on their manufacture and import. The police should be protected by body armour. Research is being carried out on that, but it should be speeded up and it should not be left to police officers to buy such body protection. That should be the job of the Home Office. We should consider the supply of metal detectors and the regular retraining of police officers to enable them to deal with knife problems.

Police are often delayed through having to seek permission to enter places such as shopping malls, and the law needs to be enforced in pubs and clubs. Penalties should be reviewed. At the moment the punishment is up to six months' imprisonment and/or a £2,000 fine. That is to be increased and perhaps there should be an increase in the sentence for hardened criminals going out with a criminal purpose and carrying a knife. Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 could be strengthened.

There should be a concerted programme to change the knife-carrying ethos in schools. The Minister should get his oar in with the Minister for Health who is carrying out a review in conjunction with the mental health tribunal. We do not want to see more knife carrying by people who are mentally ill, although that clearly affects a minority of community care cases. Search powers should be reviewed and should be exercised where there are reasonable grounds. Perhaps random spot checks could be carried out in the same way as breathalyser tests.

Above all, there should be a knife amnesty with knife banks not just outside police stations but elsewhere. Local authorities could be brought into that and such an amnesty would need Home Office funding and improved publicity. There is a case for implementing Labour's policy aim of a crime prevention council and a crime management foundation to undertake independent research. I hope that the Minister will consider that package of measures to stop people carrying knives and to change the ethos. Knives affect all our civil liberties and can even affect the ultimate one. I give way to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby).

12.17 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I take it that the hon. Gentleman also has the consent of the Minister.

Mr. Shersby: Yes. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) for allowing me to speak in this valuable debate. As the House knows, I am parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), who represents the Police Superintendents Association, cannot be present at the debate and wishes to be associated with what I have to say.

As the House knows, a terrible situation faces our country. No fewer than five police officers have lost their lives in the past decade as a result of attacks in which knives have been used. A further 17 officers have lost their lives as a result of being shot, crushed or injured in some other way. In the last couple of weeks we have heard about the tragic death of Sergeant Alan King and Detective Constable Jim Morrison and we have seen the terrible injuries inflicted on their colleagues.

As the hon. Member for Leyton has said, the common factor in many of these assaults is the knife. I have one or two suggestions to add to those advanced by the hon. Gentleman in an attempt to alleviate the problem. First, the Home Office should mount a national publicity campaign using all available media to warn parents and young people of the dangers of young people carrying knives. It would remind them that young men who carry knives and youngsters who take them to school may lose their temper and find that one stab is enough to kill a school mate or a police officer.

Such a campaign should be mounted by the Home Office and not left simply to chief constables. Parents should be reminded that they have a responsibility and that they can be fined and required to pay compensation for acts committed by juveniles. The campaign should remind young people of the severe custodial sentences that are available for this type of crime. I should like to see the Home Office introduce what is called the side-handled baton. That is longer than the standard truncheon and would be useful to police officers who patrol alone at night because it affords additional protection against all kinds of assaults, excluding of course, assaults using firearms.

I hope that the Home Secretary will set up a working party jointly with the Police Federation of England and Wales. It represents 125,000 officers in what is unfortunately only too truly the sharp end of policing. I hope that the Home Office will review the stop and search powers. Those powers were conferred under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and replaced those under the Vagrancy Act 1824. In the opinion of the police, those powers are not adequate. The Act does not give a constable power to search a person or a vehicle or

[Mr. Shersby]

anything in or on a vehicle unless he has reasonable grounds for suspecting that he will find stolen or prohibited articles.

That restriction was introduced because of the concern expressed about the old Vagrancy Act and the sus laws. The Home Office and the House must strike a balance between preserving the liberty of the citizen and protecting the lives of police men and police women who are the only protection available to ordinary citizens against people who carry knives and who will stab and kill without regard for the misery that they inflict on their fellow citizens.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on his success in securing this debate and thank him for raising the disturbing and important question of the use of knives in crime. It has been brought to the forefront of our minds in a most horrible way—by the recent series of shocking attacks on police officers in London, which resulted in two officers being killed and two others receiving terrible injuries.

I am sure that the House joins me, the hon. Member for Leyton and my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) in expressing deepest sympathy to the families of the officers who so tragically lost their lives in the course of duty. We also offer our best wishes to those who were injured, and trust that they will make a full and speedy recovery. Those incidents are a salutary reminder of the dedication of police officers to protecting the public.

The hon. Gentleman referred to an apparent increase in tbe number of offences involving knives, and I will examine the figures that he gave. I know that some were provided in parliamentary answers from the Home Office. Statistics on the misuse of knives are not readily available, because misuse is categorised under other offences, such as assault. In 1989, however, S1 division conducted an ad hoc survey of notifiable offences between 1986 and 1989 in which sharp instruments and knives were used.

Not all forces responded to that survey, but the results suggested that the percentage of notifiable offences involving the use of sharp instruments and knives fell during the period surveyed. The hon. Member for Leyton makes the point well that we could benefit from better statistics.

Details of the types of knives used in crimes are not generally available either, but ordinary kitchen and craft knives are believed to be the most commonly used in attacks, rather than the kind that the hon. Gentleman mentioned as being advertised. The hon. Gentleman wants additional controls on knife sales. Following the recent series of knife attacks on police officers, there were calls from the Police Federation for further restrictions on the sale of knives. While I appreciate public concern about misuse, I do not see how additional controls on sales could offer an easy or practical solution. I do not believe that licensing shops, for example, would help in practice. However, I shall reflect further on the hon. Gentleman's suggestions.

There are, of course, existing controls on the sales of knives. Certain types of knives that have no legitimate use —such as flick, gravity and butterfly knives—are banned. If any other knife identified by its construction as being suitable for banning comes on the market or enters the country in some way, of course we will readily and rapidly consider adding it to the controlled list.

Banned knives all have distinctive mechanisms that can be defined in law. It would be difficult to distinguish between items that have legitimate everyday uses in the home and workplace, such as kitchen and craft knives, and other types—for example, commando-style daggers—that might be considered undesirable.

It must be recognised that knives are a common feature of everyday life and that, in the wrong hands, almost any bladed or sharply pointed article is potentially a lethal weapon. The Government take the view that imposing further restrictions on the sale of knives would not generally be practicable. However, as I indicated, any particular knives that enter the country or come on the market will be examined to establish whether they can properly and effectively be added to the controlled list. The Government's approach has been to tackle the misuse of knives by tightening the law on possession of knives in public.

The hon. Member for Leyton asked about further legislation. Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 makes it an offence to possess a bladed or sharply pointed article in a public place without good reason. That Act also places the onus on the knife carrier to show that he had good reason for possessing it in public.

That measure was aimed at tackling the menace of the casual carrying of knives on the streets to which the hon. Member for Leyton drew attention. It certainly appears to be used with good effect by the courts. In 1989—the latest date for which figures are available—there were more than 1,500 convictions under section 139 of the 1988 Act. It supplements the Prevention of Crime Act 1953, which makes it an offence to carry an offensive weapon in public without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. That offence, unlike the section 139 offence, requires proof of intent to cause injury on the part of the knife carrier, and tough penalties are rightly available to the courts. The maximum penalty is two years' imprisonment or an unlimited fine.

The Government also introduced powers, under section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, to ban offensive weapons as specified by means of statutory instruments. Butterfly knives and a range of martial arts equipment were banned by that means and the Government are ready to take further action if other types of weapon become a problem.

The Government believe that the measures I have outlined provide the police and the courts with the powers and penalties to deal with those people who carry knives. As the hon. Member for Leyton knows, the maximum penalty for wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm is life imprisonment. A life sentence is mandatory if an attack leads to death and is categorised as murder.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to a knife amnesty. As he rightly suggested, there is great scope for local initiatives to increase awareness, particularly among young people, of the dangers of carrying knives and offensive weapons and to encourage the safe disposal of those weapons. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Metropolitan police launched such a campaign on 9 December, which involves providing specially adapted bins near police stations where people can deposit knives. I hope that that campaign, which continues until 19

January, succeeds in taking substantial numbers of weapons out of circulation. In 1988, when such an amnesty was held in east and south London, some 1,400 knives were collected.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge, who speaks from great knowledge of such matters, urges more public awareness. An amnesty campaign is one way in which police forces can draw a great deal of local attention to the threat of knives and what can be done about it. He is right that parents as well as young people should know the dangers, and I will refer my hon. Friend's suggestions to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge talked about side-handled batons. As he knows, we would be prepared to consider arranging for a scientific evaluation of any equipment that might assist in public order control if the chief officers request it. The offer is there and is open to senior police officers if they believe that such batons would be of advantage to their forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge would like a review of police powers of search. He referred to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which stresses that there must be some objective basis for reasonable suspicion if somebody is to be searched, such as the individual's behaviour or information received. It cannot be supported purely on the basis of personal factors.

When the codes of practice were revised recently in response to strong pressure from the police, the guidance was made slightly less restrictive by removing the statement that reasonable suspicion should be no less than the suspicion required to effect arrest without warrant. I shall take back to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary what my hon. Friend has said. As there has recently been a revision of codes, I am bound to say that my right hon. Friend may feel that the time is not right for a review. Current powers do not allow for searches that are based on a policeman's hunch that someone may be carrying an illicit article, or for blanket searches that are carried out in a particular area or among particular groups. Legal changes in that direction would, I believe, attract widespread criticism on the basis that unjustified interference with blameless citizens was being sanctioned. I should say to my hon. Friend——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Bible (Teaching)

12.30 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): As we come to the great season of Christmas, throughout the country schools and churches have been celebrating with their festivals, especially those of nine lessons and carols. There is the great ninth lesson, the Christmas gospel, which recalls the opening words of Genesis:

"In the beginning was the Word."

My theme is yes, but what word? If someone is unlucky and goes to the wrong festival, the lesson will not open with the words that I have quoted. It will start with something like that which appears in the version set out in the New English Bible:

"When all things began, the Word already was."

That is a real catchy number to start such a lesson. I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will be fortunate enough to have the Authorised Version, which contains the passage:

"There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem."

The same passage in the New English Bible reads:

"Astrologers from the east arrived in Jerusalem."

That is just like Russell Grant on a package tour. Then we have the angels saying to the shepherds:

"Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes."

The unlucky person will have instead:

"You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth."

The angels then sing:

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men."

That has been changed in the Revised Standard Version as follows:

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

In the New English Bible we find these words:

"Glory to God in highest heaven and on earth his peace for men on whom his favour rests."

Try asking angels to sing those words.

A vicar in Battersea told me the other day that when he went to the church festival of Christmas at the local primary school—one of the schools within his parish—there was plenty of Father Christmas and jingle bells, but not one reference to Jesus. He was told that such a reference might cause embarrassment to some of the pupils. If we ask children or students to recite their favourite passage or line from the Bible, we tend to get some pretty blank looks. I believe that the reason for that is that when the Bible is used in school or in church it is nearly always in the form of a modern version, which is entirely unmemorable and unpoetic. It is not surprising that phrases do not stick in the mind.

Yet we are talking about some of the greatest passages in English literature as well as one of the great ways of teaching in the Church. There is, however, an exception. Very few schools get away with teaching the Lord's prayer in anything other than something like the traditional way. The first line—

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name"—

has not yet given way in children's parlance to

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be hallowed",

or,

"Our Father in heaven, may your holy name be honoured."

Children the world over still repeat:

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

They do not repeat:

"Do not bring us to the test, but save us from the evil one",

[Mr. John Bowis]

or,

"Do not bring us to hard testing."

That sounds like something that they might have at the end of term or something done by an adult working in a steelworks. It is not something that will bring them to the Church and to Jesus.

So often one hears words that have a vague resemblance to something that one knew in the past, but it is not until one looks up the original that one realises what it was. For example—

"And you, like the lamp, must shed light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in Heaven."

That does not immediately strike one as resembling

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

Recently I attended a church service where a passage was read that went this way:

"May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice! Show a gentle attitude towards everyone. The Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. In conclusion, my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable. Put into practice what you learnt and received from Me, both from my words and from my actions."

Sure enough, last Sunday in my own church we had a different version that sounded a little more familiar:

"Rejoice in the Lord always;"—

it started all right—

"again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance."—

I began to get puzzled—

"The Lord is at hand. Have no anxieties about anything,"

—

that did not sound quite right—

"but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

That gave me the clue. It was a passage that one knew but without the poetry:

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsover things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there by any praise, think on these things."

I recall that passage because it was recited week after week at my first school and it was recited at the end of term service. Just as one learnt a poem a week at that school, so one learnt the poetry and the music of biblical passages.

The way that words come is important. There was the famous occasion when King Charles I was told that the Bible had been printed without a vital word, the word "not". The nation was therefore exhorted to commit adultery. That cost the printer some £3,000 and the confiscation of his press. I sometimes wonder whether we should not do the same with some recent translations. It is good to have translations and commentaries to help our understanding, but I believe that we must keep the original poetry of the Authorised Version.

One could choose many examples. For example—

"When I was a child I spoke like a child, thought like a child, reasoned like a child; when I grew up I finished with childish things. At present we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but one day we shall see face to face."

Something has been lost from the original, which was:

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face."

Those are the words that stick in one's memory. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew we read:

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness."

In the New English Bible we read:

"Set your mind on God's Kingdom and His justice before everything else."

It does not even sound terribly good English. We can also contrast

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"

with

"Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious of itself."

According to the New English Bible, the same passage reads:

"Each day has troubles enough of its own."

Mrs. Dale's Diary—here we come, but not the Authorised Version.

We know about the mote that is in thy brother's eye and about the beam that is in thine own eye becoming the speck of sawdust and the great plank, according to the New English Bible, and about the Revised Version and the Good News Bible both having specks and logs.

The Sermon on the Mount is perhaps one of the great pieces of literature and of the Bible. The translation that one often hears in churches and schools is not.

"blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

but "how blessed", which is totally pointless; the metre is gone. Churches and schools change

"blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"

to:

"how blest are the sorrowful: they shall find consolation."

That sounds like somebody going down to the local after a Chelsea defeat.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth"

becomes

"how blest are those of a gentle spirit"—

that sounds a bit wet—

"they shall have the earth for their possession",

which is a bit too literal.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"

becomes

"how blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail:",

which seems pointless,

"they shall be satisfied"—

I suspect all too easily.

"Blessed are the merciful"

becomes

"blest are those who show mercy: mercy shall be shown to them."

That is pointless: only the poetry has gone.

"Blessed are the pure in heart"

becomes,

"how blest are those whose hearts are pure."

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"

or, in the New English Bible; sexism reigns:

"God shall call them his sons."

The Good News Bible says,

"happy are those who mourn",

which is not what the authors of the Bible were trying to say.

There are many great pieces of literature. Arthur Bryant wrote about the period of Elizabethan England leading to the Jacobean succession. He said:

"At the moment when England's merchants and seamen were carrying her"—

Elizabeth's—

"life and influence into every ocean and continent, her writers were creating, out of a formerly rude vernacular, a literature, not only potentially, but already in achievement, as great as any yet known to history, even that of ancient Greece. Three contributions of supreme literary genius . . . One was the liturgy of the Anglican church, the other the authorised version of the Bible published under James I in 1611 . . . The third was the plays of William Shakespeare . . . Distilled by English scholars and divines from the successive translations and versions of the past century, it became natural for English men and women of all classes—including the humblest and least educated—to laird their speech and thought with its phrases and analogies."

That is the reality. One did not have to be a genius to appreciate the genius of the Authorised Version; it was picked up and it became part of one's daily life. Just as Vulgate became Tyndale's version, which became the authorised version accompanied by commentaries by J. B. Phillips and translations such as Revised Standard, the New English Bible and the Good News Bible, so Holinshed's "Chronicles" became Shakespeare and Lamb's "Tales", but Shakespeare remained; the Authorised Version did not.

The Church of England is in danger of destroying its liturgy and contribution to English literature, the King James version of the Bible. Churches and schools will ensure that they survive only if they are familiar to succeeding generations, just as Shakespeare is. It is read in the original; nobody thinks of putting on a modern language version of Shakespeare and I hope that they never do. Modern dress, maybe; modern staging, maybe; but the words will carry on.

The same is true with classical music. There may be the odd "Boston Pops" or "Nutrocker", but the real Beethoven and Haydn were introduced to generation after generation and children are learning the originals today, just as they are learning the original of Shakespeare.

I shall use Shakespeare to sum up what I am seeking to say in this short debate about the three pillars of literature —the liturgy, the Authorised Version of the Bible and Shakespeare. I hope that those in authority in Church and state will think of the passage in Hamlet where Hamlet talks to his mother about his father and his stepfather and compares the true father with the fake stepfather. He says:

"Look here, upon this picture, and on this:
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See what a grace was seated on his brow:
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;
An eye like Mars, To threaten or command;
A station like the herald Mercury,
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination, and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal."

The passage continues:

"Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor?"

I hope that the Minister will recognise that passage from his Stratford connections. It goes on to say:

"I must be cruel, only to be kind."

I am not seeking to write off with scorn the translations, many of which are worthy and many of which are good, in parts, but we must protect Shakespeare's language or it will die. We must also protect the Bible or that will die and my message to the lords of Church and school is "May they hear this prayer and let the cry of pain of those who mourn the joy and genius of the Authorised Version come unto them."

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): The House should be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) for raising this subject. This week we have debated important issues but none more important than this. The issue to which my hon. Friend has drawn our attention is the disinheritance of the children of our generation in consequence of the fact that too few teachers or clergy are nowadays accustomed or disposed to use the Authorised Version of the Bible and the 1662 Prayer Book.

Under the law there must be provision for the religious education of all registered pupils at maintained schools, and pupils must have the opportunity to take part in a daily act of collective worship at school.

In their study of English under the national curriculum pupils are required to read

"some of the works which have been most influential in shaping and refining the English language and its literature."

The Authorised Version is proposed as one of those works. So the study of the Authorised Version need not be confined to the catacombs of our educational system. Indeed, there are considerable numbers of teachers—just as there are of clergy—who believe that it is the natural and right thing to do to use the Authorised Version and the 1662 Prayer Book.

Two years ago the then editor of *The Spectator,* Charles Moore, and the Prayer Book Society offered a prize in memory of Thomas Cranmer, to be competed for by schools whose pupils would recite passages from the Prayer Book. The finalists came from seven schools widely spread, and I understand that a more recent competition enlisted yet more schools. That shows that teachers in all parts of the country still love Cranmer's prayers and believe that children should learn passages of great writing by heart.

The first competition was drawn to the attention of the nation by virtue of a remarkable speech delivered at the presentation of the prize. It was a brilliant and impassioned defence of Cranmer, of the elevated use of language and of the necessity of tradition. The speech contained the following words:

"What we have to ask ourselves, it seems to me, is whether, by making the words less poetic you really do make them more democratic. Isn't there something rather patronising about the whole assumption? Banality . . . may be accessible for all, but so is a desert."

Those words were spoken encouragingly by a person whom we may expect in due course to be the Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

I said that our children need not be disinherited, but my hon. Friend has pointed to the very real danger that many of them will be.

We wonder sadly why so many people repudiate their spiritual heritage. Elements of the explanation no doubt include the excessive pretensions of scientific rationalism, the deracinated character of a society endlessly unsettled

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

by technological change, the cultural disintegration and anomie promoted by the mass media, the perversion of liberalism which rejects the principle of authority, the diffidence of those whom we might expect to exercise authority, the expectations cultivated in political prospectuses, the aesthetic nihilism fashionable in our age, the reductionism of modern philosophy, and the perennial tendence of human beings to bite the hand that has fed them. Perhaps, however, we can draw some bleak comfort from recognising that the hatred of beauty and tradition, and the sense of spiritual loss are not new. After all, the 1645 Prayer Book was made illegal and replaced by a directory of public worship. In 1655 Jeremy Taylor found himself driven to write:

"In this sad declension of religion the supplanters are gone out, and are digging down the foundations."

In the previous century, William Tyndale was driven out of England; copies of his translation of the New Testament were rounded by and burnt by Bishop Tunstall. Tyndall was strangled by order of the public authorities in, of all places, Brussels.

I might be tempted then to suppose that the confusion, to put it no lower, that characterises the language of the New English Bible reflects a state of affairs no worse than that of the 16th and 17th centuries. But it is dismaying to read the translator's preface to the 1961 New Testament which reads:

"In doing our work, we have constantly striven to follow our instructions and render the Greek, as we understand it, into the English of the present day, that is, into the natural vocabulary, constructions and rhythms of contemporary speech . . . since sound scholarship does not always carry with it a delicate sense of style, the Committee appointed a panel of literary advisers, to whom all the work of the translating panel has been submitted."

For one thing, the translators seem unaware that prose is not the same as speech. However, the most depressing factor is the dissociation of functions between scholars —"literary advisors"—and clergy—what a falling off from Lancelot Andrewes and the combination in him of such great learning, spiritual depth and literary genius.

Our modern egalitarians do their own cause a disservice in seeking to displace the Authorised Version. The Bible —in a version that compelled the imagination through its linguistic excellence—was once the common culture of our country and other English-speaking countries. In that time, the simple and the scholarly could equally be sages. Allen Bloom has described it by saying:

"My grandparents were ignorant people by our standards, and my grandfather held only lowly jobs. But their home was spiritually rich because all the things done in it, not only what was specifically ritual, found their origin in the Bible's commandments, and their explanation in the Bible's stories and the commentaries on them, and had their imaginative counterparts in the deeds of the myriad of exemplary heroes. My grandparents found reasons for the existence of their family and the fulfilment of their duties in serious writings, and they interpreted their special sufferings with respect to a great and enobling past. Their simple faith and practices linked them to great scholars and thinkers who dealt with the same material, not from outside or from an alien perspective, but believing as they did, while simply going deeper and providing guidance. There was a respect for real learning, because it had a felt connection with their lives. This is what a community and a history mean, a common experience inviting high and low into a single body of belief."

A change in American life may be seen to have been under way by the time Mrs. Scott Fitzgerald made her critical assessment of Ernest Hemingway's prose style as "pretty damned Biblical".

It is estimated that in 1611 about 6 million people spoke English; now perhaps 600 million do. But the grandeurs of the 1611 Bible and the 1662 Prayer Book could again be possessed by them as their heritage. The following phrases, of crystalline beauty, are from Tyndale's New Testament of 1534, carried forward into the Authorised Version:

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Teachers can be confident that Tyndale's precise, simple English is entirely accessible and capable of being appropriated by those whose language is the English of today.

The following are phrases from Tyndale's translation of the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

"With God all things are possible . . . The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak . . . The burden and heat of the day . . . The salt of the earth".

They are modern English.

Tyndale, after all, translated from the Koine, the ordinary Greek of day-to-day transactions. His genius was to render the directness of that usage in the rhythmic and candenced English of the Renaissance, the language that was Shakespeare's immediate inheritance.

We do not insist that Shakespeare is rehashed in a modern translation. Shakespeare still pierces and moves those large numbers of people who read him and see his plays. The language of the Authorised Version is for the most part easier than Shakespeare's

But the great thing is to grow up with that language, so that it is part of one's consciousness. Every Sunday, for a good part of my childhood, I was obliged to attend matins at Winchester cathedral—the cathedral of Bishop Andrewes. When now I hear one of Cranmer's Collects I thrill with a sense of rightness and connectedness. The words of the 1662 Prayer Book have formed my sensibility as much as any other influence.

I applaud the teachers who continue to require their pupils to learn great texts by heart and I am glad that oracy forms part of the national curriculum. That metaphor, "by heart", is right, for what one possesses through such learning, while most often it cannot be paraphrased, informs one's whole apprehension of, and feeling for, the world.

Of course the Bible is not merely literature. To teach appreciation of the Bible only as an aesthetic experience is to diminish both it and those whom we teach. To regard the Bible as literature would indeed have been incomprehensible notion in the 17th century. It is written in what C. S. Lewis termed, writing of Milton, the language of ceremony. I hope that teachers will continue to make the Authorised Version part of the experience of worship as well as part of the curriculum. Then their pupils will be able to say in the words of Psalm 119—but let me make it clear that I do not expect them to learn the whole of the psalm—

"Thy testimonies have I claimed as mine heritage for ever: and why? They are the very joy of my heart."

I can express such hopes, but Ministers—those of the Crown anyway—cannot impose. I am told that a little while ago, a letter was received at Church house saying,

"We are doing God this term. Please send full details and pamphlets."

I do not know what reply was sent, but I should like to think that, among the details sent, was a commendation to the teacher to learn by heart—as every teacher surely should—Cranmer's Collect for the second Sunday in Advent:

"Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."

Infected Blood Transfusions

12.57 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Everyone who has become infected with HIV deserves our sympathy and support. There is one group of people, however, who I would argue deserve Government financial provision because their personal tragedy has been a direct result of their use of our national health service. It is hard to believe that anyone in the land would begrudge payments to those individuals who have become HIV antibody-positive and will develop AIDS as a result of contaminated blood or tissue transfers under the health service.

As you, Madam Deputy Speaker, may know, I have taken an interest in the development of public policy on AIDS over the years and, with the support of the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People—who was then a junior Minister at the Department of Health—I introduced and secured the enactment of the AIDS (Control) Act 1987.

Edinburgh has a particular AIDS problem. Transmission of the virus has largely been through the use of drugs. I know of a number of people in my constituency who are either HIV-positive or who have gone on to develop AIDS. It was only in October this year that I discovered that one of my constituents had become infected as a direct result of a blood transfusion.

My constituent was rushed to hospital to have her first child. It was necessary in the course of the birth for her to have a blood transfusion. That was in 1984. Not until 1989, after she had had a second child, did she discover that she was HIV positive as a direct result of a contaminated blood transfusion at the time of the birth of her first child.

It is a tragic story when anybody is infected, but everyone's heart goes out to people who become infected through the national health service. My constituent developed the symptoms of AIDS over the years without knowing that she was HIV positive. Only through her work with a voluntary Church group, set up to work with, help and support people with AIDS, did she begin to sense that the symptoms she was showing were not dissimilar to those about which she was learning in her work with that group.

My constituent is now in hospital. I hope that she will not be there for long. Fortunately, neither of her children or her husband has become infected. Like others in her position, regardless of how they have become infected, it is an extremely private matter. The vast majority of people who are HIV positive wish to retain the knowledge as a secret to themselves or to close friends and family.

As a result of the overwhelming need for justice in this matter, the Minister should be aware that a group has been formed of non-haemophiliacs who have become HIV positive as the result of an NHS blood transfusion or tissue transfer. That group was established at a meeting in Merseyside last week. Its chair and spokesperson, elected at that meeting, is Davy, and he can be contacted through a solicitor named Brian Donald of York place, Edinburgh, telephone 031-556 7951. Davy is in the Public Gallery today listening to the debate. I hope that he will hear a positive response from the Minister later.

According to Government statistics, 37 people are alive in the United Kingdom in that position; 25 others have already died. Most of them were infected before the

[Mr. Gavin Strang]

National Blood Transfusion Service began screening donations in October 1985, although at least two have become infected since then owing to the window period between infection and sero conversion.

The House will remember that in December 1990 the Government finally took the decision to make provision for 1,217 haemophiliacs infected with HIV through the blood product factor 8. An out-of-court settlement was made, bringing the total sums provided to £76 million. It took five long years of campaigning for haemophiliacs to see justice done, though many people were not convinced of the adequacy even of that settlement.

We are now asking for equal treatment for non-haemophiliacs infected with HIV as the result of an NHS blood transfusion or tissue transfer. As this group of people is much smaller than the number of haemophiliacs, the sum required would be correspondingly less, perhaps £4 million.

The Government have given a number of reasons so far for not providing compensation for non-haemophiliacs. They say that they cannot distinguish between infected non-haemophiliacs and other victims of medical accidents and that making provision for them would set a precedent for the piecemeal introduction of no-fault compensation. That is an irrelevant distraction. We are arguing not about no-fault compensation, but that non-haemophiliacs and haemophiliacs should be given equal treatment.

Last year, the Government were careful to insist that they were not providing compensation to haemophiliacs but simply making ex gratia, out-of-court settlements. In that way, they avoided setting precedents for no-fault compensation. We demand the same for non-haemophiliacs, which would also not set such precedents. One respect in which infected non-haemophiliacs differ from other victims of medical accidents is precisely that a precedent has been set for making provisions for people infected with HIV through NHS blood and tissue transfers.

The Government have given many reasons for distinguishing between haemophiliacs and non-haemophiliacs, but they are all totally unconvincing. They have argued that haemophiliacs were seriously ill before they became infected, but, by definition, many non-haemophiliacs were also ill before they became infected. Some of them received tissue transfers—those are rather exceptional—and blood transfusions precisely because they were ill with diseases such as leukaemia. The Government's arguments are nonsense, because there is no reason to make a distinction on that ground. What does it matter whether a person receives a blood transfusion because he has leukaemia or because he has had a car accident?

Secondly, the Government have argued that there is likely to be more than one infected haemophiliac in a family. Haemophilia is genetic and, as a result, there may be more than one in a family. Although HIV is not genetic, it can be transmitted from mother to child and certainly between partners, so there is a real risk that there may be more than one HIV-positive non-haemophiliac in a family as a result of a contaminated blood transfusion.

Thirdly, the Government have argued that a distinction between haemophiliacs can be made on the ground that, because of a haemophiliac's illness or condition, he or she is unlikely to have a well-paid job and therefore be able to afford adequate insurance. Again, a substantial proportion of non-haemophiliacs who received compensation were not in highly paid jobs and did not have insurance to protect them against the prospect of eventually developing AIDS as a result of a blood transfusion contaminated by HIV.

Those arguments are totally spurious. There is no valid, logical ground for distinguishing between infected haemophiliacs and non-haemophiliacs. That has been accepted by other Governments, such as those of Canada, France, Denmark and Western Australia. Although it may have taken them a little while to get there, they have all recognised that a distinction between infected haemophiliacs and non-haemophiliacs cannot be justified. The Haemophilia Society has also made that point.

One of the reasons why the haemophiliacs achieved success was that they were organised and had a society to campaign on their behalf. The society never intended to succeed to the exclusion of non-haemophiliacs. There is no justification for drawing a ring fence—to use the technical jargon—around the haemophiliacs. We have to draw a ring fence, but it must be drawn around everybody—non-haemophiliacs and haemophiliacs—who has become infected as a result of a blood transfusion under the national health service.

No amount of compensation can make up for the enormity of the personal and family tragedies involved, but the money can help to make life easier and more comfortable for those who are still alive. The money can help the families, especially the children, of those who have died as a result of AIDS.

There are good reasons for pursuing the issue until the Government recognise the justice of the case. I tabled an early-day motion which has all-party support and I emphasise that this is an all-party campaign. The motion now has 234 signatures and is a powerful demonstration of the support of Parliament for non-haemophiliacs. Hon. Members are overwhelmingly of the view that the Government's position is untenable and that they need to think again. There is no justification for continuing to distinguish between haemophiliacs and non-haemophiliacs.

The Minister has a chance this afternoon to rectify the mistake made last December when the Government announced that they would provide compensation for haemophiliacs. That was an error of judgment because the announcement should have included non-haemophiliacs. I have given the figure for the number affected. The Government figure may include one or two more people, but even if there are a few more, the total number is substantially lower than the number of haemophiliacs affected. There can be no ground for resisting the argument on the basis of financial considerations, as the Minister knows.

I have sought to demonstrate that the grounds for the Government's argument are entirely spurious. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to put the matter right. The issue will not go away and the sooner that we get an announcement that justice will be provided for the non-haemophiliacs the better.

1.13 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on seeking this opportunity to raise a subject of understandable concern which undoubtedly arouses deep sympathy in all of us. It is a tragedy that people have become infected with HIV through blood transfusions or through tissue transfer. I join the hon. Gentleman in expressing my sympathy for those affected by this unfortunate tragedy which has blighted the lives of those infected and the lives of their families.

I recognise that the hon. Gentleman has a long-standing and special concern about the whole question of HIV and AIDS. He spoke particularly of the situation in Edinburgh. He will know that the prevalence of HIV and AIDS varies in different parts of the country. I visited Edinburgh earlier this year to meet Dr. Mok and many others involved in the provision of services. I visited the new hospice in the centre of Edinburgh and saw much of the medical treatment available for those suffering from HIV and AIDS, whatever the cause.

In a sense, the hon. Gentleman's debate is about how people contracted HIV and AIDS. That is the point that he seeks to make, but he, of all people, will also be aware that the development of appropriate services, support and care for those suffering from this fatal disease has been a major challenge and a major priority for us all.

The Government's response to the hon. Gentleman's comments cannot just be a matter of sympathetic words. We are taking steps to ensure that appropriate services and treatment are available to those with HIV and AIDS and that appropriate services and treatment are available to the blood transfusion and tissue recipients and to all others who are infected.

We are seeking as far as possible to alleviate and delay the effects of the infection. We continue to support research and that support amounts to about £31 million during the past five years; about £500 million has been put by the Government into the development of services and treatment for people with HIV and AIDS. This year, the substantial ring-fenced funds of £160 million for the national health service and other organisations are the Government's contribution to preventing the further spread of HIV and providing diagnosis, treatment, care and support services.

Next year those resources are being increased to almost £200 million. That shows a clear commitment to the development of services in this country, which leads the world in the provision of care, support and treatment for those suffering from HIV and AIDS.

As I say, the hon. Gentleman has long identified the threat to public health and the enormous difficulty facing individuals and families. He sponsored the AIDS (Control) Act 1987 which, through its reports, gives the Government and health authorities a strong strategic tool with which to monitor the progress and effectiveness of their prevention and treatment efforts in the area of AIDS and the use of the earmarked money.

Earlier this year I was also able to give the initial results of the anonymised HIV sero-surveys. Hon. Members will be aware that fact is much better than fantasy in the area of HIV and AIDS. It was essential in terms of the development and planning of services, particularly in the light of the large ring-fenced sums of money available for the work, that we should have a better estimate of the prevalence and spread of the disease.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the situation in Edinburgh. Our figures demonstrated that the prevalence of HIV infection among women attending ante-natal clinics in certain parts of inner London was 1 in 500. As a result of those figures, I established the AIDS action group, which I chair. The group is studying ways of reaching key population groups and ways of co-ordinating work across a number of sectors. It will enable us to build on and to make widely known the tremendous amount of effective work already being carried forward locally. The task is urgent and we are making rapid progress. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are similar developments in Scotland.

The time has come with the development of services, prevention and support for those with HIV and AIDS to ensure that we have an effective way of ensuring that all those who are infected or increasingly affected by HIV and AIDS receive the support and care that they deserve.

The debate concerns those infected through blood transfusion and tissue transfer. I can assure the House that all practical steps are being taken to safeguard our blood supply, of which we are justly proud. Those engaging in high-risk activities associated with HIV are not accepted as blood donors and all donations are tested for HIV antibodies. Tissue donors are also tested and by such means we seek to prevent a recurrence of this appalling and unforeseen tragedy.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members will acknowledge the substantial measures taken by the Government to ensure that appropriate treatment, care and support are provided for those with HIV and to protect against any recurrence of this tragedy. Difficulties have arisen on the issue of compensation and are of concern to the hon. Gentleman. Governments of all parties accept that when there has been negligence in treatment the national health service should compensate those who have been damaged. It is for individuals to decide whether to pursue such cases and, until now, the main avenue of redress has been the courts.

As the hon. Gentleman may know, we are consulting on proposals for an arbitration scheme in respect of claims for negligence against the health service. That follows a suggestion by Lord Griffiths in his address to the annual conference of the Law Society in October 1990 that claims for compensation could, with the agreement of both parties, be considered by a small panel of medical and legal experts working on paper and applying the normal principles of negligence under common law. Any damages awarded would not be limited and would be calculated according to established guidelines. Such a system might provide a simpler, quicker and cheaper route for those who opted to use it in preference to the courts. If the suggestion meets with general support, perhaps we could develop a pilot trial in one or two regional health authorities.

Of course, the avenue of legal action is open to blood transfusion recipients infected with HIV. The hon. Gentleman sought to argue that for this group the Government should go further and provide compensation without any need to show negligence—that we should compensate, effectively, on a no-fault basis.

Earlier this year the House carefully considered the merits and demerits of a no-fault compensation scheme

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

when the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) presented her NHS (Compensation) Bill for Second Reading. On a free vote, the Government and the House rejected that Bill. That was certainly not because we lacked sympathy for the victims of medical accidents. As I hope we have shown, the contrary is the case. It is the duty of government to consider the wider implications for policy of any such major proposals. Any workable scheme of no-fault compensation would be enormously costly, and in attempting to solve one set of problems it would create another. Inevitably, there would be unfairness because those injured through NHS treatment would be compensated, while those injured or disabled through natural causes would not. Severe difficulties over causation would remain. The accountability of those providing treatment could also be reduced. There could be substantial cost implications if the awards were not to be unacceptably small, which is the case in some countries that have adopted such a scheme.

The proposals that I have mentioned offer a much better hope of finding a workable way forward for our current system. Following the full debate on 1 February when the Secretary of State for Health addressed the House, the House decisively rejected the principle of no-fault compensation for those injured because of NHS treatment when no negligence had been demonstrated. No one can underestimate the difficulties of these questions and of the decisions involved. Inevitably, there will be further demands on finite NHS resources. I have spoken about the way in which we have deliberately and determinedly invested additional resources in the development of services for those with HIV and AIDS.

Mr. Strang: The Minister's comments about no-fault compensation are interesting, but the crunch issue is about how the Government justify making a distinction between haemophiliacs and non-haemophiliacs. That is the issue that I covered in my speech and I trust that the Minister will reply to it. Surely they can provide compensation for non-haemophiliacs in the same way as for haemophiliacs. It is simply a matter of erecting the ring fence in a logical place. I do not want to get involved in the argument about no-fault compensation. I hope that the hon. Lady will address the issue that I have raised.

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope that explaining the various ways in which we are tackling the problem will help the hon. Gentleman to understand why we reached the decision that we did. It is important to consider that group in the context of the larger group of HIV and AIDS sufferers, to make it clear that—whatever the causation—they are suffering from a disease for which there is no known cure and to which we and the hon. Gentleman have sought to give priority.

It is important to establish the arguments in respect of no-fault compensation. Although it may initially seem superficially appealing, its long-term implications for the health service would be very serious. In reaching the decision a year ago that the haemophiliacs in question should be offered financial assistance because they were a special and specific group, the Government considered carefully the various factors involved. We took the view that because they already suffered from health, social and financial disadvantages associated with their lifelong condition, an exceptional decision should be made in their case.

The hon. Gentleman argued that the payments made to HIV-infected haemophiliacs should be considered as a precedent for blood transfusion cases. There is hardly any need for me to remind the House of the lengthy campaign on behalf of haemophiliacs—supported by many right hon. and hon. Members, the public and the media—whose advocates reiterated that haemophiliacs were an exceptional and specific group who merited exceptional treatment. The Government remain convinced that their case is exceptional.

It is always extremely difficult to draw distinctions. It is likely that there will always be a group who will feel unfairly treated, seek to have the limits redrawn and the boundary altered, and argue that they should be incorporated rather than excluded. That will be the case whenever such a decision is made.

The Government recognised the arguments forcefully put to us that HIV-infected haemophiliacs were a special case. I repeat that their lifelong condition of haemophilia—which had already adversely affected their health, social, employment, insurance, and mortgage prospects—was further exacerbated by the onset of HIV.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister agree that those haemophiliacs were deemed to be a special case precisely because they were infected by contaminated blood from the national health service? But is it not the case that only haemophiliacs infected in that way were compensated—not those infected in any other way?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman is correct. The haemophiliacs in question were given contaminated blood products by those who sought to treat them. The particular arguments and considerations given to their particular case have been much rehearsed.

No one can argue effectively that a line can be drawn anywhere and be left unchallenged. It is inherent in such an initiative that there will always be some who are on the other side of that line who were contaminated through no fault of their own—or even through some fault of their own—and who will argue that they also ought to receive financial recompense. It is naive to believe other than that there will always be some groups on the other side of the line who will seek to argue that it should be moved. That must be so wherever financial decisions are involved.

In the case of the haemophiliacs, the Government responded generously, making available more than £76 million to help the 1,200 individuals affected with HIV and their families. A haemophiliac with dependants will receive around £80,000 from that sum, and those with particular needs can receive additional help from the Macfarlane Trust, which has been further funded with Government money. The support that has been provided by the Government for this specific group compares favourably with state help that is provided elsewhere for haemophiliacs with HIV. The House will be aware that the Governments of about half the EC countries have made no recognition of the plight of this group.

Those advocating help for HIV-infected blood transfusion and tissue recipients argue, as has the hon. Gentleman, that the cost would be relatively small. Thankfully, the numbers suffering as a result of the tragedy are relatively small. We know of 62 reported cases

where treatment was given in the United Kingdom. We estimate that the cost of extending the recent settlement for haemophiliacs to transfusion or tissue cases treated here could be about £10 million. That is not an insignificant amount. It equates with the cost of 1,000 kidney transplants or 500 bone marrow transplants or 500 heart transplants.

In short, we share the great sympathy that the hon. Gentleman feels for this particular group of patients. We are committed to developing first-rate, effective and supportive services for the treatment and care of those with HIV and AIDS. The Government have not been persuaded, however, that blood transfusion and tissue recipients constitute a special case. We shall, of course, consider carefully the views which have been expressed by the hon. Gentleman. We have great sympathy for these tragic cases and for their families.

Schools (Berkshire)

1.30 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise this matter. It has come about because one of my colleagues cancelled his debate. That gave me the opportunity to introduce this subject. I came in, as it were, at a rather late stage.

The two schools that are mentioned on the Order Paper are of the highest standard in Berkshire. Little Heath school, in my constituency, is one of the two. Ryeish Green school is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan). I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you will allow my hon. Friend to intervene briefly as we proceed.

Incidentally, the headmaster of Little Heath school taught my daughter in another school in Berkshire. I have, therefore, a close interest in the school.

The history is that four parents with four children applied for entry into Little Heath school in the normal way. Their children were due to start at the school in September 1991. They were refused entry on the ground that the school was full. The parents went through the appeals procedure and were refused again. The appeal committee upheld the decision of the local education authority. The four parents were not satisfied with the decision. They refused to send their children to any other school. I should say that one parent sent his child to Meadway school but still wishes to transfer to Little Heath.

The parents wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and he replied to the effect that he could not intervene because the LEA had not acted unreasonably. I feel strongly that the Government's policy of open enrolment is being flouted. The LEA continues to say that the school is full.

Little Heath school was first measured in 1979. It was decided then that the maximum intake was 239. The actual intake between 1983 and 1989 was 210. The school was remeasured in 1990, and the intake that year was 253. In 1991, the year in question, the intake was 239. There were six successful appeals, so 245 became the final figure. In August 1991, three children withdrew, which meant that 242 became the final figure. Three places became available. The number of admissions the previous year was 11 more than the total number of entrants in 1991.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science has to decide whether the LEA has acted unreasonably. I believe that there are grounds for intervention. During the appeals the parents were not given full information. For example, the catchment map was not produced. There are arguments in the county about whether there is a catchment map. In some letters it is referred to as being in existence and in others it is not. The parents' representations were not circulated to the appeals committee and only one parent's preference was allowed by the local education authority, which is contrary to the Department of Education and Science circular 11/88 and contrary to the Act.

Two stages of the appeal do not appear to have been followed. The first part of an appeal is to consider whether the entry will cause the school to suffer because of having too many children. The appeals committee then has to decide whether, if it supports the local education authority, the children's needs and the parents' preference

[Sir Anthony Durant]

ought to override that decision. There may be extenuating circumstances, in the case of the parents and the children, that ought to override the earlier decision. That process was not followed.

The Government's policy of encouraging open enrolment is right. I support it. I believe that as many parents as possible should have the opportunity to send their children to the school that they want them to attend. I urge the Minister, therefore, to intervene in this case on grounds of space. According to the figures, it appears that the school took in 11 additional children during the previous year. The argument being used is that because of the national curriculum requirements the school is more crowded and that four additional children cannot be accommodated. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East will deal with the problem that has arisen at Ryeish Green where there are similar problems about numbers.

As the procedures laid down by statute have not been properly followed, I appeal to the Minister to look into the matter. It will not go away. The parents are very determined. Unless the Minister intervenes, I have no doubt that this issue will end up in the courts. I ask him, therefore, to consider seriously the points that I have made, to look again, with his colleagues, at what has happened and to provide the opportunity for these four children to go to the school that they wish to attend. It is a fine school. The parents are very determined that their children should go to it and feel very aggrieved that that opportunity has been denied to them.

1.36 pm

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) for enabling me to join in the debate. I strongly support the points that he has made. The position is highly unsatisfactory. My hon. Friend referred to the problems at Little Heath school. I intend to speak about similar problems at Ryeish Green school.

Ryeish Green is an extremely popular school, despite the fact that many of its facilities are less good than those provided by other schools in the neighbourhood. That says a great deal for the way in which Ryeish Green is run and managed. Its allocation for this year is 186 places. I ask the Minister to consider whether it is right that the local education authority should be able to allocate the number of school places in that way when—this is very misleading for parents—the actual entry number is different. Physically handicapped children are added to Ryeish Green's allocation of 186 places. In addition, there are children whom the appeal panel regard as worthy of a place. The word "worthy" is slightly invidious, but that is the wording that the appeal panel uses.

This year's allocation of 186 places was, therefore, increased to 199. The school agreed that it could take that number of children. Just before the September term started, a few children dropped out. The number of allocated places was then reduced from 199 to 196. However, parents who were anxious to send their children to Ryeish Green—whose names, presumably, were on the waiting list—were not allowed to do so. They resented that deeply.

Moreover, the headmaster offered an additional entrance form this year, but the local education authority has refused to transfer any funds for that purpose. Presumably funds will have been made available for those children at another school. The greatest injustice felt by the parents is that they have been told that there is a catchment area and that preference is given to children from the primary school catchment area. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West said, there is considerable confusion and misunderstanding about whether there is a catchment area. Parents feel a double injustice because, having failed to get their children into Ryeish Green, they are compelled to send them to other schools in the area, regardless of whether they want to do so. Having failed to get their children into Ryeish Green, a number of parents are keeping their children at home, which is very unsatisfactory.

I asked locally for the names of the people who are on the appeal panel, how they were appointed and selected and what criteria they applied in making their judgment. I was told that that was confidential and could not be passed to me, which again is unsatisfactory.

In October, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), was good enough to reply to my letter. He pointed out that the Secretary of State's scope to intervene in school admissions is "extremely limited". He said that

> "The authority's general duty to admit children to the school chosen by their parents does not apply in certain circumstances".

Again, I found that unsatisfactory, because it is not clear to parents what circumstances prevent their children from being admitted. He further said:

> "Admission authorities can have any reasonable criteria they like."

That is not satisfactory. He continues:

> "Catchment areas are not illegal or unreasonable in themselves but they may be vulnerable to legal challenge if they are drawn to co-incide with the county boundary and thus give priority to the LEA's own residents."

We have recently had the court adjudication, which is under appeal, on the Greenwich area. It appears to be totally contrary to what the courts have decided for another part of the country.

Finally—this is a glimmer of light—my hon. Friend the Minister says:

> "If the governors wish to do so, they can ask the LEA to increase the school's admission limit for next year and if the LEA were to refuse, the governors could apply to the Secretary of State for an increased standard number"

of admissions.

I am glad to have been able to participate in this short debate. I hope that I have said enough to show the strong feelings about the system in our area. Contrary to what we had hoped from increased parental choice, the system seems to have become more bureaucratic and less flexible.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of what the hon. Members for Reading, East and Reading, West have said and will agree to reconsider the position.

1.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) and for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) on their persistence in pursuing the concerns of their constituents. They have written several times to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and have pursued the interests of their constituents with determination. Persistence is one of the hallmarks of

an effective Member of Parliament and I pay full tribute to my hon. Friends for all the work that they have done on behalf of their constituents.

My hon. Friends raised the issue of parental choice and the admission of children to school. This is a matter of close interest to all our constituents—and rightly so—as is borne out by the correspondence that my ministerial colleagues and I receive from right hon. and hon. Members.

I share my hon. Friend's strong belief in parental choice in education. Our reforms are designed to enhance parental choice and to improve the information available to parents, to allow a more informed exercise of that choice. That is what more open enrolment, to use the jargon phrase, is all about. The Education Reform Act 1988 extends parental choice by providing increased opportunity for parents to send their children to the schools of their choice.

My hon. Friends have clearly conveyed in their letters to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State the disappointment of parents who were unsuccessful in gaining a place for their children at Little Heath and Ryeish Green.

That is entirely understandable. However, I emphasise that the improvements that we have introduced enhance parental choice but do not guarantee that parents will, in all cases, be able to gain a place for their child at the school of their choice. It is, I fear, unavoidable that some parents will be disappointed.

The number of places for admission to a school each year must necessarily be related to the capacity of the school. To do otherwise would cause overcrowded conditions, would affect teaching and the children's ability to learn and would benefit no one.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: I have listened carefully to what the Minister said, but how does he explain that the numbers can go up and down from one week to another? Either the school is full or it is not; either there are places or there are not.

Mr. Howarth: If my hon. Friend will allow me to continue I may be able to deal with that issue in the context of the circumstances in Reading and in the particular schools.

The key point about more open enrolment is that there is now a minimum number of admissions to a school—known as the standard number—which is related to the physical capacity of the school. The admissions authority for a school—the local education authority in the case of county schools which we are debating today—must admit children up to at least its standard number. It cannot set lower admissions numbers for administrative convenience.

Our reforms are designed to maximise parental choice but no matter how much my hon. Friends and I would like all parents to obtain their choice of school for their children, the number of pupils admitted to a school must be limited, not least in the educational interests of the children already admitted.

Sir Anthony Durant: What concerns me about the particular school in which I am interested is that there are fewer children this year than the previous year. I cannot understand how that happens. We accept that there must be figures on which decisions are based, but there has been a sudden variation in the figures for entries into that school.

Mr. Howarth: If my hon. Friend will allow me to develop the case a little further I shall try to set his particular concern in the context of the general policy appertaining to these issues. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that we must do all that we can to ensure that the options available are the best possible.

The introduction of standard numbers under more open enrolment means that admissions authorities can no longer set arbitrary restrictions on admission to popular schools. Of course, if an authority wishes to admit above the standard number, it can do so.

I understand that the standard number for Ryeish Green school is 186. Berkshire local education authority, after consultation with the head and the governors, agreed to increase the intake to 191 in the interests of meeting parental choice in the area. I understand that the authority has said that it proposes to keep admissions at the higher level.

In the case of Little Heath school there have been changes in the numbers of admissions in the past couple of years and they have, I think, caused some confusion among parents who have appealed to the Secretary of State about their child's non-admission. I shall explain briefly what I understand to have happened.

Little Heath school has a standard number of 239. That was the admissions number published for the school for 1990. Subsequently, the local education authority carried out a reassessment of the school's capacity and the admissions number was raised following consultation with the school governors to 253 for 1991. The school's accommodation was then again reassessed—

Sir Anthony Durant: The school's intake was 253 in 1990. In 1991 it was 239. The Minister's figures are right, but his years are wrong.

Mr. Howarth: It is extremely important that we understand each other correctly and that we are discussing the same facts. I shall continue with my exposition and if it proves to be the case that there has been a misunderstanding between my hon. Friends and the Department, we shall of course pursue it as constructively and helpfully as we can. However, I am not sure that my hon. Friend is entirely right in his apprehension.

The school's accommodation was again reassessed by the local education authority to take account of the requirements of the national curriculum, in consultation with the head and school governors. As a result, the local education authority assessed the school's capacity as indicating an admission limit below 239. It is perhaps regrettable that the authority and governors felt it necessary to reduce the admissions number for the school, having increased it the previous year. They did not seek to reduce the admissions below the standard number of 239; if they had wished to do so, they would have required the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

The authority has said that it regrets the situation that has arisen in those cases, but that, having regard for the pupils already at the school, it could not justify an increase in the admission levels at the schools. If the governing body of the school is unhappy with the currently agreed level of admissions and wishes to increase the school's admission limits for next year it can of course approach the local education authority. That is not all that it can do. If the local education authority is unwilling to grant an

[Mr. Howarth]

increase in admissions, the governors can apply to the Secretary of State for an increase in the school's standard number.

As the schools were oversubscribed for this year, places at the schools were allocated in accordance with the authority's published criteria. On the basis of those criteria, the children of constituents about whom my hon. Friends have written did not gain places at the school. Once places had been allocated, parents who did not obtain a place for their child were given the opportunity of presenting their appeals to the independent appeals committee. The authority's decisions were considered and upheld by the appeals committee.

My right hon. and learned Friend has considered, at my hon. Friends' request, the concerns of their constituents regarding the non-admission of their children and whether to intervene in the matter. I gladly pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, West and for Reading, East for their hard work on behalf of their constituents, but I must remind them of the limits on the powers of my right hon. and learned Friend in such matters. Before he could intervene, my right hon. and learned Friend would need to be satisfied either that the authority was acting "unreasonably" or that it was failing in its duty under section 6 of the Education Act 1980 to observe parental preferences. To fall within the term "unreasonable", as interpreted by the courts, an authority's conduct must be conduct that no sensible authority, acting with due appreciation of its responsibilities, would have decided to adopt. Those are strict criteria and understandably so. My right hon. and learned Friend's powers do not allow him to act as a court of appeal, reviewing the decisions of local appeal committees; and it is not enough that he should simply disagree with the local education authority's decision. He cannot substitute his own judgment for that of the admissions authority.

After careful consideration of the points raised by my hon. Friends on their constituents' behalf, my right hon. and learned Friend concluded that the Berkshire local education authority did not appear to have acted "unreasonably"—in this strict sense—in changing the admissions number to Little Heath back to the standard number; and that there were therefore no grounds on which he could intervene in those cases.

Provided an appeal committee is constituted in accordance with the provisions of schedule 2 to the Education Act 1980, the Secretary of State cannot intervene in respect of its findings, although it is open to the local ombudsman to investigate its decisions and procedure.

My hon. Friends the Members for Reading, West and for Reading, East have served splendidly the interests of their constituents, who are understandably disappointed and distressed about the non-admission of their children to the school of their choice. I hope that my hon. Friends accept that we have looked closely at the points that they have raised; it is unfortunate that expectations of higher admissions to Little Heath were not maintained, but the local education authority is meeting the legal requirements by continuing to admit up to the school's standard number and, on the evidence that we have, I do not think that we can describe the action of the local education authority in reducing admissions in 1991-92 as "unreasonable" in the strict legal sense, however much we may regret it.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: May I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to think a little further? The points that we have raised refer to two particular schools but also to a system, which we think is unsatisfactory and which he may also feel, following the Greenwich court case, needs re-examination. We do not think that the rigid application of catchment areas is fulfilling the Government's intentions in respect of increased parental choice and we should be grateful if the Minister would have another look at the position not just of our schools but generally.

Mr. Howarth: I think that my hon. Friend accepts that, in the case affecting the school in his constituency, full evidence has been put before us and that we have considered it with the utmost care. Of course, if any new evidence were presented, we would look at the circumstances again. On the wider issue of principle and policy, we are most anxious to make the enhancement of parental choice and the policy of more open enrolment a most effective reality. I hope that my hon. Friends will recognise, however, that it is a time-honoured and integral part of our education system that there should be local education authorities which have discretion to manage affairs within their own areas, and we have to consider carefully what balance we should strike between the pursuit of the Government's strategy of enhancing parental choice—something to which the overwhelming majority of local education authorities are committed—and the preservation of proper authority for LEAs in their own areas.

Sir Anthony Durant: What concerns me in the case of Little Heath is that the national curriculum is the ground being cited for the reduction in numbers. Are the Government pleased at the prospect of schools shrinking as a result of the national curriculum when what we are supposed to be doing is extending the education service?

Mr. Howarth: It is certainly not generally the case that schools are reducing the number of pupils because of the national curriculum. My hon. Friend represents the interests of parents and of children who attend Little Heath school and he will not want those interests to be neglected. It seems to all of us to be extremely important that physical circumstances should be provided to enable teachers to teach the national curriculum and children to learn it in conditions that are satisfactory.

As I said earlier, I perfectly understand the frustration of parents whose hopes that their children would obtain a place were disappointed, but, on the face of it, it does not appear to me that the local education authority has done the wrong thing in addressing itself to the issue of how the national curriculum can best be delivered in the particular circumstances of the school.

I hope that my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, East and for Reading, West will find my comments as constructive as they were intended to be and that I have reassured them that we have examined carefully the points that they have raised.

Fire and Emergency Services (London)

1.57 pm

Ms. Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise some important matters of concern regarding the provision of fire and emergency services in our capital city. At this time of year, and with terrorists making increasing use of fire bombs, our minds are drawn to the work of the emergency services. We all reject strongly the activities of those terrorists, and I am sure that the whole House and the country would like to pay tribute to the dedicated work done, day in, day out, by our fire fighters, ambulance staff and police officers to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude. No doubt we should all like to wish all those staff, and others working over the holiday period, a happy Christmas and a prosperous new year.

The broadening of our consciousness of the fire brigade in London has been well served by London Weekend Television's excellent programme "London's Burning". Apparently, the programme is technically very accurate and it is advised on at every stage by expert fire fighters. Its only slight fault is that it does not quite do justice to the length of time that fire fighters spend in training and keeping fit between calls. Keeping up to date with the latest developments in every area, our fire fighters truly are professionals, and have little time left to sit around between calls drinking tea.

I am privileged to have the fire authority headquarters based in my constituency and I propose first to concentrate on four issues affecting the London fire brigade.

First, the London fire and civil defence authority has a statutory duty under the Fire Services Act 1947 to provide a fire-fighting service. The Act also gives discretionary powers for the authority to use its resources to provide other special emergency rescue services. Those emergency rescue services, for which no extra Government funding is available, cover such things as road traffic accidents, people shut in lifts, people locked in and out of premises, the emergency flooding of premises and cats stranded up trees.

In the first quarter of this year, the fire brigade attended 18,700 such calls, of which more than 1,000 were motoring accidents. Surely it is absurd that such essential services, which form 40 per cent. of the work of the London fire brigade, should be considered as discretionary and be exempted from the funding formula.

In the past five years, the mainstream work of fire fighting has increased by 7 per cent. and the funding has followed that marginal increase. Over the same period, those other essential emergency services have increased by over 70 per cent., with not an extra penny from the Government.

Secondly, I challenge the Minister to defend the Government's inaction in dealing with the capital needs of London's fire brigade. Because of massive demographic changes in the capital, the authority has had to increase and relocate many of its services. As many fire stations are in buildings that are historic and listed, those changes have meant significant alterations in station usage. The Government have failed entirely to consider the costs of the statutory duties of the authority to maintain those buildings in line with listed building standards.

Similarly, the Government's so-called commitment to the equality of women in the work-place is shown again to be lip service as, in funding the fire authority, the Government ignore the costs that must be borne by the authority—and rightly so—in altering many stations to accommodate the increasing number of women fire fighters.

The costs of developing and introducing new technology and equipment designed to save increasingly more lives are still not met by the Government in working out the funding. As a result, we risk losing our position as a world leader in life saving.

Thirdly, I come to the topical subject of pension funds, though I shall avoid the temptation to make comparisons with the problems facing the many Mirror Group and Maxwell Communication Corporation pensioners. Fire authorities are statutorily obliged to meet pension obligations for fire fighters from their revenue budgets. Between 1986 and 1990, when the Conservatives, with Liberal support, spawned the administration of the London fire and civil defence authority, more than 600 front-line fire fighters were cut from the establishment.

While today's revenue budget is led by the new, smaller number of fire fighters, the authority still has to pay for the pensions of the former staff. That pensions expenditure is predicted to rise between 1988 and 1993 from £13 million to a massive £34 million, which would account for about 14 per cent. of the authority's revenue budget, inevitably at the expense of other areas, such as training.

Fourthly, on fire cover, I challenge the Minister to respond to the outdated and discredited system of fire risk assessment which the Government have refused to address. It may not be well known that London's first fire bridges were established by insurance companies to protect the buildings that they covered. Since then, fire risk assessment on which basis fire fighters and engines are distributed and from which their funding is determined has been based almost exclusively on buildings and not on people. Those categories of A risk—the most intense—down to D risk are long overdue for replacement. The Government have failed to take the advice of many senior fire professionals to agree to such a fundamental review quickly. Although those assessed risk categories provide only minimum standards, I am pleased that the London fire brigade provides a service that is far higher than that bare minimum. I compliment the commitment of the members of the London fire authority, led by Councillor Tony Ritchie and Chief Fire Officer Brian Robinson, and the constructive co-operation of the trade unions involved in that service. Their commitment is extremely high.

Funding is based only on the minimum cover, even though the London fire brigade provides a service that is far higher than the bare minimum. A system that provides only for a minimum service is selling the people of London short. It relies on the extra dedication and commitment of individual fire fighters. A parallel can be drawn with the work and commitment of the ambulance service, and I shall allow for a short intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) specifically on that.

A more co-ordinated approach is needed to the resource allocations of the fire brigade. My hon. Friends and I look forward to the introduction of a Greater London authority to work with the fire service in performing a critical co-ordinating role, with the arrival in the next six months of a Labour Government.

I wish to give the Minister plenty of time to respond and I challenge him to answer the following points. When will the Government agree to extending the fire authorities'

[Ms. Kate Hoey]

statutory responsibility to include other emergency rescue work with the necessary funding to pay for it? When will they provide suitable funding, through the basic credit approval system, which at present does not even keep pace with inflation, to undertake the essential building programme and fully keep up with the increase in the number of women fire fighters and ever-developing technology?

When will the Government agree to a standard spending assessment to meet unavoidable pension realities? When will they allow fire authorities to operate proper investment pension funds? When will they agree to a fire assessment system that takes proper account of people rather than just buildings?

As those issues and others that will be raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North cannot be dealt with fully in a short debate, will the Minister arrange for a full debate on this important subject in the new year in Government time and for a statement to be made? When will the Government stop running away from their responsibilities properly to fund emergency services for the people of London?

2.7 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) and the Minister for allowing me to contribute briefly to this debate. I wish to talk specifically about another aspect of London's emergency services. Although I wholeheartedly support what my hon. Friend said about the fire service, I wish to speak about the ambulance service.

May I state for the record—it is in the Register of Members' Interests—that I am sponsored in the House by the National Union of Public Employees, which has a significant membership among the London ambulance service.

The ambulance service is vital for Londoners. It demands and receives enormous dedication and conscientiousness from its staff. They have shown their commitment for many years, working in awful circumstances. They suffer greatly at present because of understaffing, inadequate vehicles and an unaccountable service and many of them do not live to enjoy a long retirement because the stress of the job often causes premature death. They suffer from the stress of the job and from the stress of being called out in an emergency and not knowing whether they will see a fairly minor accident in the home or a terrible tragedy on the roads or railways in which they will be asked to pull children's bodies out of the wreckage. That is the lot of the ambulance workers, who are extremely dedicated people.

The ambulance service was efficiently and accountably run by the Greater London council. The service was taken away from the council in the health service reorganisation of 1974 and was put under South West Thames regional health authority. It is now attempting to make itself into a trust.

There is the ludicrous position of the director of the London ambulance service seeming to be remarkably reluctant to meet Members of Parliament, never mind replying to correspondence from Members of Parliament concerning their legitimate fears about the ambulance service. When I met him 18 months ago, he told me that much of the ambulance service was now commercially confidential because of the tendering system. It is nonsense for the director of a major service on which the people of London rely to tell a Member of Parliament, "Sorry, I cannot answer your questions because of commercial confidentiality." That is wholly wrong.

The London ambulance service has also managed to get rid of £3 million on a computer system that does not work, and that is now the subject of an inquiry. A further £3 million is to be spent on a replacement. The 14th report of the Public Accounts Committee was heavily critical of the performance of the London ambulance service, and rightly so. The improvements that the Committee and London Members have looked for simply have not happened.

I will give a few facts before giving the Minister sufficient time to reply. I recognise that as a Home Office Minister, it will be difficult for him to answer all the questions about the ambulance service. I hope that he will be good enough to pass on what I have said to his colleagues in the Department of Health who should be able to answer the points.

In 1990, as an average, 76 per cent. of all emergency 999 calls to the London ambulance service were answered within 14 minutes. The national Orcon standard requires a response time of 95 per cent. within 14 minutes. For the first quarter of 1991, 66 per cent. of such calls were met within 14 minutes, so the situation got worse. In the second quarter, the figure improved slightly to 73 per cent. and in the third quarter, 68 per cent. were answered within 14 minutes. There are 2,000 calls per day, so that means that more than 600 emergency calls a day are not met within the nationally required times.

The ambulance service may reasonably say that the problem is a product of traffic and other factors. It is indeed a product of traffic, but it is also a product of inadequate vehicles, insufficient staff and insufficient funding for the service. Last weekend, 14 and 15 December, was a terrible weekend for weather. There was heavy fog, icy roads and very dangerous conditions. It is in just such circumstances that the ambulance service is more in demand than at any other time, yet one fifth of the vehicles were off the road because they did not work, because there were no drivers for them or because they were too old.

Ms. Hoey: Does my hon. Friend agree that not only are the vehicles generally greatly inadequate, but the new vehicles that are being forced on some areas are inadequate in terms of safety for the ambulance personnel driving them? That is especially true in my own area of Brixton.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. The financial problems of the ambulance service are serious. I understand that some vehicles are now being forced to run for 16 hours a day, which means that there is insufficient time for basic maintenance and repair work on them. The vehicles are being run into the ground.

In reply to an Adjournment debate on 18 April 1991, which was initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health announced expenditure of £3·5 million on new vehicles, as reported in column 672 of *Hansard*. Only 60 have been bought and none has been bought since April. They are not safe vehicles in the opinion of members of the National Union

of Public Employees and of the Confederation of Health Service Employees who drive them. They held a meeting yesterday with the Health and Safety Executive so that they could express their concerns. They have two major concerns. First, there is no bulkhead door between the cab and the back of the ambulance. That is dangerous for the person in the back, because in the areas that my hon. Friend and I represent, tragically, attacks on ambulance personnel are common. I deplore and condemn those attacks, but they do occur as a result of drug-taking, drunkenness and so on.

Secondly, the vehicles have only one stretcher space. Therefore, at a stroke, the purchase of new vehicles has halved the ambulance service's capacity to carry emergency cases. In addition, the transmission system has been changed from automatic gearboxes, which give a smoother run, are easier to drive and are better and safer for patients, to manual gearboxes, which are much more difficult to drive and give passengers a rougher ride. That is important to patients with spinal injuries.

We are approaching Christmas when there is, tragically, great demand on the ambulance service because the number of accidents increases as a result of drunken driving and so on. I hope that the ambulance service gets through. I hope that it copes. I know that the staff will do their best. I wish that the Government would do their best to fund the ambulance service properly and that the senior management would do their best to get decent vehicles so that the dedication of the staff can be properly rewarded.

I am tired of hearing complaints after every major festival and holiday in London that the ambulance service could not cope. The ambulance service could cope if it were given the tools with which to do the job properly. We salute the quality of the staff every time there is a major disaster. Let us recognise that dedication and ensure that they have proper equipment to do the job and that we have an accountable service in London once again.

2.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) on securing this debate and I am grateful to her for raising the important subject of the provision of fire cover in London. I join her and the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) in paying tribute to the vital work done by the emergency services in London.

This is a timely occasion for a debate on the fire service in view of the fact that the London fire and civil defence authority has just reached decisions on the future provision of fire cover in the capital and put forward for the approval of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary proposals for reductions in the number of fire-fighting appliances at certain stations and for the closure of Sanderstead fire station.

The statutory responsibility for providing an effective and efficient fire brigade in London, and thus the responsibility for assessing fire risks and the deployment of resources to meet them, rests with the authority. However, my right hon. Friend is concerned to ensure that fire authorities comply with the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover mentioned by the hon. Lady to which I shall come later.

The fire service in England and Wales costs more than £1 billion per year. Like other local government services, it is funded through revenue support grant and non-domestic rates, which together make up some 85 per cent. of fire authorities' expenditure, and the community charge. The Government are concerned to ensure that the way in which those sums are spent represents good value for money.

That is why, in 1985, the Home Office invited all fire authorities in England and Wales to review the fire risks in their areas and the resources necessary to meet them. The chief fire officer of the London fire brigade completed his review earlier this year. The proposals in the review were given extensive publicity in an extremely thorough consultation exercise by the authority with the public, London borough councils, adjacent county councils and other relevant organisations. The authority has kept the fire service trade unions, the National Association of Fire Officers and the Fire Brigades Union closely in touch with developments since the review began.

If my right hon. Friend is to give his approval to those proposals, he will need to be satisfied, on the professional advice of Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services, that the London fire and civil defence authority will continue to meet the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover. He will not be prepared to agree to any reductions that would reduce standards of fire cover below those agreed minima.

Proposals to close fire stations or to reduce the number of operational fire fighters or fire-fighting appliances can raise important and sensitive local issues. The concerns expressed while the report has been developing and the implications of some proposals for standards of fire cover are well understood by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary who will take those factors into account when deciding whether to approve the authority's proposals. He will also want to allow adequate time for hon. Members to make further representations to him now that the authority has formally submitted its proposals.

Patterns of fire risk change over time and it is important regularly to reassess them to ensure that fire authorities continue to meet their statutory responsibilities and do so efficiently. I understand the concern about the implications of the recommended changes, but the Home Secretary will not approve reductions that would result in unacceptable levels of public protection.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall spoke about financing. The fire service in England and Wales costs well over £1 billion each year and the London fire and civil defence authority costs more than £200 million annually. We are anxious to ensure that the fire service, like any other public service, operates efficiently and with sufficient resources. That means ensuring that the resources are accurately targeted to where they are most needed. Fire service resources are largely determined by fire risks, and patterns of risk change. Therefore, the deployment of fire service resources needs to be reviewed regularly.

The hon. Lady complained about capital restraints on the fire service in London. The fire service share of total local authority standard spending in England in 1992-93 will be 8 per cent. higher than in the present year. The London fire and civil defence authority standard spending assessment for 1991-92 is £226·8 milion. Its provisional standard spending assessment next year is £242·4 million, an increase of 6·9 per cent. That compares with an increase last month in fire fighters' pay, which is the main constituent of fire authorities' expenditure, of 5·6 per cent. The increase for next year is on top of an increase of over

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

16 per cent. for this year. Both those increases have been above the rate of inflation and demonstrate the Government's desire to have an effective fire service.

Decisions on the total provisions for the fire service took account of additional burdens for fire prevention. The hon. Lady specifically mentioned non-fire services. Such services are provided at the discretion of the fire authority and the hon. Lady was right to say that the SSA distribution formula does not include an indicator for them. The overall resources provided for the fire service allow non-fire services to be carried out extremely well. Authorities may charge for those services, but obviously do not do so when such services are carried out in the course of attending an emergency.

The hon. Lady spoke about pension increases. That cost is not peculiar to the London authority. We are aware of concern that provision for expenditure on pensions is increasing at a rate higher than that of inflation. Additional pensions burdens were taken into account in reaching decisions on the fire service share of total standard spending. While the Government are always prepared to consider sensible proposals for changes to the standard spending assessment distributional mechanism, we are not convinced that a special indicator for pensions is yet necessary.

On capital expenditure, the London fire and civil defence authority's basic credit approval for 1992-93 was issued yesterday. It is £8·2 million, 4·1 per cent. above the approval for the current year of £7·9 million. Requirements for additional resources for fire service capital provision have to compete in each year's public expenditure survey with other new requirements, and at a time of continuing pressure on public expenditure it was not possible to allocate any more than this to the London authority. I am aware that the authority hopes to spend more than this next year and increase its capital programme in some of the ways mentioned by the hon. Lady. Basic credit approvals are not the only source of provision for capital expenditure. The authority may decide, in the light of its priorities, to contribute to capital provision from revenue expenditure, and it may use a proportion of any capital receipts.

We propose also, subject to the views of local authority associations, to issue £5 million additional provision nationally next year, in the form of supplementary credit approvals—for the specific purpose of expenditure on replacement mobilisation and communications systems.

The hon. Member for Islington, North mentioned risk categories, which were most recently assessed by the joint committee on standards of fire services in 1985. Buildings and complexes that are particularly at risk can be designated special risks, commanding initial attendance higher than that appropriate for the surrounding area.

There has been a particular request for a change in the formula for urban C risk. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities put to the Home Office a proposal that areas currently designated C risk should be divided into urban C and rural C—both with enhanced attendance standards, but with a requirement for an initial attendance of two appliances to fires in areas of urban C, as against the current requirement for one appliance in eight to 10 minutes.

That proposal would entail substantial additional resources for the fire service in England and Wales. We are considering that proposal, but the 1985 joint committee concluded that a formal split of the C risk category into two new categories was unnecessary, as 82 per cent. of fire brigades in England and Wales have a policy of mobilising two appliances to property fires in areas of C risk. However, the question of risk level is currently under examination.

The hon. Member for Islington, North raised the important question of the London ambulance service. The hon. Gentleman acknowledged in this remarks that the Department of Health is in the lead, but I admire the agility with which he properly used the debate to raise the subject. Although the hon. Gentleman very politely gave me notice of the various issues that he might raise in this debate, I had little time in which to acquaint myself with them. I will, however, do as the hon. Gentleman asked, and draw his remarks to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that when the London ambulance service board was established in 1990, it was confronted by a number of serious and pressing issues, including low staff morale following an industrial dispute, acute staff shortages, high absenteeism, top-heavy management, poor industrial relations, an absence of reliable and meaningful management information, and failure to meet recommended standards of service.

To improve what the London ambulance service itself regarded as a totally unacceptable call answering problem in central ambulance control, the board took steps to improve staffing and the system for dealing with emergency calls. It commissioned a computer-aided dispatch system to speed the handling of and response to emergency calls, and new staffing rotas were arranged to reflect known peak demand times. Management introduced various initiatives to combat absenteeism, and to improve recruitment and retention levels in the service generally. Sickness levels have fallen by nearly 2 per cent. since December 1990, and a further 19 control room staff are being recruited.

I repeat that I will ensure that the many points raised by the hon. Gentleman on which I cannot comment will reach the ears of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Vauxhall for making possible this debate, and to the hon. Member for Islington, North for extending it.

It being half-past Two o'clock the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BROADCASTING

Ordered,

That Mr. Nicholas Baker, Sir Anthony Grant, Mr. Bruce Grocott, Mr. David Harris, Kate Hoey, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. Humfrey Malins, Mr. Merlyn Rees and Mr. John P. Smith be members of the Select Committee on Broadcasting.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Hampton Court Green

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of Hampton Court green in my constituency. This has long been a beautiful, cherished and treasured public open space. It is valued by visitors, passers by and residents within my constituency at Hampton Court, Hampton Wick, Hampton Hill, Hampton and surrounding areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), whose East Molesey constituents nearby enjoy the use of Hampton Court green, asks to be associated with my remarks.

Hampton Court green is a royal property which is now the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, exercised through its Historic Royal Palaces Agency. There is an increasing tendency to use the green for parking. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a petition from local residents, which reads as follows:

"We the undersigned local residents and members of the public note with deep concern the decision of the Hampton Court administrators to use The Hampton Court green for car parking in connection with commercial ventures at Hampton Court Palace. This use is fast becoming an established practice—with the subsequent deprivation of the local residents and the public at large of the free enjoyment of this long established unspoilt open green space.

We wish to express our grave fears that, in the absence of any specific assurance to the contrary, the Palace administrators tend increasingly to view The Green as merely an adjunct to Hampton Court Palace with minimal regard to its intrinsic value as a local amenity which enhances this beautiful historic area.

We consider that such use is not necessary for the efficient and successful management of Hampton Court Palace which is an important local amenity as well as a national institution.

We therefore call on you to take urgent steps to build into the present policies and terms of reference clear and unmistakeable safeguards to define the permanent status of The Green as an area of public recreation and enjoyment and to prohibit its use at any time for car parking."

I must declare an interest. For the past 22 years, I have lived on the edge of Hampton Court green. But the fact that I live there does not mean that my neighbours, who are also my constituents and who also live there, should expect any greater or less a service from me as their Member of Parliament in the protection of their environment than any other constituents—for example, if somebody decided to park cars all over Twickenham green. I know that that point will be understood by the House and accepted by the Department of the Environment.

Government policy is to protect open space, whether in urban or rural areas. That includes greens, village greens and commons. The protection of open space does not just mean keeping buildings off them. It also means upholding their character and keeping them open and free from clutter of any kind. In upholding that Government policy, the Government should set an example to local authorities where the Government themselves own parks, open spaces, commons or greens.

At Hampton Court green this task has been delegated to the Historic Royal Palaces Agency, but the agency is clearly responsible to Parliament, as set out in its own annual review for 1990-91, which states on page 6:

"The Secretary of State for the Environment is accountable to Parliament for the agency's policy, operations and resources."

There is no doubt whatever that the Government are answerable to Parliament for the management of the green.

Furthermore, the question of parking on the green cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be said to be merely a matter of day-to-day administrative detail. Whether or not the green is used for parking on a major scale is basic to the whole character and existence of the green.

I estimate that in the spring and summer of 1990 Hampton Court green was covered with car parking, fairs and their paraphernalia for more than 40 days. That is far too much. My constituents do not accept it; nor do the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Esher. I do not accept it. It makes a deep inroad into the character of the green, it is in conflict with Government policy, and it ought to be drastically curtailed. The problem is that the Historic Palaces Agency also manages Hampton Court palace. This palace is a great national treasure and a vital part of our national heritage.

I am aware, Mr. Speaker, that a member of your family is a distinguished real tennis player on Henry VIII's historic court there, that you go to Hampton Court from time to time and that you therefore recognise the great value of Hampton Court palace. The agency has been asked to increase the revenue of the palace and to decrease its enormous running losses. They are exceedingly heavy, due to the fact that Hampton Court palace is a very big and very old building. The agency has also been given responsibility for Hampton Court green.

Therein lies the difficulty. The green would have been better protected if, like the adjacent Bushey park, it had remained, like the other royal parks, under the royal parks bailiff. As it is, the agency and the palace administration seem to view the green as a satellite to the palace that can be used and even sacrificed in the interests of the palace.

Unlike other village greens, it has neither the protection of any local authority, as common land, nor the protection of the Department of the Environment, through its royal parks department. When the agency was established it seems to have been given no clear or specific instructions about the protection of the green. Either instructions of that kind should now be given to the agency or the green should be removed from the responsibility of the Historic Royal Palaces Agency and put under the protection of some other part of the Department of the Environment so that its character as a green can be preserved.

What has angered local residents is that since the agency was set up two or three years ago the green has been used as a public car park for up to 2,000 cars when commercial events to do with the palace have been staged. In July 1990 and July 1991 there were five-day flower shows in Hampton Court park, also known as Home park, Hampton Court, on the Kingston side of the palace. The description "flower show" is a little misleading. It was only about one third to do with flowers, while the other two thirds were devoted to the sale of other bits and pieces connected with gardening.

Only 5,000 cars were parked in Home park where there is room—out of sight behind walls and closer to the site of the flower show—for very many more cars, provided that the parking is well organised, which this year it was not.

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

The congestion had a severe impact. The parking, as well as the traffic, needlessly damaged the environment of the people who live in the area and who suffered from it.

In June this year, parking was allowed all over the green for the quincentenary of the birth of King Henry VIII in 1491. Again, the cars should have been parked in Home park. I hope that the Minister will confirm that that was a one-off episode for the green.

Fairs, however, are traditional, time-honoured and accepted. One expects fairs to take place on greens. That is quite different from using Hampton Court green as a car park for an event being held in a different place. Each year, there are three traditional fairs on the bank holiday Mondays at Easter, Whitsun and the end of August. Each time, the green is covered with fair paraphernalia and clobber for 10 or 11 days. Fairs are allowed to bring all that in on the Monday before, be open for five days from the Friday until the following Tuesday of the bank holiday weekend, and have to move off on the Wednesday.

Whatever has been allowed in the past, that is far too long. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to request the Historic Royal Palaces Agency to impose a far stricter timetable on the fair proprietors, and then to see it enforced. Although the Historic Royal Palaces Agency sounds like an independent body such as a quango or nationalised board, it is not. It consists of civil servants in the Department of the Environment, to whom certain work has been delegated.

Next, the so-called craft fair each September is in no sense a traditional fair. There are no roundabouts, no big wheels, no dodgems, no Punch and Judy shows and no skittles. It is a relatively recent addition. It consists of shops on the green. It is not right that a public open space —a village green—should be used to set up shops, whether in parades or tents, and then to excuse it by calling it a "fair". If it continues—I hope that it will not—I hope that it will be most tightly controlled and that controls will be applied and enforced as to the number of days it is open, the number of days on which equipment can stay on the green, the volume of piped music and of announcements, and that shopkeepers setting up shops on the green should not be allowed to park their vehicles on the green at all —certainly not in the chaotic manner which took place this year under the chestnut trees, to the damage of the environment and close to houses where people live.

I remind my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State of the name of his Department. I want him to tell me exactly what the Department of the Environment intends to do to protect the environment of Hampton Court green.

Finally, before I sit down, may I be allowed to wish you, Mr. Speaker, and Mrs. Weatherill a very happy Christmas and thank you for all that you do for us all.

2.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the debate introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), in which he has focused on progress and developments at Hampton Court palace and, in particular, on the use of Hampton Court green.

My hon. Friend is not only well known on both sides of the House and outside as a most vigorous champion of the interests of his constituents but has been extremely energetic in pursuing the points that he has made on the Floor of the House. He has been in consultation with the Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Baroness Blatch, and is therefore already aware of the close attention that my Department has been giving the issues that he raised.

Hampton Court palace, with its gardens, Home park, to which my hon. Friend referred, and Hampton Court green, is one of the palaces of the Historic Royal Palaces Agency, which was established on 1 October 1989 as an executive agency within my Department and under the Government's "next steps" initiative. "Next steps" agencies are different from Government Departments. They have been designed to give them more freedom in their operations and day-to-day management than would be possible if they remained directly within the functions of a Government Department. Although some of the staff may have been civil servants, it would not be true to say that the agencies are staffed exclusively by civil servants.

The Historic Royal Palaces Agency was set up with three aims: to improve the experience of visitors to the palaces, to preserve the palaces to the highest possible standards and to provide a more efficient and effective quality of service. Those aims determine the philosophy, approach and action programme of the agency of focusing on three needs: first, the needs of the buildings and estates themselves and the importance of conserving them for future generations; secondly, the needs of today's visitors who expect—rightly—a service of improving quality and a new approach to the presentation of the palaces which is intended to bring them alive in an historically authoritative way; and thirdly, the needs of the taxpayer who, understandably, is looking for improvements in effectiveness and a reduction in the level of public spending on the upkeep of magnificent palaces.

Since the agency was launched two years ago, significant improvements have been made against all three of those requirements and more are planned for the future. The chief executive, Mr. David Beeton, and his management team have provided a focus for the management of these palaces. Their energy and commitment have set in hand a programme of work more ambitious than has been contemplated for some time. It has all been made possible through the work of the "next steps" philosophy which is one of delegated accountability.

The aims of the agency are established by Ministers——

Mr. Jessel: This is all very valuable information to do with the palaces, but my debate is specifically on Hampton Court green. Can the Minister say whether the agency has been given any terms of reference about what it is to do to maintain the green and its character?

Mr. Yeo: I am coming to the green. As my hon. Friend generously allowed me rather more than my share of the available time, I thought that it would be helpful if I put what I was about to say in the context of the Government's overall strategy for the "next steps" agency, a point on which my my hon. Friend touched when introducing the debate. However, I was about to deal with the green.

The aims of this agency and others are established by Ministers who remain accountable for them in this House, but the day-to-day responsibility for management

decisions—in this case, for the palaces—which are necessary to achieve those aims rest with the chief executive. That is set out in the framework document for historic royal palaces which was published on 1 October 1989.

I and my colleagues are fully committed to the "next steps" principles of delegated accountability. Local management matters must be left to chief executives who are accountable for them, but I welcome the chance to provide the House with some additional insight into the operations of Hampton Court palace and to respond in particular to my hon. Friend's concerns.

I shall deal first with the Hampton Court green. I appreciate what a close personal interest my hon. Friend has in the green, living as he does adjacent to it. It is an open space of about 18 hectares. It is bordered by the palace gardens which cover 27 hectares and by Home park which covers 223 hectares and it adjoins Bushey park which covers 445 hectares. Therefore, the neighbourhood is generally supplied with open spaces of various kinds.

As with all the other areas, the green is subject to the royal parks regulations. It has been managed alongside Hampton Court gardens and Home park to which my hon. Friend has referred. The tarmacked car park which is located on a small part of the green—and has been for many decades—has for some time been used as a coach park and as the overflow car park for Hampton Court palace. As I understand it, my hon. Friend is not objecting to the continued use of that as a car park——

Mr. Jessel: It is on the site of a former Army barracks. Therefore, it has never been an open space and it should not be quoted in order to justify any other parking on any other part of the green.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's warning, but I had no intention of quoting it for that purpose.

The green has been traditionally used for a variety of temporary functions and events, some of which my hon. Friend mentioned. I believe that a traditional fair—I am not certain whether it has the requisite number of roundabouts or side shows—has been held on the green for up to three times a year since the turn of the century, and dates back to before the agency was established.

In addition, before the agency was established, an annual craft fair was allowed on the green in 1988. Those two fairs mean that the green is currently used for events on about 39 days in any year. That statistic precedes the agency's creation. Since the establishment of the agency the green has been used for five further days for parking for the international flower show in Home park and for three evenings for parking for a midsummer masquerade held in Hampton Court gardens in June 1991. Of the annual usage, only five days and three evenings have resulted from events organised since the establishment of the agency. I appreciate that there has been an increase over the previous traditional usage.

Mr. Jessel: I hope that my hon. Friend will not treat the craft fair, which started in 1988, as a traditional usage.

Mr. Yeo: It is clearly not a traditional usage in the same sense as the other fairs that have been held throughout the century, but it is important in the context of my hon. Friend's concerns about the agency to say that the craft fair started more than a year before the agency was established.

The use of Hampton Court and its estate for such events is entirely in line with policy in other royal parks. Parks are for open-air enjoyment and recreation, and can also facilitate programmes of special events such as fun runs and Pavarotti concerts. The use of Hampton Court green for short-term parking is seen as necessary to support those special events at Hampton Court palace and gardens.

I have noted carefully what my hon. Friend said about restricting parking on the green and assure him that I shall bear in mind the comments which he expressed forcefully. I know that the agency and its management would want to balance the very proper pursuit of revenue-generating activities, which we encourage and which form an important part of their overall objectives, against any activity that may cause widespread concern within the local community.

The protection of open space, to which my hon. Friend referred, is an important objective of the Government, but it is not the only one. There are some occasions when the temporary use of open space for another purpose, whether parking or anything else, may be an essential means to facilitate additional objectives that the Government also consider high priorities and which enable large numbers of the community to enjoy and share in activities which would otherwise be impossible to stage. I am not absolutely convinced that the additional eight days of usage on top of the 39 days established usage before the agency commenced necessarily constitute the enormous change that I think my hon. Friend may have been suggesting. However, I shall certainly bear his points in mind.

I think that my hon. Friend asked whether we could reduce the amount of time that the traditional fair, which has run from the turn of the century, spends on the green. It takes a long time to set up and dismantle that fair, but I can assure my hon. Friend that that time has not increased during recent years and is in line with the contract conditions. The agency is not aware of any occasion on which the traditional fair has stayed beyond the time allowed under the contract. Had it been aware of any such instance, it would have taken vigorous steps to ensure that the terms of the contract were met. The three-year contract for the traditional fair has expired and is up for renewal. The agency will take careful account of the health and safety requirements for the inspection of any fairground equipment used and will be seeking to reduce the number of days required to set up and dismantle that fair. As my hon. Friend knows, in response to a request from him, the agency has already reviewed the length of time required for setting up the craft fair and has managed to reduce it by one day this summer.

As my hon. Friend knows far better than I, most of the use of Hampton Court green is related to the traditional fair, which is provided essentially for the enjoyment and benefit of local residents. My hon. Friend will be sensitive to the likely public reaction to any suggestion that the fair should be entirely discontinued. Other functions and events at the palace account for a few more days' usage and the provision of car parking on the green will continue to be needed for those purposes. I cannot, therefore, hold out to my hon. Friend the prospect of an instruction from the Government requiring those arrangements to end, but, as I have assured him, we will keep an eye on the situation. We believe that those functions and events are central to the core business of the agency—perhaps more so than the

[Mr. Yeo]

traditional fair. The midsummer masquerade organised last summer brought thousands of local people to the palace to enjoy its unique atmosphere and historic gardens, in a way that was consistent with the aims that Ministers have set for the agency. The palace was brought alive on those evenings, which were not only educational but extremely valuable.

I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that his concerns are being carefully noted. We shall, of course, continue to pay the closest possible attention to any criticisms that he has of the way in which the green is being used and I shall certainly reflect carefully on his comments about the disadvantages of using the green for such purposes. I hope that the green will continue to facilitate—without damage—the enjoyment of activities that would not otherwise take place.

As this is the last debate before Christmas, my hon. Friend took the opportunity to wish you, Mr. Speaker, and your family a very happy Christmas. We have been debating Hampton Court. Christmas is the one time of the year when, even at the end of the 20th century, some of us may enjoy meals of a style perhaps more traditional in Henry VIII's day, when I understand a feast-day dinner would normally comprise up to 10 courses, commencing with items such as venison pies, baked carp in wine with prunes, followed by boiled mutton, swan, cock, roast boar with a pudding and, finally, cream of almonds, wafers and marzipan. I believe that your personal tastes, Mr. Speaker, are somewhat more ascetic than that, but I am sure that that will in no way detract from the enjoyment that you and your family have during the next three weeks. I wish you and my hon. Friend the compliments of the season and hope that my hon. Friend will be able to enjoy a peaceful stroll across Hampton Court green on Christmas morning without bumping into too many parked cars.

Mr. Jessel: If it is in order, Mr. Speaker I shall make use of the two minutes that remain to us.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his reply and in particular his indication that, when the contracts for the fairground proprietors for the bank holiday fairs come to be renewed, the number of days on which they are allowed to leave their plant on the green could be reduced. That is the only concession that my hon. Friend has made so far.

On the craft fair, I ought perhaps to have given the Minister notice of my point that the shopkeepers were parking their cars on the green and that that ought to be stopped. Will my hon. Friend say whether he can have that matter looked at to see whether the practice can be curtailed, as it has been causing some annoyance? This year the craft fair was not completely removed on the day on which it ought to have been removed—whatever official letters flying to and fro may have said.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to Henry VIII and the consumption of swans. I hope that he will not mention that when he comes to my constituency, although, on other grounds, he will be welcome in view of his very helpful planning decision against the construction of a Marks and Spencer shop in the riverside part of Twickenham earlier this year. I hope that he will keep quiet on the subject of the consumption of swans, which are highly valued along the River Thames and which my constituents do not want to be eaten on Christmas day or any other day of the year.

Mr. Speaker: Before I adjourn the House for Christmas, I wish, on my account and on behalf of my Deputies, to express my warm thanks to the Officers and Staff of the House who serve us in such a devoted way throughout the year. To the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), to the Minister and to the Whip, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), I express my warm thanks for their good wishes to me, which I return in full measure. I wish them and all Members of the House a very happy Christmas.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock, till Monday 13 January 1992, pursuant to the Resolution of the House of 12 December.

House of Commons

Monday 13 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

London Transport

1. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of London Transport to discuss improvements to public transport in London.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I meet the chairman of London Transport regularly to discuss a variety of issues, including future improvements and standards of service.

Mr. Carrington: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware how welcome the prospect of bus deregulation in London is, with the likelihood of improved services and of getting more people back on buses? Will he take steps to ensure that buses have greater priority over other road users and to eliminate one of the major causes of road congestion in London—the long time that it takes to get passengers loaded on to one-man operated buses because drivers have to give change to passengers?

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome what my hon. Friend said. Bus deregulation in other parts of the country has led to much innovation in the bus industry and to a 19 per cent. increase in bus mileage. I agree with my hon. Friend about encouraging the quick movement of buses throughout the capital. The red route option, which we introduced, has already shown that bus services improve when comparable improvements are made to traffic management.

Mr. Sedgemore: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the start of crossrail is being delayed? As proposals for the Hackney to Chelsea tube line will not be tabled until crossrail starts, does that mean that development of the Hackney to Chelsea line will be delayed? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman discuss that issue with London Transport?

Mr. Rifkind: The crossrail Bill has been introduced and I have no doubt that it will be taken forward with all proper expedition. British Rail and London Transport have a massive expansion programme of new investment, which means that certain projects must be completed before others can reasonably be expected to begin. The priorities are extension of the Jubilee line, then crossrail and then development of the Chelsea to Hackney line. The safeguarding of the Chelsea to Hackney line has already been announced.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: When my right hon. and learned Friend meets the chairman of London Transport to discuss improvements, will he draw to his attention the importance of providing for south-east London, which is so ill-served by the underground system, and of driving a route through Camberwell, Dulwich and onwards to Crystal Palace?

Mr. Rifkind: I am aware that, historically, south London has not been as well served by the underground as north London. The Jubilee line extension will be a major new additional part of the infrastructure and will serve certain parts of south London, but I take note of my hon. Friend's other comments.

Ms. Ruddock: When the Secretary of State next meets the chairman of London Transport, will he confess that the Government are in a complete mess? Will he acknowledge, unlike the view of the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington), that there is overwhelming opposition to bus deregulation in London? Will he explain rumours of a Government U-turn on the need for a strategic authority? Will he recommend a cheap and cheerful service for the underground, or a new compensation plan of chocolates and flowers? I suggest that the Secretary of State take a little time to read our new document, "London: a strategy for transport", which might help him and his colleagues to get sorted out on the need for better transport in the capital city.

Mr. Rifkind: I certainly hope that the hon. Lady will cheer up because——

Ms. Ruddock: I am cheerful.

Mr. Rifkind: I am glad that the hon. Lady is cheering up. I must remind her that, to judge by the performance of the last Labour Government as opposed to the promises of the present Labour Opposition, Londoners can look forward only to cuts in the investment required. I remind her that the Labour Government's White Paper of 1977 said that the upsurge in the subsidy in the early years of that decade had been accompanied by sharp cuts in investment. That was our experience under the previous Labour Government and would be the experience of Londoners if there were ever to be the misfortune of another Labour Government.

Kent Rail Services

3. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss commuter services in north-west Kent; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss all current issues. I recently travelled on the Kent rail service and visited my hon. Friend's constituency with him.

Mr. Dunn: I thank my hon. Friend for the time and trouble that he took last week to visit my constituency and see at first hand the problems caused by and resulting from British Rail. Bearing in mind the fact that my constituents want a reliable and quality service, will he take steps today to confirm that the orders that are placed for the new Networker rolling stock will be supplied in the near future, for the betterment of the north-west Kent commuter?

Mr. Freeman: I can confirm that 486 vehicles for new Networker trains are being manufactured at a total cost of £365 million and that the first of those trains will come into service on my hon. Friend's line in May this year. Some 63 stations have already had their platforms lengthened to take the new longer train—positive evidence of the Government's support for British Rail's expansion programme.

Mr. Prescott: Will the Minister confirm that the order for the north Kent line, the Kent line, is the one that has not yet been agreed by the Treasury? Would not it be much better to pinch another of Labour's ideas and lease the 188 trains rather than provide compensation schemes, chocolates and flowers?

Mr. Freeman: I have already explained to the House that 486 vehicles are being manufactured for the Kent link services, which serve Dartford, Swanley and Sevenoaks. The orders have been placed——

Mr. Prescott: Only for the first three batches.

Mr. Freeman: —for the first three batches. One hundred and eighty eight of the class 465 trains have been authorised, but not yet ordered, by British Rail. We expect British Rail to give urgent consideration to the timing of the placement of that order.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Normally, I do not call hon. Members after Front Benchers, but I shall make an exception today. Dame Peggy Fenner, first.

Dame Peggy Fenner: My hon. Friend will be aware that the commuters in Kent are looking for some advantages from the channel tunnel rail link. Will he please assure me that the story in *The Sunday Telegraph* yesterday about considering yet another line is untrue?

Mr. Freeman: I can confirm that that story in *The Sunday Telegraph* is wrong. The Government have made their position clear on the route of the high-speed rail link and there is no reconsideration.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister tell us whether these north Kent lines will be privatised under some new emanation of the London, Chatham and Dover railway? If they are, will they run two, three or four types of train for typists, civil servants and even, perhaps, Ministers of the Crown who might occasionally like to travel by public transport?

Mr. Freeman: The House will expect me to apologise again for the remarks that I injudiciously made when I was trying to illustrate a simple point—that, with the private sector providing more rail services in future, I hope that a range of choice will be available to the travelling public in terms of price and time of day, rather like that provided by the airlines and the long-distance coach market.

On the north Kent lines, the Government want to see a modern, first-class rail system in Network SouthEast. Substantial progress has been made on, for example, the Northampton line and the Thames and Chiltern lines and will shortly be made on the Kent link lines. By the end of the decade Network SouthEast will be the best mass-transit system in the world.

Southend-on-Sea

4. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will pay an official visit to Southend-on-Sea travelling by public transport.

Mr. Freeman: I should be happy to visit Southend-on-Sea travelling by British Rail at the earliest opportunity. The Government are well aware of the problems on the London-Tilbury and Southend line and are keen to see improvements in that service. The Government's recent increase in funding to British Rail will enable the modernisation of the line to be begun with a £50 million resignalling project.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Although the Minister's welcome acceptance of my invitation will bring confidence to the people of Southend that their serious problems with the Fenchurch street line are not being ignored, can he give some information soon about the replacement of the rolling stock, following his welcome assurance that we will have a good bit of money for the replacement of the signalling? I sincerely express the hope that when my hon. Friend visits Southend-on-Sea his train there and his train back will be on time.

Mr. Freeman: I can give my hon. Friend some positive news. The Department is urgently considering British Rail's proposals to meet the need for replacement rolling stock on the London-Tilbury and Southend line by transferring relatively new class 321 and class 315 rolling stock from other lines after resignalling on the London-Tilbury and Southend line is complete.

Rail Signalling Systems

5. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the chairman of British Rail regarding the safety of the signalling systems in use on the Cardiff-Paddington line.

Mr. Rifkind: I have frequent meetings with the chairman of British Rail at which various safety-related topics are discussed.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, subsequent to the accident at the Severn tunnel on 7 December, the Government's railway inspectorate removed and confiscated a length of self-healing cable, which is suspected to be part of the cause of the signalling failures that may have led to the accident? Since then, that length of self-healing cable has been kept under lock and key at the railway inspectorate building at Reading. It has not been released for independent investigation or for investigation by BR experts, so it is not part of the evidence that is being considered at the BR internal inquiry now under way. Does the Secretary of State agree that that action demonstrates an appalling lack of trust between the Government's railway inspectorate and BR in discovering the cause of that accident?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman should not draw that type of conclusion. In addition to BR's internal inquiry, the railway inspectorate, which is totally independent, is to carry out its own examination of that accident. It is wise to allow the inspectorate to begin its inquiry. We will all look carefully at the conclusions that it draws from its work and from the evidence submitted to it.

Mr. Prescott: If the Secretary of State has discussed inter-city routes with the chairman of British Rail, will he tell us what is his view, if not the view of Cabinet colleagues, on the privatisation of InterCity? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman require the guaranteeing of through routes to all parts of the United Kingdom? Is he prepared to give a subsidy to maintain those routes to guarantee private profit rather than meet public transport needs?

Mr. Rifkind: I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to certain press reports that appeared last week which referred to an alleged internal British Rail document about the implications of privatisation for InterCity. Since those reports appeared, it has become clear that that document was not a BR document, but a bogus one, which I understand the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) was involved in passing to the press. What the public would like to know is whether the Opposition, including the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North and the Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), were aware that that document was not a genuine document, but was something prepared, no doubt, for political purposes.

Rail Safety

6. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve safety on the railways.

Mr. Rifkind: We are committed to improving the already extremely high level of railway safety. Both British Rail and London Underground have major safety programmes under way. These include investment in new equipment, new work procedures, additional training and new safety management systems.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Secretary of State agree that the number of railway accidents, which has increased recently, is in no small measure due to the under-investment in British Rail since the Tory Government placed restrictions on the railway system?

As Italy invests £63 per head, Germany £41 per head and this country only £24 per head in the railways, does not the Secretary of State have a teeny-weeny twinge of conscience when he hears of railway accidents?

Mr. Rifkind: I might, if the hon. Gentleman's facts were right, but they are wrong in two fundamental respects. First, safety expenditure under the Government and British Rail is higher than it has ever been in British Rail's history—it has gone up from £140 million to £200 million. Secondly, the number of significant train accidents recorded in 1990 was the lowest on record and it is expected that the final figure for 1991 will show a further decline.

Mr. Adley: I welcome the change of policy, which took place some time ago under my right hon. and learned Friend's sponsorship, of increasing investment in the railways. However, does he agree that there has been a fall of well over half in the percentage of gross domestic product invested in the railways in the past 10 years? If the public service obligation grant is substantially reduced, will not there be an inevitable increase in dissatisfaction with customer service? If my right hon. and learned Friend believes in cause and effect, will he assure the House that he has learnt a lesson from it and that not only investment in but the subsidy to British Rail will be maintained to provide the service that people expect from the railways as we approach the end of the century?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with a certain amount of what my hon. Friend said. There is certainly a case for subsidy on the social railway, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree with the judgment of the previous Labour Government, who said that there was no case for subsidising inter-urban services, nor was there a social case for subsidy with regard to inter-city services. As for rural railways and other parts of the subsidised railway, the Government have made it abundantly clear that investment will go ahead. Indeed, it is now higher than at any time since the early 1960s.

Mr. Fearn: Is the Secretary of State aware that London Underground has stated that there is no limit to the number of people who wish to push themselves on to a London Underground train? Does he intend to take action on that official statement?

Mr. Rifkind: We are anxious to see an expansion in the capacity of the underground. One reason why we accepted the investment that London Underground told the Monopolies and Mergers Commission was necessary was to ensure that, in years to come, there would be the rolling stock to meet the problems to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. and learned Friend will recall the bomb explosion a month ago on the track in my constituency. Mercifully, it did not cause the death and destruction intended. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, although we cannot protect the entire railway track throughout the country, a useful step may be to see whether cameras can be used at strategic points, not least at the busiest rail junction in the world?

Mr. Rifkind: I note what my hon. Friend says. There are already a number of cameras at railway stations and other spots. The incident to which my hon. Friend refers happened on track outside the railway station. Clearly, it is not feasible to have cameras covering the whole of the track. It is for those involved in enhancing the security of the infrastructure to identify where cameras would be most useful in the battle against terrorism and vandalism.

Mr. Snape: May I ask the Secretary of State about the current safety inquiry into the accident at Newton junction in Scotland? Is it true that among the inquiry's recommendations are the provision of signalling alterations, the installation of new protective devices and changed signalling practice at that and other junctions, which may cause delays to approaching trains? Would not it be safer, cheaper and quicker to reinstate the conventional junction lay-out at that and other accident sites? Is not it beyond the realms of possibility that the Secretary of State and railway management have got it wrong on this occasion?

Mr. Rifkind: The inquiry's recommendations have not yet been put to Ministers. When they are, we shall consider what the independent inquiry has identified and we shall do whatever is necessary to enhance safety in the use of the railways. Fortunately, our railways remain one of the

safest means of transport and I am sure that the whole House welcomes the fact that the number of significant accidents on the railways is now the lowest on record.

Roll On/Roll Off Ferries

7. **Mr. Terry Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the higher standards of residual stability recommended by the steering committee of the roll on/roll off ferry safety research programme to be applied to all roll on/roll off ferries using British ports.

The Minister for Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The maritime safety committee of the International Maritime Organisation has agreed that the higher standards referred to by the hon. Gentleman should be phased in, starting in October 1994. When the matter is further considered by the committee in April, the United Kingdom will continue to press for the phasing-in period to be less than the proposed five years.

Mr. Davis: Will the Minister confirm that it is now five years since the Herald of Free Enterprise capsized, with tremendous loss of life, and two years since the committee for the research programme into the safety of roll on/roll off ferries said that something should be done about the safety of existing ferries—those built before 1990? The Minister has now said that it will be another seven years before everyone crossing the channel on holiday will be carried as safely as possible. Will he accept personal responsibility for any tragedies that occur in the meantime?

Mr. McLoughlin: A number of recommendations following the immediate aftermath of the Herald of Free Enterprise tragedy have been put into operation. Research was carried out on the stability of such ferries, which took some time. We are now trying to get agreement with the International Maritime Organisation to phase in the recommendations much more quickly, and the United Kingdom has led those calls. It would not be acceptable to anyone for ships using United Kingdom ports to be treated differently. I am not sure whether that is what the hon. Gentleman proposes. The simple fact remains that, if we cannot get agreement, we may consider taking unilateral action in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rathbone: Does my hon. Friend accept that the continuing Government pressure to bring about the improvements is welcome news? Will he use the facilities of the European Community to ensure that ships that are manned and owned by France, for example, obey the new rules as quickly as possible?

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes, indeed. That is one reason why we are trying to get agreement through the International Maritime Organisation. We see the matter not as a purely British problem but as a far more widespread problem. The best way in which to get agreement on those matters is through international agreement and international regulation.

Ms. Walley: Does the Minister agree that with ferry safety, as well as putting on pressure, the Government should act? Is not it about time for the Government to move responsibility for ferry safety away from the Department of Transport to a separate, independent body so that we can be fully assured about all aspects of ferry safety, including crewing levels? We do not want situations such as that at Commodore Shipping, where English officers and crews have been replaced by Norwegians and Poles who cannot even speak English, thus increasing the risk of severe ferry accidents.

Mr. McLoughlin: What we see from the Opposition spokesman is more confusion in the Labour party. At one stage, Labour sheds crocodile tears for the decline in the merchant fleet, yet in the next breath, it says how much more regulation it would like to be applied to the merchant fleet. The simple fact is that we believe, as the Opposition have so far, that the best way to make movements along those lines is through international agreement and through the International Maritime Organisation. That is what we are trying to do.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: If the Minister is genuinely concerned about maritime safety, he must do something about the massive proposed cuts in the coastguard service. Will he make a statement to the House about the matter and will he get rid of the unwanted and unnecessary cuts in the number of coastguards?

Mr. McLoughlin: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that cuts mean setting up 68 new sector organisations throughout the country, I agree that there are cuts. Under the coastguard sector review, we have considered the most effective way to provide a coastguard service around the whole of the United Kingdom. That has meant that we have increased the number of sector offices throughout the United Kingdom and we have announced a large new building programme. We have increased the amount being spent on the coastguard service and a good coastguard service is available to our coastline.

Road Construction

9. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on motorway and major trunk road construction in each of the past three years at constant prices.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): At constant prices, expenditure on construction of motorways and trunk roads in England was £782 million in 1988-89, £981 million in 1989-90 and £1,318 million in 1990-91.

Mr. Knox: In view of the congestion on motorways and major trunk roads, do not those figures still fall short of what is necessary and desirable, despite the improvement that has been made in the past three years?

Mr. Chope: There is much in what my hon. Friend says. That is why the Government are committed to an expanded roads programme and continuing major investment in our transport infrastructure. In that respect, the Government's policy is very different from that of the main Opposition parties, both of which are committed to reductions in real terms in expenditure on our roads.

Mr. Janman: My hon. Friend will be aware of the difficulties on the A13—one of the main trunk links out of London to Essex and East Anglia. Can he confirm that things are on course for the early completion of the Mar Dyke-Wellington link on the A13, and can he tell the House the date on which he hopes that work on that link will start?

Mr. Chope: I hope that the results of the public inquiry will be announced shortly and that the advance works on the link can be started before the end of the year, although that depends wholly on the outcome of the general election, because, as I said, the Opposition are committed to reducing expenditure on roads and vital pieces of road infrastructure such as that for which my hon. Friend rightly argues would be threatened by a Labour Government.

Rail Signalling

10. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instigate an independent inquiry into the signalling system of British Rail.

Mr. Rifkind: British Rail investigates all cases of signal failure. Those caused by vandalism, or which result in accidents, are already investigated by independent agencies and there is therefore no need for a general inquiry into British Rail's signalling system.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Secretary of State has said several times today how proud he is of British Rail's safety record —a pride which we all share—but that is surely no reason not to look again at the real doubts that have arisen in the past year about manning, the number of hours worked and the quality of some of the new systems of signalling that are being installed. We need to maintain that safety record, and one of the best ways to improve the traveller's commitment to BR is to ensure that the signalling system is working very efficiently indeed.

Mr. Rifkind: I note what the hon. Lady says. She is right to draw attention to the priorities involved in enhancing safety. We are seeking to enable British Rail to take forward its safety standards by substantially increasing the resources available—from £140 million to £200 million in the current year. That is an indication of the priority that we all attach to this important issue.

Mr. Batiste: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that many of the problems that British Rail experienced on the east coast line at the end of last year were due to criminal vandalism affecting the signalling system, particularly in Scotland and the north of England? What action is being taken to prevent a recurrence?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree that criminal vandalism is appalling: it can often lead to loss of life or the risk of serious injury. Clearly, criminal proceedings, which are a matter for others, would normally be the consequence of such action. British Rail is doing all in its power to protect its property from acts of vandalism, but, given the many thousands of miles of infrastructure, there are inevitably limits to what can be done by British Rail alone.

Mr. Wilson: In assessing the safety of signalling and other safety factors, will the Secretary of State take account of the genuine concerns, based on genuine information, about the Government's plans for InterCity? In that context, will he break the habit of a lifetime and answer two questions straight? Are there any plans to downgrade the role of the ScotRail board? And is there any possibility—or is it part of current thinking—that InterCity tracks will be sold off as part of InterCity in the highly improbable event of the right hon. and learned Gentleman still being in a position to proceed with such a sale?

Mr. Rifkind: I note that the hon. Gentleman did not take this ideal opportunity to deny that he may have been involved in the passing to the press of a bogus document about the alleged future of InterCity. On the future of InterCity, he should await the Government's White Paper. The internal administration of British Rail is a matter for British Rail to decide.

Chelmsford-Liverpool Street Line

11. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the Chelmsford-Liverpool Street line.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend and I regularly meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss all current issues. The Chelmsford-Liverpool Street line is being resignalled and Liverpool Street station has recently been refurbished and its layout restructured to increase flexibility and capacity.

Mr. Burns: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. When he next speaks to the chairman of British Rail, will he tell him that, whereas there have been some improvements to the line in the past five years, my constituents are still extremely concerned about punctuality and the cleanliness of trains? Will he please ensure that there is no slippage whatever in the time scale for the resignalling from Bethnal Green to Chelmsford which would obviously substantially enhance the service?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend will understand that punctuality often depends on signalling as well as the quality of the rolling stock. I can give my hon. Friend and his constituents the assurance that he seeks. The £60 million resignalling programme for work between Liverpool Street and Southend Victoria will start this year and signalling work in the Chelmsford area will commence next year.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister will be aware that that line goes through Stratford station in my constituency. Does he recall his recent visit to Stratford station, to which he was carried in his ministerial sedan chair by two sweating but cheerful typists? He rightly said that passenger facilities were absolutely appalling, especially the absence of adequate public lavatories. Is he aware that the situation remains the same, and will he tell us when something will be done about it?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, I recall my visit to Stratford station with the hon. Gentleman. He will know that British Rail is considering a major remodelling of the station, in part to handle the arrival of the Jubilee line. He also knows that there are plans for a high-speed rail link to run through Stratford. With the arrival of crossrail through Stratford, Stratford is an important transport hub and will become even more important. I am sorry to hear about the lavatories. At the previous Question Time I was asked about the lavatories at Stratford station. I shall visit them.

Rail Ombudsman

12. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to appoint a rail ombudsman to investigate customer concerns.

Mr. Rifkind: The transport users consultative committees already represent passenger interests and there is recourse to an independent arbitration scheme. The position of passengers will be further strengthened by the publication of passengers charters for both British Rail and London Transport.

Mr. Gregory: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that in a variety of spheres such as banking, pensions and building societies, ombudsmen have been enormously successful? Despite the work of the transport users consultative committees, they do not have the teeth that ombudsmen would have. The travelling public and freight users are fed up with the inequality and inadequacy of British Rail. Would not the appointment of a British Rail ombudsman restore confidence to this small part of the state sector?

Mr. Rifkind: I note what my hon. Friend says. I hope that in the short term more attention will be paid to the availability of the independent arbitration scheme, which was set up in 1985 and which has not often been used, primarily because so few people are aware that it provides a means of getting an independent investigation of alleged grievances against British Rail and of obtaining redress and compensation where they are due. Of course the citizens charter, as it applies to British Rail's activities, will also be a means of taking forward the rights of passengers to ensure a proper response or compensation from British Rail if there is shoddy service.

Heavy Lorries

13. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new initiatives he plans to reduce the damage caused by heavy lorries.

Mr. Chope: The Government have a policy of continuing to reduce the noise, pollution, vibration and road damage caused by heavy lorries.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware that three annual checks by Welsh trading standards officers discovered that as many as one in five lorries on Welsh roads are overloaded, yet the chance of being checked is one in every 5,000 journeys? When will the Minister do something to reduce the damage and danger caused by heavy lorries, especially in rural areas such as my constituency and the areas of Caerleon and Marshfield? Will he promise to resist all attempts to increase the maximum permitted weights of heavy lorries?

Mr. Chope: On the last point, we are committed to minimising the impact of heavy goods vehicles on roads and we are arguing strongly in Europe for road-friendly suspension for lorries. As to the enforcement of lorry weights, we have doubled the number of inspections over the past five years. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about breaches of the law. That is why I hope that we shall be able to introduce weigh-in-motion sensors over the coming months.

Western Region Rail Services

14. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the western region.

Mr. Roger Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss all current issues. We are concerned to maintain and improve standards on all rail services, including those in the western region.

Sir Anthony Durant: Is my hon. Friend aware that the service beyond Reading has deteriorated badly, with large numbers of cancellations, particularly at Pangbourne, Tilehurst, Reading West and Theale stations? When will the new rolling stock arrive?

Mr. Freeman: I can confirm that the new Networker turbo class 165 trains will be in service in the May timetable this year—that will bring an improvement of the service on the Thames line—and the Networker express class 166 trains will arrive next year. These improvements follow the £75 million investment in the Chiltern line, which has gone into new trains, new stations, new facilities, all of which has meant a great improvement for all the commuters on that line; those on the Thames line will benefit similarly.

THE ARTS

Reserve Collections

30. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his estimate of the number and value of reserve collections in the public sector; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): Information on reserve collections is not held centrally, but most major national and local authority-run museums and galleries hold such collections. They are of inestimable value in both financial and scholarly terms.

Mr. Gregory: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the collections are vast and have often been assembled at very little cost, but at the same time they are the treasures of the night watchmen? In other words, unless one is a special scholar or a night watchman, one does not see these collections. Is it not time that many of them were made available to schools, colleges, banks and building societies so that the treasure trove of Britain is available to everyone?

Mr. Renton: I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend is making and I know of his support for museums and galleries in York and in Yorkshire. One of the national museums and galleries for which I have responsibility, the Tate, is making great efforts, by setting up galleries in, for example, Liverpool and shortly in St. Ives, to make others of its collections regularly available for view in the north-west or the south-west. I hope that other galleries will take note of the good point that my hon. Friend has made.

Dr. Godman: With regard to collections in Scotland and the housing of those collections, may I point out that many of us living in the west of Scotland are opposed to the building of a national art gallery in Edinburgh? I remind

the Minister that the visiting of galleries is not a pastime unique to residents of Edinburgh or visitors to that fine city. Does the Minister agree that there should not be such a gallery and that our collections should be dispersed throughout the whole of Scotland?

Mr. Renton: As the hon. Gentleman will know, responsibility for the national museums and galleries of Scotland rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, not with me. I am aware, from a number of visits to Scotland, of the fine museums and galleries in both Edinburgh and Glasgow. I am also aware of the intention to add a new wing to the national museum of Scotland. That apart, I would hesitate to enter the traditional fratricidal debate between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Mr. Jessel: Is not my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory), who has done so much to encourage the arts in York, absolutely right? As museums keep asking for more public money, should they not heed public opinion, which is that works of art exist to be seen and should not be stashed away in cellars but should be got up and out and on view?

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend has a keen interest in these matters. I should point out to him that, thanks to the generosity of the Sainsbury brothers, which has resulted in the building of the new wing of the national gallery, all the permanent collection of the national gallery is now on display to an ever-increasing part of the British public.

I am in favour of somewhat greater powers of disposal being given to some of our national museums and galleries so that if an item was clearly surplus to a collection there would be power to dispose of it, provided that the funds realised were reinvested in the acquisition of other, perhaps contemporary material. Most local authorities already have such powers.

Design Museum

32. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what support he gives or plans to give to the design museum.

Mr. Renton: I understand that the purpose of the design museum is to enhance understanding of the influence of good design. The museum is of course within the private sector, but the Department of Trade and Industry has provided pump-priming financial support over the past three years, totalling £650,000.

Mr. Bowis: I join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to the design museum for the standard that it has set. It has been emulated in many parts of the world, including Canada and Japan. It has been able to obtain a third of the income that it needs from sponsorship, while a further third has been obtained from admission charges. A significant part of the other third of its income has come in the past from moneys from the Department of Trade and Industry. I understand that that support has averaged £250,000 over the past three years. As that support may be coming to an end, there may be a large gap. Will my right hon. Friend agree to talk to the museum to ascertain whether he can guide it in filling the gap? Otherwise, the excellent work that has been done on education and exhibitions will have to cease.

Mr. Renton: I recognise the work that has been done by the design museum in making an important contribution to the understanding of the role of design in a modern industrial society. Some of the museums that I support directly—for example, the Victoria and Albert museum and the science museum, and also the Crafts Council—often lay on extremely good displays of contemporary or past design work. Against that background, I shall certainly talk to my ministerial colleague at the Department of Trade and Industry about how his negotiations with the design museum on further funding are progressing.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I endorse the comments of the Minister and those of the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) in support of the design museum, which is in Bermondsey. Will the Minister consider the wider context of the risk to arts funding in the Docklands corporation area with the withdrawal of LDDC funding, which is threatened to start from the end of March? That will affect both the design museum and other arts-funded projects throughout Docklands, north and south of the river.

Mr. Renton: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. I was much concerned about delays in LBGC funding of arts institutions throughout Greater London last year. I took some measures through the Arts Council to help the cash flows of some of the institutions that were threatened by the delays in that funding. I understand that this year the LBGC has started making decisions much more quickly.

Mr. Hughes: The LDDC.

Mr. Renton: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I thought that he was talking about the LBGC, the London Boroughs Grants Committee.

I shall certainly take up the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised about London docklands.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the great contest that takes place for funds in which the design museum and other bodies are involved. Does he agree that a national lottery would help considerably?

Mr. Renton: I think that without any doubt a national lottery would be of considerable assistance both to the causes of art and heritage, and to sport as well. Obviously there are some serious considerations to be resolved before such a lottery is introduced. Like my hon. Friend, I shall be following the process of the private Member's Bill this Friday, the National Lottery Bill, with considerable interest.

Opera

34. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what steps he is taking to encourage access to opera by young people and by a wider range of the public generally.

Mr. Renton: Major opera companies in receipt of public funds offer concessionary ticket prices for certain groups, including students. Each major opera company in this country has an outreach and education programme and the Arts Council's touring programme supports clients who take opera to areas of the country which would not otherwise have access to it.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. I hope that he will show his belief in the importance of the process. Does he agree that extending the experience of opera and opportunities to learn of opera to those who would not normally even think of it, or think of taking advantage of such concessions, would be a good thing? Will he join me in commending the exercises undertaken by, for example, Welsh National Opera in conjunction with local organisations, including those in Grangetown, Ely and Splott? The WNO has sought to introduce young people and communities in general to opera in those locations.

Mr. Renton: Yes. I am pleased that through the good settlement that I was able to give to the Arts Council of Great Britain for the year ahead and, through it, the Welsh Arts Council, the Welsh National Opera's overall income from the two arts councils will rise by about 7 per cent. next year to a record figure of £6·1 million. That must be good for everyone living in Wales who likes opera.

The WNO already operates a community-in-education project at its ardiff base, which caters for all ages. I am delighted that it is now providing a three-day project at Sir Thomas Picton's school in Haverfordwest, around its production of Don Pasquale. It is an imaginative educational project.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the sort of project to which he just referred is another example of where a national lottery could be of great assistance? In view of his earlier encouraging remarks, will he now confirm that he intends to vote in favour of the private Member's Bill on Friday?

Mr. Renton: I have always appreciated the artfulness with which my hon. Friend asks questions. Like him, I shall be following the proceedings on Friday with great interest.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Servants (Dress)

39. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what plans he has to introduce a dress code for civil servants in departmental Ministries in London.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): Matters such as standards of dress are the responsibility of managers in Departments and agencies. The Employment Service has recently introduced guidance on standards of dress and the Benefits Agency has introduced a range of distinctive dress.

Mr. Burns: Although the majority of people would not want to revert stuffily to the strict dress code for civil servants of the 1950s, does my right hon. Friend agree that the pendulum may have swung too far the other way? Do not male civil servants now sometimes turn up at work wearing ponytails, earrings, jeans or, in the summer, even Lycra shorts?

Mr. Renton: I appreciate the high taste in satorial elegance for which my hon. Friend is well known. However, the responsibility and wish of most managers, whether in Departments or executive agencies, is simply to want those who work for them to be reasonably presentable. I must confess that I would prefer to see a pigtail with an earring rather than the traditional civil service bowler hat.

Mr. Skinner: Is there a possibility that in the new-fangled classless society the Prime Minister will give special OBEs, MBEs and CBEs for the different coloured dress codes of civil servants? Is there not a rumour that if they all dress in grey and follow the Prime Minister's example, they can all ride in a special railway carriage without a typist in sight?

Mr. Renton: As the hon. Gentleman introduced the subject of colour of dress, I can only say that I have been listening to him for almost 18 years and I wish that he would sometimes change the colour of his tie. It would be nice if, just for once, he did not wear a red tie.

Permanent Secretaries

40. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will introduce arrangements so that each Department of State has co-equal male and female permanent secretaries.

Mr. Renton: No. The Government have a comprehensive programme of action to promote equality of opportunity. The proportion of women in the top three grades has almost doubled in the past four years.

Mrs. Gorman: Pending the time when we have a balance of men and women in this Chamber—a matter on which I shall expound next Tuesday afternoon, when I hope that many of my colleagues will support the concept of more women in this House—does my right hon. Friend agree that public consciousness of the lack of female representation of women's views in our national life is now very high? Would not one way to meet the increasing demand for female representation be to have two permanent secretaries—a man and a woman—at each Department? Does he agree that any Department which adopted such a policy would have the grateful thanks of a vast number of women?

Mr. Renton: Given my hon. Friend's well-known commitment to productivity, efficiency and careful spending of money in the public sector, I am surprised by her suggestion and I do not think that it is tremendously sensible. As for my hon. Friend's other idea, I wonder whether she would enjoy having her own constituency split, with one half represented by a man called Billy and the other by a woman called Ricca.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister persist in his rejection of that totally barmy proposal and instead direct his attention to ensuring that the many well-qualified and able women who are in the civil service get the real top jobs? Will he set an example by persuading the Prime Minister to do something about the membership of the Cabinet? Can it really be the case that there is no Conservative woman Back Bencher who could do a better job than some of the present Cabinet Ministers?

Mr. Renton: Not a better job, but certainly a very good job. I am sure that after the next general election, there will be Conservative women in the Cabinet of a Conservative Government. I am delighted to repeat that the number of

women in the top grades of the civil service is improving all the time and they, of course, will be the permanent secretaries of the future.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way of improving the representation of women in the higher reaches of the civil service still further would be to make matters easier for them lower down the ladder? Can he give any information as to how arrangements such as job sharing have grown in the civil service to facilitate that desirable outcome?

Mr. Renton: It is now possible for women in every grade and every position in the civil service to be part-time workers. That means, by definition, that there is an opportunity in every grade for job sharing of some kind. We are considering many other aspects in order to improve the position of women in the civil service—to make it easier for them to take jobs, leave to have children, and return later. The civil service is on the right path and it often serves as a good guide and leading light to the private sector.

Dr. Marek: As usual, the Minister makes a lot of statements but gives no real facts, It would be useful if he followed the Prime Minister's example and supported the concept of targets for the number of women that he expects to see in grades 1 to 5 of the civil service in one, two and five years' time. As the Minister does not deny that there are enough women from which to choose, would not a little concentration on that issue, and the provision of targets so that we can all see what is going on, be very welcome?

Mr. Renton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman gives credit to what is being done by civil service departments and executive agencies. The setting of targets would be wrong because it would mean exercising positive discrimination, whereby not necessarily all jobs would go to those with the right and proper talents to do them. Our principle in the civil service is that all jobs should be available to everyone—irrespective of sex, race, creed or religion. That should be the guiding principle, together with good guidelines to managers as to how to operate within that broad principle.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that nothing is more insulting to women—whether it is said by women or men—than talk of setting targets for the number of women to be in top posts? Has it not been proved in the House that a woman can get to the top job in the land? Whether that is achieved by a woman on this side or the other side of the House, to talk of women gaining promotion as part of a target number is one of the most stupid and fatuous things that anyone could suggest.

Mr. Renton: My wife would certainly agree with my hon. Friend's remarks, as would most right hon. and hon. Members.

THE ARTS

Opera and Poetry

36. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what percentage of his budget he intends to spend in the current year and next year on *(a)* opera and *(b)* poetry.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): I estimate that in the current financial year about £1·5 million will be spent on poetry and £30 million on opera. That represents about 0·77 per cent. and 15 per cent. respectively of the Government's 1991-92 grant in aid of £194·2 million to the Arts Council. Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available.

Mr. Flynn: Given that for every person who attends live opera, at least 1,000 more buy and enjoy reading poetry, will the Minister change his priorities and become the first legislator to acknowledge the unacknowledged legislators of the world? Why does he persist in being munificent to Mozart and bounteous to Beethoven, but a Scrooge to Hughes and a meanie to Heaney?

Mr. Renton: Having just bought Seamus Heaney's latest book for Christmas, I can at least deny that I myself have been mean to Heaney over the festive season.

I think that the hon. Gentleman forgets that a good many operas are based on poetry—for instance, "Gawain", "Orpheus and Euridice" and "Dido and Aeneas". There has been a close connection between opera and poetry over the years; given the interchange of thinking between the two subjects. I do not think that the problem mentioned by the hon. Gentleman exists.

Arts Facilities for Children

37. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had with London arts organisations about provision of arts facilities and entertainments for children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The London arts board is primarily responsible for funding arts for children and young people in London. I have not myself had discussions with individual arts organisations. Together with the London boroughs, the LAB attaches a high priority to helping to nurture the audiences, performers and producers of the future through its support for the arts in schools and for organisations which work for young people.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend see what he can do to help some children in my constituency, who came to me saying that they would like access to present-day artists such as Yehudi Menuhin, Cliff Richard and Jason Donovan and other, younger stars? How can my right hon. Friend help to allow my younger constituents personal access to such people, so that they can talk over with them the art forms that they are seeking to promote?

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend presents an interesting challenge. I suggest that he and his friends in Ealing, North —which he has represented so well for so many years—put together a festival that would be of interest to young people, and also to the important artists whom he mentioned. My hon. Friend should then invite the artists to the festival. If it would help, I would attend and be the festival's patron.

Ravenscraig

3.31 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the consequences for the economy of Lanarkshire and Scotland of the announcement of the closure of Ravenscraig.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): May I repeat the Government's deep disappointment at British Steel's decision, because of market conditions, to close Ravenscraig. I do not for one moment underestimate the distress that will be felt by the work force, their families and the local communities concerned. I believe that British Steel owes it to its employees to explain and justify the decision.

The Government's responsibility is to seek to create economic conditions in which new industry will be encouraged to develop in Lanarkshire, replacing the jobs lost. That is a task on which we embarked some time ago. I believe that the action that we have already taken in Lanarkshire, and the proposal that we are now making for an enterprise zone, mean that we can take a positive view of the economic future for Motherwell and north Lanarkshire.

The closure, when it happens later this year, will mean the loss of 1,220 direct jobs. We estimate the loss of a similar number of indirect jobs in the Lanarkshire travel-to-work area, making a total of more than 2,400. This could result in an increase in unemployment in the area of just under one percentage point. Other job losses elsewhere in Scotland resulting from the closure could take the total figure to more than 3,000.

The economy of Lanarkshire does not, however, depend on steel. It is already much diversified. Indeed, steel's contribution to Scottish gross domestic product is less than 1 per cent. Nevertheless, a closure of this size will cause difficulties for the local economy. That is why, to supplement other measures already in hand, we have accepted the case put forward by the Lanarkshire working group for an enterprise zone to be created.

When British Steel announced, in 1990, the closure of the Ravenscraig hot strip mill and the Clydesdale tubeworks, I convened the Lanarkshire working group. That group's report—published in June last year—took account of speculation that there would be further steel job losses. It recommended a detailed early-action programme aimed at providing attractive serviced sites which would bring private sector investment to Lanarkshire. I accepted its findings, and many of its proposals are now being implemented. Some £120 million-worth of infrastructural investment is under way in Lanarkshire in the current year.

Those measures are already bearing fruit. The Lanarkshire development agency is leading regeneration efforts, with ready co-operation from the other bodies represented on the working group. Funding for 13 of the industrial sites identified is going ahead this year. There is now a wealth of development activity in the area, geared to replacing lost steel jobs with a range of companies which should give Lanarkshire greater economic security than a declining steel industry has been able to provide.

Further public expenditure of some £50 million in the enterprise zone, if approved by the European Commission, is expected to lever private sector investment of £250 million into north Lanarkshire and to secure 7,500 net additional jobs. That project would come on top of the successes that our earlier initiatives have already achieved. In the past four years, unemployment in Lanarkshire travel-to-work area, although still too high, has fallen by almost 9,000. That is evidence of the area's underlying strength.

I am confident that the enterprise of the people of Lanarkshire, supported by the initiatives that the Government are taking, will enable the area to surmount its present difficulties and to develop new economic strengths. I am determined to help it to do so.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that in Scotland there is an almost universal view that, in respect of Ravenscraig, the Government have promised much but done nothing? The widely held feeling is that, for far too long, the right hon. Gentleman and his immediate predecessors have paid lip service to the campaign to save Ravenscraig, but have not lifted a finger to help. The right hon. Gentleman's estimate of the number of jobs likely to be lost as a result of the final closure of the plant is insultingly complacent.

While recognising that, after the demolition job done by British Steel, the appearance of a buyer is very much a long shot, may I ask the Secretary of State whether the Government will do everything they can to keep that option open? Will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that, if interest is shown by any party, the Government, for once, will provide whole-hearted support?

Does the Secretary of State recognise the need to explore the possibilities of new technology—in particular, thin slab casting? He will recall that this was identified in the Arthur D. Little report as an option worth considering, and I know that Scottish Enterprise has been doing some work on it. If a practical proposal does emerge—I stress the word "if"—will he be prepared to concede direct Government involvement in the form of a joint venture?

Will the Secretary of State remember that jobs at Hunterston are also at risk? Is he prepared to make the necessary resources available and to commission Scottish Enterprise specifically to look at the potential of Hunterston as a deep-water port?

If a buyer cannot be found and closure therefore goes ahead, will the Secretary of State enforce the principle that the polluter pays? Is he aware that Lanarkshire development agency estimates indicate that it may cost about £200 million to reinstate the sites abandoned by British Steel? Does he accept that it would be a defeat for justice, an offence to good sense and a further humiliation of the Government if British Steel were able to walk away from the damage that it has done?

Does the Secretary of State accept that his claim that the Government have already contributed £120 million to fund the regeneration of Lanarkshire has little or no credibility? That figure relies heavily on existing budgets and simply does not measure up to the scale of the crisis. The Wishaw general hospital was the subject of an existing proposal, and the budgets of the Lanarkshire development agency and of the East Kilbride development corporation were already in place. The new money is simply inadequate.

Why has it taken so long to reach a decision about enterprise zone status for Lanarkshire? As he himself pointed out, that step was recommended by his own

working party as long ago as June 1991. Is it correct to say that Treasury resistance was overcome only as a result of the disaster of the closure announcement? Does the Secretary of State expect any difficulty over European Commission approval, and when does he expect a decision on the matter to be reached?

In a letter dated 5 February 1991 to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), the Prime Minister recognised explicitly the difficulties facing Lanarkshire and promised that there was

"no intention of neglecting these problems."

Eleven months later, there has not even been preliminary contact with Brussels about one of the central provisions that the Secretary of State alleges that he has accepted. We believe not only that enterprise zone status must be secured, but that British Steel must meet the cost of site reclamation, that the break-up of the East Kilbride development corporation must be stopped, that there must be a much more determined commitment to investment in training and education, and that there must be an end to the nonsense of the proposed privatisation of British Rail, which would have disastrous consequences for the infrastructure strategy for Lanarkshire.

Will the Minister seriously reconsider his half-hearted response to the working party's proposals? Does he not recognise that the depressing history of indecision and delay just will not do? False optimism about the economy, and sympathy easily given, will do nothing for the workers at Ravenscraig and Hunterston. If the right hon. Gentleman will not give commitment and drive to the fight for economic recovery, the electorate will look to others who will.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman accused me of doing nothing, yet we have heard nothing from the Opposition as to what they would do. Perhaps in the course of questions, he or others in his party will tell us what they would do. All that we know so far is that the Labour party has abandoned the commitment given by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in February 1988 to renationalise the steel industry. Plainly, nationalisation is now recognised by the Opposition as a course of disaster.

On the question of a buyer for Ravenscraig, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) knows, the prospectus included an undertaking that any commercial offer would be considered when Ravenscraig was no longer needed by British Steel for steel-making. I put it to Sir Robert Scholey that that undertaking would be triggered, and he confirmed that that was the case.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked me about thin slab casting. That was considered in the Arthur D. Little consultants' report in July last year, which identified considerable difficulties but recognised that it was a possible development. However, no interest has been expressed in it. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Government would contemplate a joint venture. First, that suggests that the Government are the organisation which should be managing the steel industry, and I totally disagree. Secondly, it suggests that someone else might come forward for a joint venture. So far, no one has come forward.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about Hunterston. I confirm that I intend to commission a consultants' study as a basis for determining future planning policy there. He asked me about cleaning up the environmental consequences of steel making. That is certainly something that we shall seek to investigate further with British Steel, which has already undertaken to clear the site down to ground level and to leave it in a tidy condition—further than the legal requirement.

On the question of the £120 million of economic infrastructural investment, the hon. Gentleman complains that that is in existing budgets. Of course it is. We put it into the existing budgets with precisely this situation in mind. Incidentally, it does not include the Wishaw hospital. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] If Opposition Members had no perception that there might be job losses in the steel industry in Lanarkshire, if they were not thinking ahead and contemplating further measures which might be needed, they must be out of touch with reality.

As for the enterprise zone, the recommendation from the working party came to me last June. Since then a detailed proposal has been worked up and negotiations have continued within Government. As a result of the initiatives that I embarked upon during the Christmas recess, approval has been achieved within Government for submission of an application to the European Community. I hope that that will achieve European approval in April, but it is a matter for the Commission and not for me.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that the Government's response to the working group report was half-hearted. We have accepted the vast majority of the working group's proposals and a considerable number of them are already under way, including the development of 13 industrial sites in Lanarkshire to help to prepare it for inward investment.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that the announcement has been long expected and long feared in Motherwell? Over the years and over the generations, so much effort has been put in to the building, strengthening and operating of the steel industry that there is incomprehension and a great sense of sadness and loss in Motherwell today. The campaign waged by the steel workers has been recognised and supported by the people of Scotland and far beyond. It has been recognised but not supported by Ministers, who have approached the whole exercise with total blindness and naivety since the privatisation announcement, which dismisses them for the lightweights they are.

As the decision has been expected for so long, people are baffled by the bungling and prevarification shown by the Government over the enterprise zone. The Secretary of State was wrong. He has submitted not one enterprise zone proposal but two. The Treasury estimated that the first proposal would cost £100 million, and it was knocked back. After the closure of Ravenscraig, the Secretary of State makes a second proposal at half the cost estimated in the original proposal.

Is the Secretary of State aware that Lanarkshire development agency is not able to pay for the training of sub-contractors at Ravenscraig, which is to close within six months, because of petty Government regulations excluding it from paying people who are already in employment?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the Prime Minister asked the Under-Secretary of State to look into the new motorway link between the M8 and M74? The Under-Secretary of State has written to me saying that that is a matter for Strathclyde regional council.

Is the Secretary of State aware that, having razed Ravenscraig to the ground, acccording to consultants

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

appointed at the prompting of the Secretary of State, there is a £200 million bill to be met for clearance of the site? The Government have not a clue how to approach that problem.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the various Government agencies involved—the Warren Spring laboratory, Lanarkshire development agency, and the national engineering laboratory—have not been consulted or introduced to each other or asked to consider the problems, although Ministers are responsible?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the Government have left little time between the last date for the general election, which could be as late as July, and the closure date of September, when British Steel may consider that its obligation to offer for sale has expired? Will the Secretary of State therefore offer the Opposition full access to Scottish Enterprise, to public agencies and to all concerned so that we can properly examine the options that an incoming Government will face?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the people of Lanarkshire, of Motherwell and of Scotland are fully prepared? We are getting on with the process of redevelopment. All we want to be rid of is this traitorous Government.

Mr. Lang: I quite understand that the hon. Gentleman, as a Member of Parliament for the area, feels very strongly. I understand the feeling of sadness and loss in the area and I share the huge disappointment of the people of Motherwell and of north Lanarkshire at British Steel's decision. When the hon. Gentleman talks about naivety, he must recognise that British Steel operates in international trading conditions that are fiercely competitive. It operates in a market where, to use its own words, there is "a deep global recession". Its profits and interim results are down from £307 million to £19 million. It is naive not to recognise international trading conditions and the need for companies such as British Steel to adapt to them.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned training. We are extensively committed to training and retraining in the area. About 6,000 people are on youth and adult training schemes in the area, and the Government expect to spend some £40 million through the iron and steel readaption benefit scheme for retraining.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned roads. We are already studying closely the possible fast link between the M8 and the M74 and the junctions between the A8 and M8.

The Government are investing enormous effort and resources in redeveloping the infrastructure of Lanarkshire, not as some short-term, temporary or Johnny-come-lately measure but building on what we have been doing throughout our period in government. As I said in my response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Garscadden, unemployment in Lanarkshire has fallen by 9,000 in the past four years. How many parts of the rest of the United Kingdom can say that against a background of general recession?

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): The Secretary of State and his crony, who earlier was sneering at some of the answers, have presided over the most odious industrial betrayal in modern Scottish history. Is he proud of the fact that he has complied with and connived in every stage of the closure of the Ravenscraig works, from Gartcosh through privatisation to the hot strip mill? Is he proud of the fact that, having told the Lanarkshire Labour Members for two years that the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Employment have no role to play in intervening, today of all days a Department of Employment press release should announce proudly that it is dispatching, for planning purposes, Government officials and experts

"to ensure the availability of good quality, relevant training for the thousands likely to lose their jobs through the decline of the steel industry in Poland"?

Does it not speak volumes that Departments could not intervene to assist in Scotland but can dispatch people to Cracow rather than to Motherwell? Does it not show that the contempt in which the Minister is held by the people of Motherwell is almost exceeded by the contempt in which he is held by Government Departments and his own political party?

Should not the Secretary of State today pledge that Ravenscraig will remain for sale up to and including the date of the general election and that he will insist on that, that the Government resources of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Employment will be used to assist not only Poland, but the sale of the Ravenscraig plant worldwide, and, more importantly, that the Government will actively intervene to investigate and financially assist the development of new technology in thin slab casting production, which is perfectly legitimate for financial aid under the European Economic Community? Is not the fact that the Minister cannot announce that today, when the Government can announce initiatives in far-off Europe, a reflection to the people of Motherwell and Scotland of his total failure and inability?

Mr. Lang: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman thinks it more appropriate to indulge in sterile invective than to seek positive ways forward. On the availability of Ravenscraig for sale, I have already made it clear that the chairman of British Steel still considers that the undertaking included in the prospectus is triggered by the announcement of intended closure. Thin slab steel is a matter for British Steel. If it viewed that as a potentially commercially attractive proposition, it would embark on that. That is certainly not something on which the Government should appropriately embark.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Does the Secretary of State agree that, although the news about the Ravenscraig closure is depressing, alarming and sad, it is nothing more than sickening hypocrisy for the Labour party and the Scottish National party to complain as they have unless they can make a specific proposal that Ravenscraig—including the strip mill and not without it—is for sale and they have the agreement of the European Commission for such a sale to go ahead, particularly bearing in mind what Bob Scholey said to the Select Committee?

Does the Secretary of State further agree that it is political rubbish for Opposition Members to talk about enterprise zones when they know, because of the way they voted and the views of their leaders, that there is absolutely nothing that the Government can do about an enterprise zone without first having the approval of Brussels?

I accept that the Secretary of State is doing a fine job fighting for Scotland, but will he have the courage to tell

the Opposition the facts of life and stop them exploiting the misery of the people of Lanarkshire for purely political purposes?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. For the past five years I have been trying to tell the Labour party the facts of life, both as Minister with responsibility for industry and as Secretary of State. Sadly, Labour Members prefer to live in the past and talk Scotland down rather than look to the future and help to build Scotland up.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Secretary of State now accept that he and his Government are substantially responsible for last week's announcement of the closure of Ravenscraig? To step back in time, before privatisation he refused to promote a company based on the assets of Scottish Steel, which could have provided competition to British Steel and the necessary investment, and he has pursued economic policies that have deepened the recession to the point that Ravenscraig has been closed two years earlier than provided in the worthless assurances given to the Government by Sir Bob Scholey.

Will the Secretary of State accept that there is little confidence in his parroting Bob Scholey as the source of authority for any future investment or the sale of any plant in Scotland? Will he accept that not only Ravenscraig but all the remaining steel assets in Scotland, including Hunterston, should be made available for sale to ensure that next century, when a new deep-water steel facility is required in Scotland, it will have behind it a body that has shown commitment to Scotland, which British Steel has not?

Finally——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Bruce: —will the Secretary of State ensure that the development capabilities of the Scottish new towns are used in the development promotion of Lanarkshire and that their expertise is used to attract the necessary inward investment to replace at least some of the jobs that he and his Government have so disastrously destroyed?

Mr. Lang: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear me say that unemployment in the Lanarkshire travel-to-work area had fallen by 9,000 in the past four years. Part of the reason for that is the inward investment that the Government have attracted to East Kilbride in Lanarkshire.

On the global recession in steel products, if the hon. Gentleman does not believe British Steel, he should look at the other major steel producers in Europe to see how they are faring.

At the time of privatisation, the separate privatisation of the Scottish steel industry was considered extensively. The advice of the Government's advisers and the Government's own conclusion was that that could not be done viably. When the steel industry was nationalised by the Labour party, it scrambled and destroyed the individual identities of the previous free-standing Scottish companies, took control to London and changed the company into a product division structure so that the Scottish plants became the end of a branch line. It therefore became impossible to privatise the steel industry on a Scottish basis separate from the rest of the United Kingdom. I looked at that proposal sympathetically but, sadly, too much damage had been done under nationalised ownership.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Secretary of State prepared to accept any level of responsibility for his policy paralysis as the crisis in Scottish steel has deepened, or indeed for the actions of his predecessor who sent Ravenscraig unprotected into the hands of a hostile private monopoly? Has he seen the positive proposals released this afternoon from the shop stewards of the Dalzell plate mill? They argue that, for a total investment of under £200 million—less than the clean-up costs of the Ravenscraig site—a world-class pipe and plate mill could be established, which would require increased production through the Ravenscraig plant services. That steel complex would be well able to compete effectively in the lucrative offshore markets round the coast of Scotland. For that or any other positive proposal to come to fruition, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the first thing that must be done is to take the entire assets of British Steel in Scotland into public ownership?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows that my Department prepared a detailed report on Dalzell, which we submitted to British Steel, arguing the case for maintaining it and establishing the single plate strategy based upon it. British Steel has rejected that: on the other hand, Dalzell remains in operation and remains unaffected by the decisions to close Ravenscraig. I hope that, as a result of recent trading conditions, the prospects for Dalzell are lengthening rather than shortening.

If the hon. Gentleman believes that nationalisation is the solution to the problems of the steel industry, he should have a word with the Labour party, which committed itself to the renationalisation of that industry —it would have been the third time it had been renationalised—but even the Labour party has now realised that renationalisation is a dead end.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Would it not be more sensible to look to the future than to the past? In that context, I am glad to see that the shadow Secretary of State for Wales is in his place, because I remember when, 10 years ago or more, he and I, and others, argued the case for the Sommers works at Shotton vis-à-vis Ravenscraig. We suggested that it might be better to keep the north Wales steel-making capacity there rather than in Scotland.

North Wales, in the end having accepted reality, has got more industry and diverse industry. Corby has got more industry as well as more diverse industry. The coal industry of south Wales, having declined, has got more industry and more diverse industry. The north-east shipyards have got more industry and more diverse industry. So far as the Opposition are concerned, to try to revive a cause is beyond me. We have nothing to be ashamed of. Let us look to the future, not to the past.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The House is also indebted to him for reminding us that the problems of steel closures is not confined to Scotland. Many towns in England and in Wales have experienced substantial job losses as a result of steel closures. In Corby, unemployment, at its height, reached 35 per cent., but as a result of the type of measures that we are taking in Lanarkshire, unemployment there fell to as low as 4 per cent. last year. In the early 1980s in Scunthorpe,

[Mr. Lang]

unemployment was at 20 per cent., but it is now down to around 10 per cent. I believe that the measures that we are taking in Lanarkshire will create the same long-term beneficial effect in that region and will not only bring down unemployment, but broaden and diversify the Lanarkshire economic base, making it more secure for the future.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I wonder whether the Secretary of State realises that his answers have been so complacent that they have come across as a further betrayal of the Scottish people? His speech reminded me forcefully of an inept bereavement counsellor who persuades a bereaved person that bereavement is not such a bad thing and that everyone should experience one. One of the Secretary of State's greatest failures is that he did not even stand up to some of his own Back Benchers, who called the Scottish steel workers "subsidy junkies" and claimed that they were unproductive. He totally failed to answer that. Finally, did the Secretary of State know that the Secretary of State for Employment was providing training for Polish steel workers? If so, why did he not at least demand the same for the people of Lanarkshire?

Mr. Lang: I do not think that provision of advice on training matters to other countries precludes the necessary provision of training advice and financial assistance within the United Kingdom. In that context, my responsibility is to Lanarkshire. I am confident that the training measures, like the other infrastructural measures that we are providing, are relevant and will meet the needs of the area in preparing for the future.

The hon. Lady talked of betrayal. Betrayal was to pour some £14 billion into the steel industry to prop up uncompetitive and overmanned plants and to fail to modernise them, embrace new technology or help them prepare for the future. Belatedly, reality dawned on the industry and it began to make headway and became profitable. We must now consider the need to find a diversification of Lanarkshire's economy to attract new companies. I hope that, when we attract new companies to Lanarkshire, the Labour party will prevail upon its trade union friends to treat them sensibly, rather than the way they treated Ford in Dundee.

Sir Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the real issue is the fact that, in view of the international recession, British Steel is fighting for its life? If we stop British Steel taking the commercial decisions necessary for its survival in the world as it is at the moment, we shall end up with no steel industry. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that some good could come out of the disaster in Lanarkshire if all resources are brought in, as happened in Corby and other steel closure towns? Will he assure the House that he will give maximum support to British Steel Industries, which helped the regeneration of former steel sites, and that he will fight hard in Europe to ensure that that enterprise zone is created? The House of Commons will be angry if that proposal is spiked by the European Commission.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for injecting a sense of commercial realism into the debate. British Steel Industries have already set up workshops in Coatbridge and Clydesdale, where 25 new small businesses have been attracted employing some 140 people, and they now plan to build a 50,000 sq ft workshop in the Strathclyde business park, and a youth enterprise centre. Those realistic and sensible proposals will help the general effort toward strengthening the Lanarkshire economy.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Does the Secretary of State not feel ashamed to come to the Dispatch Box with not one Tory Scottish Back Bencher sitting behind him? Just a week after the closure decision, is he not ashamed to bleat plaintively that British Steel has not yet put forward an official spokesman to explain why all those jobs will be destroyed? Why does the Secretary of State cling on, almost innocently and certainly naively, to the figure of some 2,200 jobs being affected, when everyone in Scotland knows and all authoritative experts have said that the number is closer to 7,000? A much greater number will probably be affected. If Lanarkshire is to be able to look forward to the new industries which we hope will replace the jobs lost through the damage to the steel industry, we must at least hear the truth about the scale of what is needed and what the Government intend to supply.

Mr. Lang: Two of my hon. Friends are ill and are therefore unable to be here today. The figure for job losses which I gave was not 2,200, but more than 3,000, taking account of indirect jobs across Scotland. The figures for Lanarkshire which my Department has produced equate almost exactly with the figures from the Fraser of Allander Institute, which also took account of the closure of the hot strip mill and of Clydesdale last year, and of the indirect jobs related thereto.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question. However, I fully understand its importance for hon. Members with Scottish constituencies and, indeed, for the whole of the United Kingdom. I will call two more from each side and those whom I have not been able to call —[HON. MEMBERS: "Each side?"] Order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Where are the Scottish Tory Back Benchers?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will look with consideration on those whom I have not been able to call today when we come to DTI questions on Wednesday.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party knows perfectly well that the decision at Ravenscraig, however regrettable, was entirely inevitable? Will he assure the House that, in the best tradition of Conservative duty towards those unfortunate people, he will see to it that every effort that the Government put into recreating jobs and into bringing new jobs to Ravenscraig will be properly co-ordinated, and that he will ensure that the European Community is revved up in the matter?

Mr. Lang: I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend on that. There are no fewer than 60 projects already in hand this year on infrastructural, environmental and training initiatives in the area.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Has the Secretary of State read the article by Mr. Alf Young in today's *Glasgow Herald*? Does he agree with Mr. Young's analysis of the future of the British steel industry and the future of Scottish sunrise industries? If so, does he accept that we need a far-reaching reappraisal of Scottish

economic policy, rather than policy made on the hoof, which is what we have had from the Secretary of State throughout the period? Will he now give an undertaking that there will be a long, hard look at what needs to be done to ensure the maintenance of Scotland as a major manufacturing nation?

Mr. Lang: I always read Mr. Alf Young's articles with enthusiastic interest, although I do not always find myself in total agreement with all his conclusions. The hon. Gentleman asked me whether we would take a long, hard look. We have been taking a long, hard look for some time at the economic problems of Scotland and of Lanarkshire. It is as a result of the initiatives that we have developed that unemployment in Lanarkshire has been falling over the past four years and is 9,000 lower than it was four years ago.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): So that we are left in no doubt, will my right hon. Friend once again ask the Labour party to make it clear whether it would reopen Ravenscraig?

Mr. Lang: That is not a question for me, but it is a well-judged question because we have heard nothing constructive or positive from the Labour party, and no suggestions of any initiatives that could be taken other than those that we are already taking.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): When did the Secretary of State last have words with Sir Leon Brittan about the possibility of an enterprise zone in north Lanarkshire? The Commissioner's statement is not in line with the Government's statement. What assurances can we have that the enterprise zone—if the Commission agrees to it—will include the whole of north Lanarkshire?

Mr. Lang: I was last in touch with Sir Leon Brittan when I wrote to him on 7 January. I am sure that he and his directorate will give positive, fair-minded and sensible consideration to the application for an enterprise zone. I hope that that will lead to a conclusion in favour, and that we shall then be able to get that initiative under way on top of all the other initiatives. I anticipate that the real advantage of the enterprise zone will be the generation of substantial private sector investment, because ultimately it is private sector investment that will stimulate the renewal of Lanarkshire.

Local Government Finance (Wales)

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement setting out my decisions on local government finance in Wales for 1992-93.

The three reports that set out the final terms of the settlement will be laid before the House on Monday 20 January. I have today placed details of the settlement in the Library and have arranged for essential data to be sent to every local authority in Wales.

When I announced my provisional settlement proposals to the House in July, I referred to the need to adjust the provisional total standard spending figure of £2,639 million to reflect the funding requirements of the Polytechnic of Wales and the five other major higher education colleges in Wales that are to leave the local authority sector on 1 April 1992. In my statement on 23 July, I announced a provisional figure of £34·6 million to meet that need. After further consultation with the Assembly of Welsh Counties, I have decided that that figure represents an appropriate level of funding for the establishments in 1992-93. The settlement has been adjusted accordingly and allows for a level of total standard spending by Welsh authorities of £2,604·4 million. That is an increase of 8·5 per cent. on the comparable figure for last year and an increase of 5·1 per cent. on the level of budgets set by Welsh authorities in 1991-91.

Aggregate external finance in support of that level of spending will be £2,348·4 million—an increase of more than £147 million or 6·7 per cent. on the comparable level of support for 1991-92, taking into account the additional central Government support provided through the £140 general reduction in the community charge for the current financial year and the appropriate adjustment in respect of the higher education establishments. Within the aggregate external finance total, the revenue support grant for 1992-93 is £1,617·1 million, the distributable amount for the non-domestic rating account is £536 million and the total allocated for revenue specific grants is £195·3 million.

The increased support provided to local government in Wales in 1991-92 through the £140 general reduction raised the level of central Government support for local authorities' revenue spending from 79 per cent. to nearly 92 per cent. I will continue this higher level of support in 1992-93 by enhancing the level of aggregate external finance. As a result, the AEF figure for the coming year is £445 million more than the equivalent AEF figure for 1991-92 before implementation of the general reduction—an increase of more than 23 per cent.

The settlement gives local authorities in Wales a realistic framework for developing new services in 1992-93 and maintaining existing ones, particularly in the light of the reduced inflationary pressures that will bear on local authorities in the coming year and the continuing scope for efficiency savings. In that context, I should like to pay special tribute to local government in Wales for the vigorous and collaborative way in which it is pursuing efficiency initiatives. I look forward to meeting both the Assembly of Welsh Counties and the Council of Welsh Districts in the near future to discuss their latest proposals.

If authorities spend in line with these plans, the average community charge in Wales for 1992-93 should not exceed

[Mr. David Hunt]

£118—before relief and benefits are taken into account. That is less than half the equivalent figure for English authorities and £3 less than the average charge of £121 actually set by Welsh authorities for 1991-92.

I have already announced my proposals that the non-domestic rate poundage for 1992-93 should be 42·5 p. That represents an increase of just 4·1 per cent. on the rate poundage of 40·8p for the current year. That is a dramatic illustration of the benefit for businesses of our success in bringing down the rate of inflation.

In addition to the financial support through AEF to which I have already referred, I am providing £6 million grant in 1992-93 to Welsh charging authorities to offset the revenue costs of preparing for the new council tax. This represents 75 per cent. of the £8 million revenue cost of implementation estimated in an independent study undertaken by CSL Management Group, which looked at a representative sample of charging authorities in Wales. I recognise that that represents a change of view from my original position that I would expect local authorities to find these costs from within their own resources.

In addition, I have announced that credit approvals will be available to local authorities to cover the full £1·24 million capital cost of preparation estimated by CSL. That is a generous contribution towards overall preparation costs, particularly as the savings to Welsh authorities in administering the council tax when compared with the poll tax—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—will outweigh the preparation costs. In due course I shall seek the approval of the House for the council tax preparation grant scheme in Wales.

I should also like to give the House details of my decision on funding the community charge reduction scheme—CCRS—in 1992-93. In my statement on my provisional settlement proposals in July, I confirmed that the scheme would continue in the final year of the poll tax, notwithstanding the considerable increase in central Government support for local authority spending.

Although the overall burden on community charge payers in Wales is very much lower as a result of the increased support that I am providing, I have decided that it would be appropriate to continue to fund a reduction scheme for the final year of the poll tax. I therefore intend to make £40 million available in 1992-93. This will provide substantial assistance to charge payers who most need the relief and is double the amount that was available to charge payers in 1990-91 under the transitional relief scheme when the community charge for standard spending in Wales was £173. The scheme will provide relief direct to specified communities by reference to the actual community charge—or poll tax—set in 1990-91. I expect that more than 50 per cent. of charge payers in over 500 communities in Wales will continue to benefit from the reduction scheme. The average charge in Wales after these reductions should be about £100. Community charge benefit will provide further assistance above that to those charge payers on the lowest incomes.

This is a good settlement for Welsh local government, community charge payers and non-domestic ratepayers alike. The resources that I am providing through AEF and the special grant for council tax preparation, taken together, give local authorities a level of support which is 7 per cent. up on 1991-92. If authorities budget reasonably, charging authorities in Wales should, on average, set community charges that are lower in cash terms than those set in 1991-92. The increase in the non-domestic rate poundage for 1992-93 has been limited to just 4·1 per cent. I expect local government in Wales to rise to the challenge. Charge payers in Wales will expect no less. I have written to every local authority leader in Wales making it clear that, if necessary, I will use my charge-capping powers to curb any authority that I consider sets an unreasonable budget for 1992-93.

I commend the settlement to the House.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement—"the gospel according to Dai Poll Tax"—which reminds us that the poll tax continues under the Conservatives.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he faces the prospect of a general election campaign in Wales with the poll tax firmly in place and the poll tax bills hitting the doormats, and is able to offer only a council tax banding alternative that is designed to help the richest, living in the best areas?

Will the right hon. Gentleman, once and for all, recognise that, if the Government had taken up the offer of the Labour party's offer of co-operation on a Bill to abolish the poll tax, we would now be considering the implementation of a fairer, property-based system of local taxation?

Why will not the Secretary of State recognise that his prediction for the average poll tax is way wide of the mark? At best, this settlement is only half of what Welsh districts calculate that they need for next year. Has not the right hon. Gentleman got it wrong? His statement fails to take account of the full effects of inflation, the increased resources needed to fund community care and the new statutory responsibilities introduced by the Children Act 1989. There is also implementation of the national curriculum and of the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to be considered.

The Secretary of State's average poll tax prediction is unrealistic. The increase in total spending is nothing like enough. Instead of just over 5 per cent., 10 per cent. is needed for new duties and inflation. The figures that I have given are the key figures, not the inflated figures with which the right hon. Gentleman is playing.

The poll tax nightmare continues. Why did not the right hon. Gentleman admit that the unfair 20 per cent. rule is still in place? Why does it remain, despite the fact that it means that local authorities will have to continue to collect from students and the poor a sum that is often less than the cost of collection itself? Why does the poll tax continue when the Prime Minister has described it as an "uncollectable" tax? Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that councils in Wales are being asked to engage in the biggest debt collection exercise in the history of Wales? After 400,000 summonses, £17 million in uncollected poll tax and £100 million wasted on implementing the poll tax in Wales alone, why does he not admit that the poll tax was and is a total disaster, under him?

I noticed that the right hon. Gentleman left the prospect of capping wide open. How can he use the rhetoric of partnership on the one hand and threaten local councils with the big stick of capping on the other? How can he justify charge capping, in view of the restrained spending record of Welsh councils? They are loyal,

co-operative and helpful. The Secretary of State for the Environment would give his right hand to deal with councillors as good as these.

Does the Secretary of State for Wales accept that this settlement is inadequate against a background of deepening recession, escalating homelessness and growing concern over educational standards? Why does he not immediately begin the phased release of capital receipts —the moneys held by local councils and realised from the sale of council houses? Would not that begin to meet the desperate housing needs of Wales, caused by the cut in the number of affordable homes to rent and the mortgage repossession crisis? Would it not also be a powerful boost to our struggling construction industry and help to kick start the Welsh economy out of its recession?

Thirteen years of Conservative Government are coming to an end. Is it not the case that in those years we have seen £100 billion of oil revenues squandered, standards of local services decline and local democracy undermined and belittled by a centralising, arrogant London-based Conservative Government, who have not listened and who do not care about Wales? I tell the right hon. Gentleman that in Wales his party will be swept into oblivion when the general election takes place.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman raised eight points. First, he criticised the council tax alternative but failed to mention his solution, which is to return to rates and then to have a revaluation. That revaluation would be based on so many different criteria that even the Labour party cannot begin to work out what it would mean. It does not know whether it would be based on the number of windows in a property, the area of the floor or capital value. Still the Labour party has not worked it out.

I remind the hon. Gentleman again—I shall repeat this again and again because it is exactly what his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said—that going back to rates would be to return to the most unjust of all taxes.

As for consultations, I remind the hon. Gentleman that there was an empty chair in my office which was never filled by the Labour party. The Liberal Democrats came and made their suggestions in a constructive and sensible atmosphere.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I cannot give way when I am responding to questions.

Members of Plaid Cymru came and put their point of view in a sensible and constructive manner. My right hon. and hon. Friends did likewise. The Labour party never came.

The third point is that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) says that there are additional inflationary pressures. I remind him that inflation is now down to 4·3 per cent., and that the settlement that I have announced is considerably in excess of that.

The fourth point is the claim that this is an unrealistic settlement. I merely say to the hon. Gentleman that it allows for local authorities to spend £1,193 for every man, woman and child in Wales, towards which they will be receiving external financing of £1,075. That is a pretty good deal by any stretch of assessment.

The hon. Gentleman says that it is nothing like enough, but what is he really saying? I notice that there are certain key Opposition Front-Bench Members absent—*[Laughter.]* Wait for it. I do not see—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman has proved my point. There are certain noticeable absentees—the shadow Treasury Front-Bench team. Where is the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)? The hon. Gentleman misses the point.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard nothing out of order. It may be a point of disagreement.

Mr. Davies: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is the hon. Gentleman's point of order?

Mr. Davies: The Secretary of State is supposed to be replying to questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). Surely it is not fair for him to take this opportunity to criticise Labour Members for their absence.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is strictly correct, but I have a suspicion that this frequently happens shortly before a general election.

Mr. Hunt: If the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside will listen to the conclusion of the sentence, he will understand.

I do not criticise the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East or the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) for being absent. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would say what he has just said if the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the hon. Lady were present. He has said that the proposed spending is nothing like enough. I want to know whether he says that with the authority—*[Interruption.]* Not from the districts. He has said from the Opposition Front bench that this—*[Interruption.]* Do not point at me with some press release.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that we resort to pointing here.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman should not point.

Mr. Barry Jones: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hunt: I am answering the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us hear the point of order.

Mr. Barry Jones: I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State cannot even read from his prepared notes. He is not even attributing the right figures to the district councils, which sent out a well distributed press release. The right hon. Gentleman can rule in Wales only by press release and hype, and today we are seeing him at his worst.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not qualified to judge the figures. Let us return to the main subject. We have a heavy day ahead, and a number of hon. Members want to ask questions on this statement.

Mr. Hunt: It was the hon. Gentleman who flashed the press release at me. He should not refer to a press release. What he said in this Chamber, to which I am replying——

Mr. Barry Jones: Answer the question.

Mr. Hunt: I am answering the hon. Gentleman's point. He said that the spending allocation that I announced was

[Mr. Hunt]

nothing like enough. Did he say that with the authority of his shadow Cabinet colleagues? If he believes that that spending allocation is nothing like enough, how much does he think local authorities should spend? From where is the money to come? Will it come from the community charge payers, by increasing poll tax—community charge—demands, or will it come from the taxpayer? He cannot simply say that the spending allocation is nothing like enough; he must spell out what that means.

Fifthly, on debt collection, the hon. Gentleman needs reminding that local authorities in Wales have done extremely well. They have collected 100 per cent. of what they budgeted to collect in the last financial year, and it appears that they are doing just as well in the current financial year.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would release capital receipts on a phased basis. I must tell him that the net position is one of substantial local authority debt. The latest figures that I have for all-services local authority debt is £2·917 billion, which is more than £1,000 local authority debt per man, woman and child in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: So?

Mr. Hunt: So there are no net receipts as such to distribute. There is local authority debt of more than £1,000 per man, woman and child in Wales.

Seventhly, on capping, presumably there would be no limits under the Labour party. It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman could confirm that. Not only is the spending allocation not enough, but the message from the Labour party is, "Spend, spend, spend; tax, tax, tax."

On the hon. Gentleman's final point, I remind him that Wales has been transformed under the Conservatives during the 1980s and has become the land of opportunity for the 1990s. At the next general election, the people of Wales will have to decide whether to return to the bad old days of the Labour and Liberal parties or to move forward under the Conservative party.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): My right hon. Friend may or may not be aware that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), in a now justly celebrated sermon from the pulpit of St. Asaph's cathedral, promised unlimited support for the arts under a Labour Administration—and that is in addition to the considerable commitments that evidently he has urged this afternoon.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that local authorities in my area regard him as a Minister who is prepared to listen and to help, and that they deeply appreciate that? Is he further aware that the people of Wales will recognise what an excellent deal his announcement is for them? It is very much better than is available for England. There is also particular gratitude for the trouble that he has taken to ease the transition from the community charge to the new council tax.

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting the points that he did, which I hope Opposition Members will answer at some stage. It is all well and good to go around Wales promising more spending—spend, spend, spend. However, someone will have to pick up the bill, and undoubtedly that will be the people of Wales. When the people of Wales realise that the settlement allows for spending of £1,193 for every man, woman and child in Wales—towards which there will be external finance of more than 90 per cent. of that figure—they will appreciate that it is a very good settlement.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The Secretary of State is the person who set the poll tax on the track, only to see it later plunge into the political abyss. That cost Welsh taxpayers a great deal of money. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why he regards it as still right that Welsh poll tax payers should pay any part of the transition to council tax? Surely it is most unfair for them to face that expenditure.

Why has the Secretary of State not given an additional amount toward the peripherality factor, which still disadvantages rural areas in Wales? They find it difficult to meet necessary revenue expenditure, such as the cost of road repairs and the much increased cost of social services in the light of the care in the community policy.

Mr. Hunt: On peripherality and the whole standard spending assessment question, I have a distribution sub-group of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, which allows district and county representatives to meet my officials to talk through the factors that should govern the distribution of standard spending assessments. The outcome is heavily dependent on the data that are fed in by local authorities, which change from time to time.

That sub-group seeks to balance the needs of rural and deprived areas and those of more urban areas. On balance, local authorities agree with the way in which standard spending assessments are currently worked out. That matter is obviously one that we consider from time to time, in great detail.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): My right hon. Friend's excellent statement will be warmly welcomed in Wales. Is he aware that many people in Wales are concerned about media claims that Welsh local councils are hellbent on setting the community charge at about £300? Is not my right hon. Friend's announcement today a complete rejection of such claims? Thanks to this Government, surely not even the most malicious left-wing council could set a community charge of about £300 and impose it on its local electors. However, does not such a threat emphasise the need for my right hon. Friend to keep his capping powers?

Mr. Hunt: I believe that my hon. Friend refers to national press stories that were echoed in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, which suggested that community charge levels were to reach £300. Those reports, of course, referred to the level in England, of a community charge for standard spending of £257. My hon. Friend is right to say that there were many telephone calls to the Welsh Office from people asking what on earth was happening. In fact, the position remains unchanged. Our community charge for standard spending is £118, as opposed to £257 for England. Today's announcement means—even before community charge benefit is taken into account—that the community charge in Wales next year should be around £100.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Is the Secretary of State aware of the deplorable state of our roads and pavements, and the fact that significant parts of our street lighting system are out of action as a result of disrepair, when all the evidence is that effective street

lighting helps to combat crime? Given the huge backlog of disrepair, has the right hon. Gentleman provided any special facto. for dealing with such genuine, local, and fundamental problems that all of us face from day to day and from week to week?

Mr. Hunt: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we do not deal in Wales through hypothecated or specific grants for the totality of local government expenditure, but reach an overall figure for total standard spending—which is more than £2,600 million. It is for local authorities to set their own priorities within that expenditure. I have no doubt that we could point to certain local authorities that do not exercise their priorities correctly, but it is for local authorities to determine their own priorities within the overall settlement.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Secretary of State accept, however, that in no year in which he has given the average figure for the poll tax base for Wales has that figure been achieved? When local authorities assess settlements such as the one that he has announced today in relation to what they received in the previous year, they never seem quite so generous.

Will the right hon. Gentleman respond to the genuine concern felt by Welsh local authorities about the additional expenditure imposed on them as a result of Government legislation—especially that caused by the plans for community care and the implementation of the Children Act 1989? Will he assure us that any shortfall in training programmes connected with such changes will be made up this year?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is right to stress that it is up to local authorities not only to set their own priorities —I made that point to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands)—but to work out the level of community charge that should be set locally. I have never suggested that I would do other than emphasise to local authorities that they must budget sensibly. I have also said that I would prefer that to be done by means of self-restraint, but it is important to have that ultimate power to protect charge payers in Wales. I am not sure about the policies of Plaid Cymru; I do not know whether it would provide for such a power to restrain excessive spending. Labour, however, has said that it would introduce no such power.

I have made clear my determination to ensure that local authority expenditure is kept to a reasonable level in the coming year. That is why I shall not hesitate to exercise my charge-capping powers should it become necessary to do so.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that, despite his palliatives and protestations, he will find it very difficult to live down his close association with the poll tax? May I also draw to his attention the deteriorating housing situation in Wales? It is developing into a scandal, mostly because our local authorities are not allowed to spend the receipts from the sale of council houses.

Why did the right hon. Gentleman dodge the request for him to give a clear and specific reply on that subject to my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) this afternoon? Our local authorities Wales are fed up with the repression imposed on them by the present Government.

Mr. Hunt: To some extent, Opposition Members give the impression that those capital receipts have vanished, blown away by the winds of faith. That is not so; they have been used, very sensibly, to pay off their debts that were incurred when the houses involved were built. As I have already told the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), the amount of local authority debt in Wales is more than £1,000 for every man, woman and child.

Government support for local authority capital expenditure next year has increased by 24 per cent. over the current year, rising to £536 million. The lion's share is earmarked for housing—in particular for the home improvements and renovation scheme, which I believe is going extremely well in Wales.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Is the Secretary of State aware, first, of the growing housing problem; secondly, of the increasing difficulties experienced by local authorities in putting central heating systems into houses when requests for them have been made on medical grounds; and, thirdly, of the lengthening waiting lists for adaptations to houses that are needed by, for instance, disabled people?

May I plead with the right hon. Gentleman to think again about a phased release of capital receipts? Much good could be done for people throughout Wales through the expenditure of relatively little money. Will the right hon. Gentleman give a pledge to re-examine the matter, and to do something about it?

Mr. Hunt: I am not too sure that the hon. Gentleman listened to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes). As I said then, local authority capital has been increased by some 24 per cent., to £536 million. I have also been able to persuade my Government colleagues to increase the provision of mandatory home renovation grant by £80 million, bringing next year's total provision to £143 million. That will greatly assist us in improving existing housing stock. As for the provision of new houses, the hon. Gentleman will know that the Housing for Wales allocation is now at record levels.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): The cost of setting up the poll tax, administering it and then bailing it out has amounted to £1 billion in Wales alone, according to the Local Government Information Unit. Is it not time that the Secretary of State apologised to the House for a wanton misuse of £1 billion of other people's money that makes even Robert Maxwell look like a saint?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is a master of hyperbole and the single entendre. I do not know where he found that £1 billion figure, but his mathematics presumably included the transitional relief scheme and various other grants.

I make no apology for having abolishing the iniquitous domestic rating scheme. What saddens me is the fact that the hon. Gentleman's party proposes to return to it.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Secretary of State list all the recommendations made by the Liberal Democrats that he has incorporated in the council tax proposals?

Mr. Hunt: Of course: I shall willingly write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Secretary of State has always shown great enthusiasm for the poll tax

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

in general, and he now shows great enthusiasm for this settlement. As he is so enthusiastic, may I invite him to make the poll tax a battleground in the approaching general election, and to urge every Welsh local authority to ensure that it issues the demands that the system will involve before the election takes place?

Mr. Hunt: Although I do not know when the election will be, I should be delighted if the people of Wales made up their minds about clearly expressed alternatives. Under the present Government's spending plans, which include a special Welsh grant advantage, more than 90 per cent. of local spending will be met by external finance; less than 10 per cent. will be met by the local charge payer.

I should like the people to decide between the present Government, who are abolishing the poll tax or community charge and replacing it with a fairer council tax, and the Labour party, which promises a return to the system of taxation that its own leader has described as the most unjust of all—the iniquitous, hated domestic rating system.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): May I point out that the distribution of grant is grossly unfair? Authorities such as Rhymney Valley—which, on every objective index, can be described as socially deprived, receive less than the average increase that is available to Wales as a whole.

Does not the Secretary of State realise that, given the enormous housing and unemployment problems that we have in the valleys, his standard spending assessment model is grossly unfair and needs re-examination? If local authorities in the position that I have described find that they are forced to raise poll tax levels by more than the right hon. Gentleman recommends, and if he is minded to use his reserve capping powers, will he now undertake to consult those authorities before taking such draconian action?

Mr. Hunt: No. The local authorities know my position, which I have made absolutely clear. In regard to spending generally, I have been asked various questions by hon. Members on both sides of the House about whether certain kinds of spending have been taken into account —for instance, spending on community care. I have considered the entire range of local authority services, and I believe that, against that background, the settlement is fair and just.

As for standard spending assessments, as I told the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), we examine them constantly. If the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has any specific proposals, I shall be pleased to hear from him; but we consider SSAs carefully, within the overall total of standard spending, and our proposals struck me as a reasonable compromise between the various interests involved.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we recognise the importance and significance of the valleys. That is demonstrated by the valleys programme, which was launched by the present Government.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The leader of my council tells me that its capital receipts from the sale of council houses is about £12 million. He tells me also that the council is not allowed to spend that money. If it were able to do so, more houses could be built, with no additional burden on taxpayers or poll tax payers. Why is the Secretary of State so pathologically blind—because of his Tory dogma—to the real needs of the helpless and the homeless who desperately need homes but are denied them by his policy?

Mr. Hunt: May I explain again that we are dealing with a very substantial local authority debt burden—the figure approaching £3 billion, which represents more than £1,000 for every man, woman and child in Wales. I have already decided—I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes my decision—to increase local authority capital provision next year by 24 per cent. Most of that will go into the provision of housing. In addition, of course, the resources earmarked for the provision of housing in Wales is at a record level. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has published an extremely good agenda for action on housing. I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that we take very seriously indeed our responsibilities for housing in Wales.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): About six times this afternoon, Opposition Members have asked the Secretary of State about the impact of his settlement on the ability of local authorities to implement the Government's proposal to transfer to the local authorities responsibilities in respect of care in the community and the Children Act 1989. Each time that the Secretary of State has had an opportunity to comment on that matter, he has refused to do so. What does he expect will be the impact on the ability of local authorities progressively to take on the burden, from 1 April, of looking after the services currently provided by the health authorities with direct Government finance?

Mr. Hunt: I thought that I had just said in reply to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), but I say again, that I have looked at the whole range of services. In respect of community care, we in Wales are extremely well on course towards implementing the new system on 1 April 1993. Included in this settlement are specific grants for training, and various other spending responsibilities have been taken into account.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): Is not the Secretary of State's great problem the fact that he simply does not listen to people in Wales? If he had listened to the people of Wales, he would not have been burdened by the tragedy of the poll tax. If he had listened to local government leaders in Wales, we should not have a system of poll tax relief that is so inane that it goes not to individuals but to communities. If he had listened to my hon. Friends about the question of housing, and had released the capital receipts that are locked away in the coffers of local authorities, tens of thousands of people in Wales would have houses. Cannot he see that, for these and other reasons, the next time a Secretary of State for Wales comes to the Dispatch Box to announce a rate support grant settlement, it will be a Labour Secretary of State?

Mr. Hunt: I would listen more willingly to the hon. Gentleman if he were to get his facts right. He says that, if I had listened to local authorities in Wales, I would not have produced this transitional relief scheme. *[Interruption.]* He says that they have changed their view. In fact, he has changed his position. A few moments ago,

he said that, if local authorities had been listened to, we would not have introduced the scheme. But we introduced the scheme in response to a request from local authorities.

It is a very simple and effective scheme. We are now in the final year of the poll tax or community charge system, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would have expected us to produce an alternative system based on individual need and requiring everybody to apply. Does he really think we ought to have done that?

I believe that this is a very fair settlement. The average community charge in Wales, even before taking community charge benefit into account, will be about £100. The only people in this House that I fear are my English colleagues—they having heard that the community charge in Wales will be about £100. The key question—to which we have never had a response—is whether the shadow Secretary of State will continue the special Welsh revenue support grant advantage that has been secured under the present Government. From the Labour party there is a deafening silence as to whether it would continue to fund local government services to the extent of more than 90 per cent. from aggregate external finance.

The fact is that, under a Labour Government—for the sake of the people of Wales, I very much hope that that will never come about—the policy on local authorities would be "spend, spend, spend", and the bills would have to be met by the people of Wales.

BCCI

4.55 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the liquidation of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International on Tuesday 14 January 1992."

The matter is specific because, as the House knows, the High Court adjourned the application for provisional liquidation on 2 December until tomorrow to give further time for the provisional liquidator, Touche Ross, and the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi to have further discussions about the best solution for depositors and creditors. On 3 January, the court in Luxembourg ordered the liquidation of the Luxembourg bank.

At my meeting an hour ago with the provisional liquidator of BCCI, Mr. Christopher Morris, he told me that his recommendation tomorrow would be that the bank should go into liquidation. It seems that the longest provisional liquidation in banking history, and the largest international insolvency of all time, is about to come to an end. The bank that for six months has refused to die will be given its last rites tomorrow at about 11 o'clock.

The matter is important because there are 32,000 depositors and 1,200 former members of staff of BCCI whose lives will be dramatically affected by the decision tomorrow. Depositors risk their businesses at a time of deep recession, and for many, these businesses represent a lifetime's work. In addition, there is the knock-on effect of further job losses. The 1,200 former members of staff risk the repossession of their homes because they cannot afford the mortgages, have no jobs and have little prospect of employment. The anxiety, hardship, distress and worry extend to the poll tax payers in 30 local authority areas—from the Western Isles in Scotland to Southwark in London—where councils deposited in BCCI.

The matter is urgent because, on 20 December last year, the Prime Minister wrote to me saying that he was not prepared to intervene. Parliament needs an opportunity to persuade Ministers of the need to intervene to support the negotiations.

In addition, no details of the settlement agreement have been released, although Mr. Morris helpfully told me this afternoon that he expects an announcement within the next month. The depositors need an opportunity to examine the settlement agreement before the bank goes into liquidation, and this House needs an opportunity to discuss the matter and to deliberate upon whether this course is in the best interests of depositors and creditors. We need a full debate on the Floor of the House to show the depositors and former employees that the House cares and to enable Members with a constituency interest to contribute before an irreversible decision is taken tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the liquidation of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International on Tuesday 14 January 1992."

[Mr. Speaker]

I have listened with concern to what the hon. Member said, as I too have constituents who are affected by the collapse of this bank. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have to decide whether to give the matter precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I regret that, in this case, the matter that he has raised does not meet the requirements of the Standing Order, and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

Ravenscraig

4.59 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the closure of Ravenscraig."

I have to do so following the totally inadequate and insubstantial statement of the Secretary of State.

The matter is specific, in that it relates to the closure of one of the five major integrated steel works and to the strategy that the House has often called upon British Steel to explain. It is important not only to the steel workers and the people of Motherwell but to Scotland and to the future industrial development of the United Kingdom. It is also important to the House in that, at many times and in many ways, through Select Committees, at Question Time, in debate and in the motion passed by the House on 21 May 1990, the House has called upon British Steel to explain and defend its decision and the House has been ignored. British Steel has made no statement on the latest closure announcement; it has answered no questions beyond the bald announcement last Wednesday.

Finally, the matter is urgent because, in statements by Ministers in the House in 1987, British Steel undertook to offer the works for sale to another operator if it wished to close them. There is little time between a possible general election as late as July and the closure date in September for the complex and difficult investigations and negotiations required. Conditions do not yet exist in which those investigations can take place.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) asked leave to move the Adjournment of the House, to discuss a specific and important matter namely, "the closure of Ravenscraig, and the consequences for the economy of Lanarkshire and of Scotland."

Again, of course, I have listened with concern to what he said about the matter, as I listened to the answers and questions during the private notice question. I regret that I cannot submit his application to the House today and therefore cannot allow the debate.

Points of Order

5.1 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I refer you to the Order Paper and to Transport questions. A cursory examination of the questions dealt with will reveal that the majority were on British Rail. Very few questions concerning roads were likely to be reached, although they are important for those of us in the west midlands. However, Question 9, on roads, was reached and it was noticeable that you were unable to call many hon. Members because no Opposition Members stood up, possibly because they have no policies and do not wish to reveal that.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but that question was withdrawn.

Mr. King: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) asked Question 9 on the Order Paper on the subject of road construction.

Mr. Speaker: I do apologise. I thought that the hon. Member was referring to Question 8 on transport. I beg his pardon. Question 9 was asked and answered.

Mr. King: Indeed it was. The point that I wish to make was that many of us were seeking to catch your eye, as we had not had the opportunity to ask any questions on the important subject of roads. Your difficulty was that no Opposition Members were standing up. It is possible that they have no policy on roads, and we understand that, but in such circumstances is it not possible to extend to Conservative Members the opportunity to ask important questions, as we have a policy on roads?

Mr. Speaker: The selection of hon. Members to ask questions at Question Time is a difficult matter. In 40 minutes, I try to reach at least Question 12, and we were able to achieve that today.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It was much appreciated by all hon. Members representing Scotland that you allowed the private notice question on Ravenscraig to extend for some considerable time. However, you will understand the disappointment of hon. Members from Scotland that we are not to be afforded the opportunity to debate that in the House, following the request by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray).

If neither the Government nor the official Opposition are prepared to allocate time for such a debate to take place in the near future, would it be in order for the House to consider the establishment of a special Scottish Grand Committee to meet in Scotland to discuss the matter, or the establishment of an interim Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which could summon witnesses such as Sir Ian MacGregor, Bob Scholey and representatives of the steel industry at management and at union level, because this is a matter of great importance to people the length and breadth of our nation of Scotland?

Mr. Speaker: I am well aware of the concern. I told the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) that his application did not meet the requirements of the Standing

Order for a debate today or tomorrow. I hope that there will be other opportunities to discuss that important matter.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On that very point, Mr. Speaker, may I thank you for your liberal attitude towards debating steel in the House, often—in fact, almost always—under the auspices of the Opposition, who have allocated several days to it? When you say that you hope that there will be a debate—I am sure that we all share that hope—will you bring any influence to bear because of the question raised about the powers of Parliament and requiring answers from British Steel? As you may know, the chairman of British Steel showed extreme reluctance to turn up and to give any information to the members of the Select Committee. Ministers, members of the Select Committee, and hon. Members on both sides of the House have constantly reiterated that they required British Steel to give reasons for its actions, but to date it has not done so. Can you use your good offices to impress the case on the Government, on behalf of all sections of Parliament?

Mr. Speaker: I am only responsible for debates which take place on the Floor of the House. Whether the Select Committee decides to investigate the issue is not a matter for me, but I take note of what the hon. Member has said.

Orders of the Day

Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill

[Lords]

Order for Second Reading, read.

5.6 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill, which was introduced in this House on 10 December, constitutes an important landmark in the history of the nursing, midwifery and health visiting professions. Its main purpose, in brief, is to change the constitution and functions of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting and the four national boards for nursing, midwifery and health visiting.

The five statutory bodies were set up under the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979. Prior to that, there had been a number of bodies in all four countries regulating either whole professions or specific aspects of training. The new statutory framework aimed to bring those bodies together, to establish common standards of education and training and professional conduct throughout the United Kingdom and to establish a single United Kingdom register for nurses, midwives and health visitors. It sought fully to establish the principle of professional self-regulation for the three professions. Those are important principles, which are reflected, and indeed further developed, in the current Bill.

Under the 1979 Act, the UKCC was established as the single United Kingdom corporate body, responsible for establishing and improving standards of training; maintaining a register of qualified practitioners; and determining whether a practitioner should be removed from the register.

The national boards were set up as autonomous corporate bodies in the four countries, with responsibility for making provision for nurse, midwifery and health visiting education and training in line with UKCC requirements, for arranging examinations, for collaborating with the UKCC in the promotion of improved training method, and for carrying out initial investigations in cases of alleged misconduct.

In 1987, a review of the central council and the national boards was commissioned by the four United Kingdom Health Departments as part of the regular Treasury programme of reviews of non-departmental public bodies. It was carried out between December 1988 and March 1989 by Peat Marwick McLintock. The review team produced a radical set of recommendations, and its report was issued for consultation in August 1989. On 4 February 1991, the Secretary of State announced the Government's decisions on the Peat Marwick McLintock recommendations, and indicated our intention to introduce legislation as soon as possible to implement those decisions.

The purpose of the legislation would be to change the constitution of the central council from a body the majority of whose members are nominated by the national boards, to a body the majority of whose members are elected by the professions to whom they are responsible. It would change the constitution of the four national boards

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

for nursing, midwifery and health visiting from elected to appointed bodies. It would remove the role of the national boards in managing and financing the provision of nursing, midwifery and health visiting education and training, in line with the principles of the NHS reforms. That function would be devolved to health authorities, with the exception of Northern Ireland, where the existing arrangements would continue to apply. It would centralise all professional conduct investigations at the council, avoiding duplication of effort and rationalising this important function. Unnecessary delays in this sensitive aspect of the council's work are distressing for all those involved and are certainly uncalled for.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): What are the Government's plans for section 32 of the General Whitley Council appeals procedures? Some months ago, the Government expressed an intention to do away with the scheme, but there is no mention of that in the Bill.

Mrs. Bottomley: Section 32 has nothing to do with the Bill. We want to find a way of tackling the question of section 32, which is cumbersome and causes much delay and unnecessary ill will. We should like to make progress in talks with the staff side and the unions, but the hon. Lady will appreciate that section 32 has nothing to do with this important Bill, which deals with the regulation of nurses, midwives and health visitors.

Much thought and discussion has gone into the Bill. In principle, it is not controversial but is a highly sensitive matter for the profession, which is the backbone of the health service.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the changes that the Minister is referring to have any impact on Project 2000? Nurses are being denied the opportunity to take part in that project because of regional differences, particularly in my constituency. Will the Bill allow those nurses to take part in Project 2000?

Mrs. Bottomley: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, rather than answer interventions in an ad hoc manner I shall make an announcement about Project 2000 later. The project has been a major success of the Government. We shall announce additional funding, which will mean that, since its establishment, we will have spent more than £205 million on this important new form of nurse training.

Immediately after my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement about the plans that we intended to carry forward on the basis of the Peat Marwick report, we established a legislation advisory group and gave it the remit of considering in detail what changes will be required to the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act to give effect to the Government's decisions on the recommendations. The group comprised representatives of the four United Kingdom health departments, the UKCC and the national boards.

I want to pay tribute to the work of the group. It met five times between March and September last year, and I was pleased to meet its representatives earlier in the autumn to discuss the outstanding issues that have emerged from its work. I think that it is fair to say that there is virtual unanimity on the legislative proposals that are enshrined in the Bill. I want to pay tribute to the constructive and valuable contribution that the statutory bodies and professional organisations representing nurses, midwives and health visitors have made to the development of our proposals. Without their co-operation, we would not have been able to move as fast as we have.

Before outlining the provisions of the Bill in more detail, I must underline, for the benefit of the House, a point that ministerial colleagues and I have made in other settings. The fact that there will no longer be a centrally top-sliced budget for nursing and midwifery education and training, distributed by the national boards, does not detract from the Government's commitment to ensure that adequate provision is made for education and training.

We have made it clear that we expect the regional health authorities in England to establish protected budgets for pre and post registration training for nurses, midwives and health visitors and that we are developing mechanisms to ensure that those budgets are monitored at the centre. This year, we are spending about £770 million on pre and post-registration nurse education and training. Next year —1992-93—the figure will rise to £870 million. That is a practical demonstration of the Government's commitment to invest in the major work force of the national health service.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am sure, therefore, that the Minister will make it clear that, if regional authorities do not comply with the suggestion that they should provide adequate education, the Government will not only take sanctions but will write into the Bill the ability to take sanctions.

Mrs. Bottomley: I do not think the hon. Lady will be surprised to hear that I am not prepared to write that into the Bill. We shall take steps to ensure that the substantial resources that are invested in nurse education and training, pre-registration and post-registration, continue and develop. Indeed, not so long ago I was able to visit the nurse training college in the hon. Lady's constituency and was most impressed by its work.

We are dependent on the skills, contribution and commitment of those who work in the health service to provide high-quality patient care. Our commitment to patient care relies on the long-term supply of well qualified staff. As a tangible example of our commitment to training and investing in nurse education, I can announce extra resources for Project 2000, to which the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) referred.

I announced today that we shall make a further £98 million available in 1992-93 for the further implementation of Project 2000. That is a large increase on last year's £71 million and shows our commitment to the initiative. That £71 million was almost double the amount of money that was available the previous year. The major part of the money will be needed for the ongoing cost of the 49 schemes that already provide Project 2000 training. Sixty-two per cent. of nursing schools have Project 2000 courses, and we intend, with those resources, to ensure a further development of colleges where Project 2000 courses are available.

We shall make an announcement in April when we have consulted further. Since 1988, we have invested £207 million in Project 2000, which is a practical and clear commitment to ensuring that we have the nurses that we need for today and tomorrow.

Mr. O'Brien: I appreciate the opportunity to make a further point on this matter, because it is important to a constituent of mine who has applied for a Project 2000 course but has been denied it. Will the anomalies in the Project 2000 scheme be removed by the changes that the Minister is referring to? That is important to practising nurses.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman may wish to write to me with the details of the college to which he is referring.

Since 1988, 62 per cent. of nursing schools in England —more than 29,000 nursing places—have been able to change to Project 2000 courses. I regard that as rapid progress and a considerable achievement, and I am pleased to inform the House and the hon. Member for Normanton that we have made available further resources to continue that process of change. I hope that the college to which he is referring will be one of those that joins the new Project 2000 courses.

I shall now go through the Bill in detail. Clause 1 increases the maximum membership of the central council from 45 to 60 and specifies that two thirds of the membership shall be elected, rather than nominated by the national boards as at present, under an approved electoral scheme. The remaining members are to be appointed by the Secretary of State, bearing in mind the need to secure that the members of the council shall include representatives of the three professions of nursing, midwifery and health visiting, and representatives from all parts of the United Kingdom.

The increase in the maximum membership takes into account the increased work load which will be placed on members by the future role and responsibilities of the council, in particular the centralising of all professional conduct investigations at the council. The fact that the majority of members will in future be elected by the professions to which the council is answerable reinforces the principle that the nursing, midwifery and health visiting professions should be fully self-regulating. It means that these professions have come of age in terms of self-regulation.

Clause 2 requires the council to submit proposals with respect to the overall numbers of the council, and an electoral scheme, to the Secretary of State for approval within six months of the Bill being enacted. That reflects the principle that as many detailed matters as possible with regard to the constitution and procedures of the council should be for the professions themselves to determine, acting through the council.

Clause 3 amends the Secretary of State's powers to constitute new standing committees. In future, such committees may be constituted only at the request of the council. The clause places on the council the responsibility of determining the need for a new standing committee and, at the same time, draws specific attention to the requirement placed on the council, in determining whether to make such a request, to have regard to the interests of all groups in the professions which it regulates.

Clause 4 provides for the non-executive members of a national board to be appointed by the Secretary of State rather than elected, as at present. In future, the national boards will be smaller executive bodies with a more limited role and function, directly accountable to the Secretary of State. The clause also provides for certain officers appointed by the boards to be ex officio members of the boards.

Clause 5 amends the functions of the national boards by specifying that they shall approve institutions which provide courses of training for nurses, midwives and health visitors rather than providing or arranging for others to provide courses at the institutions that they have approved. That latter function will in future, as I have already explained, be discharged by health authorities, except in Northern Ireland where clause 5(3) ensures that the role of the national board can continue as at present. The clause also removes from the boards their disciplinary investigation functions, so that professional conduct matters will in future be the sole responsibility of the council. That step is well understood and is important in streamlining the disciplinary functions.

Clause 6 abolishes standing committees of the national boards, joint committees of the council and the boards, and the board's local training committees. Standing committees and local training committees will no longer be appropriate for the smaller executive bodies the boards will become, and the clear differentiation between the roles of the council and the boards will render joint committees redundant.

Clauses 7, 8 and 9 relate to the professional conduct and fitness to practise and will add welcome elements of flexibility to the council's existing powers. Clause 7 gives the council a power to suspend the names of nurses, midwives or health visitors from the professional register held by the council. That is an important step, and is in addition to the present power to remove them from the register. It is intended that the power will be used where a nurse, midwife or health visitor is deemed by the health committee of the council to be unfit, for medical reasons, to practise. The professions have welcomed that power.

Clause 8 allows the committees of the council which deal with proceedings for removal and suspension from the register, to have a minority of members who are not members of the council. That will obviously assist the council greatly in dealing with the additional committee work consequent on the centralisation of all professional conduct investigations at the council. There will be a work load, and to discharge it effectively sufficient numbers will be needed to undertake these great responsibilities.

Clause 9 was introduced following useful discussion in another place. It puts it beyond any possible doubt that rules in relation to proceedings which might lead to removal from the register can make provisions about the giving by the appropriate committees of cautions as to future conduct. There was some debate about whether the powers already existed or whether they should be written into the legislation. In view of the great uncertainty on the matter, we decided it was fair to write them into the legislation. It is another important midway step to improve the mechanisms at their disposal.

It is envisaged that the rules will provide for such cautions to be given in cases where professional misconduct has been established, but is not deemed sufficiently serious to warrant complete removal from the register.

Clauses 10 to 12 are concerned with midwifery practice. Clause 10 removes the requirement for the council to consult the national boards before acting on any report from the council's midwifery committee on proposals regarding midwifery practice rules—an amendment which stems from the fact that the national boards themselves will no longer have statutory standing midwifery committees.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

Since the council will in future be solely responsible for midwifery practice rules and their enforcement through the professional conduct mechanism, clause 11 requires local supervising authorities for midwives to inform the council rather than the boards of any notice given to them in compliance with the rules on midwifery practice. Clause 12 empowers the council to make rules prescribing the standards to be observed by the boards in relation to advice and guidance to health authorities and health boards regarding the local supervision of midwifery practice.

Since the beginning of the century, special arrangements have been made for midwives, and the midwifery committee of the council will continue to play that important part.

Clause 13 provides a reserve power for the Secretary of State—as is usual in such circumstances—to make grants to the council and the national boards towards any expenses incurred in connection with bringing into force the provisions of the Bill, while removing from the council the obligation to reimburse the boards in respect of expenditure on their part.

Clause 14 makes it clear that the council is not required to consult the national boards on any proposed rules which do not appear to the council to be relevant to the boards' functions. That recognises the fact that the council, as the elected body responsible for making the rules, is the proper body to determine what is relevant to those functions. The remaining clauses deal with transitional provisions, amendments and repeals.

Mrs. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Will the Minister clarify whether, in the detail that she has just given us, the regional health authorities will be responsible for funding the policy? If so, regional health authorities will have to decide their priorities, so it is well possible that education and training could come lower down the list of priorities of some regional health authorities because of financial considerations.

Mrs. Bottomley: I addressed that point at the beginning of the debate before the hon. Lady had time to join us. I made it clear that the money available for the education and training of nurses, midwives and health visitors would be top-sliced and held by the regions. We are carrying forward arrangements to make sure that there is a transparency of the resources so ring-fenced and that there are effective mechanisms for monitoring how the money is spent. I was able to tell the House that the money spent this year on pre and post-registration and training for nurses, midwives and health visitors amounts to £770 million. Next year that sum will be £870 million. These are large sums.

The health service has always been a good trainer of our staff. We want to ensure that we retain those trained staff. That is why our work in carrying forward the proposals under Project 2000 are so important. I am pleased to report that what is so elegantly called our "wastage rate" in the health service has never been lower. We are holding on to more nurses, health visitors and midwives than ever before.

As my hon. Friend Baroness Cumberlege said in another place, whereas the average time spent by a nurse in the service used to be about seven years, it has now risen to about 14 years. That is a significant improvement in the way in which we are an effective employer. Of course, it calls into question the importance of post-registration training—an area in which good progress is being made.

This is a short Bill, but a very significant one for the future of the nursing, midwifery and health visiting professions. It provides another demonstration of our total commitment to the future of the professions, and the key role we expect to see them continue to play in providing health care to the people of the United Kingdom. I believe that it ranks in importance with the other two major developments affecting the professions which have taken place under the Government: the establishment of the pay review body in 1983 and our decision in 1988 to implement and fund Project 2000. Not that those are the only examples of Government action to safeguard, strengthen and develop the nursing, midwifery and health visiting professions.

It is essential that those professional groups who make up the backbone of our health service are properly remunerated and trained and have effective and self-regulating organisations to ensure their well-being. It is against that background—because of the value we attach to the nursing, midwifery and health visiting professions—that we have taken such speedy action to implement our decisions on the Peat Marwick McLintock recommendations and have given priority to this Bill in our legislative programme this Session. The professions themselves have welcomed the Bill, and I am convinced it will benefit not only the professions but, even more importantly, the patients and clients whom they serve with such skill and dedication. I commend it to the House accordingly.

5.31 pm

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Mid-Staffordshire): In principle, the Labour party welcomes this important Bill, which has the broad support of the professional organisations and the health unions whose members are affected by it.

The Bill will update and modernise the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979 by remedying some of the defects that have become apparent since then, following the Peat, Marwick, McLintock review of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting and the four national boards. However, there are some matters on which we will seek clarification or assurance.

The Bill is largely uncontentious and we wish to facilitate its swift passage on to the statute book. It seeks to streamline the bodies of representation and accreditation of the nursing professions by removing duplication of roles and removing confusing remits. It will strengthen the representation of the professions and improve the accountability of the UKCC to them.

We welcome the move to make two thirds of the UKCC elected from the professions, as we believe that that will give nurses, midwives and health visitors increased control over their professions. We agree that the centralising of elected representatives away from the national boards to the UKCC will improve the accountability of the UKCC.

We are concerned that the procedure for election to the UKCC, which will be approved by the Secretary of State, should ensure fair representation of all groups, especially minorities, and achieve a regional balance as well. We understand that the UKCC is anxious to achieve that, but

we seek an assurance from the Minister that that will happen. We also want to ensure that provision is made for the representation of enrolled nurses on the UKCC. Although an enrolled nurse can represent any group, it is important to ensure that enrolled nurses are represented as an interest themselves.

We are also concerned that the members of the UKCC appointed by the Secretary of State will include representatives of nursing, midwifery and health visiting from the four national areas. It is equally important that appointments to the national boards include a registered nurse and a practising health visitor and midwife. Baroness Hooper conceded in another place that, in practice, that will happen. Therefore, we see no reason why that commitment cannot be included in the Bill. Furthermore, we want to ensure that those whose appointments are made by the Secretary of State have the appropriate qualifications and experience to fulfil their functions. We also want the interests of minorities, and consultation with them, to be given equal weight with the interests of the larger professions.

With the change of function and responsibility between the national boards and the UKCC, it is obvious that the joint committee and the national board standing committee of health visitors and district nurses are, de facto, abolished. However, will the Minister assure the House that the new standing committees to be established by the UKCC will include committees for the minority professions so that their significant contributions to nursing are heard and they are consulted on the issues that concern them?

Minority or specialist groups are naturally anxious about their status. They do not want it diminished by the Bill. We want to stress that the term "minority" is in no way a reference to the importance of the work carried out by health visitors and nurses in the community, such as district nurses, community psychiatric nurses, school nurses, residential care nurses, occupational health nurses, practice nurses, nurse practitioners as well as those nurses who are working in terminal care. Those people may be a minority in number but they are not in stature.

The Labour party attaches immense importance to the role of primary care and to the nursing profession, which is at the forefront of health in the community. The Labour party is fully committed to health promotion and prevention care. The next Labour Government will have a vigorous public health strategy in which those groups of health workers will play a vital role.

Community nursing is the face of the NHS in homes and workplaces nationwide. Nurses in that sector have to cope with the effects on their patients of poor housing conditions and a deteriorating social fabric. They are the face of the NHS and they play the crucial role of promoting better health through advice on life style, a healthy diet, exercise, alcohol, smoking and drug addiction. The work of midwives in helping mothers and young children and the work of the district nurse in clinical medicine are crucial.

Community nurses are witnesses to the everyday health of the population. Their testimony on it represents crucial, first-hand experience of which those planning for the hospital-based sector must take significant account. Through health promotion and the prevention of conditions that lead to ill-health, those nurses seek to lift some of the burden from their colleagues in the acute sector. The nurses in that sector are the constant face of the NHS with patients in its care. They observe and participate in every moment of a patient's time in hospital. They have to cope with the constantly changing needs of patients, doctors and management.

Nurses are the linchpin of the NHS. There are 500,000 nurses in Britain today on whom we depend for our good health at home, in hospital and at work. I am extremely aware of the important and valuable role that nurses play in my constituency and I want to pay tribute to them.

The financing of the UKCC comes from individual nurses themselves who pay a fee of £30 tri-annually to maintain their names on the register. In the past, questions have been raised about the publication of financial reports and the accountability of the UKCC for its use of funds to those who supply them. We recognise that the fact that the Bill introduces a two-thirds elected representative element to the UKCC means that that accountability has been improved. The UKCC itself has tightened up the process of disclosing its financial status. However, it would be prudent and sensible to place the UKCC under the regular inspection of the Audit Commission as an assurance to the professions of the UKCC's commitment to sound and open financial management. That would prevent such problems arising again.

The issue that is of most concern to the Labour party is the future of nursing education. At a time when it is important to attract more women and men to the nursing professions it is vital that education facilities exist to offer excellent training and a career structure through pre and post-registration specialities as well as courses for those wishing to return to the profession.

Furthermore, it is crucial that those already in the profession—whether students, auxiliaries, enrolled, registered or specialist nurses—have the opportunity to seek the nursing career that they desire through adequate educational facilities, which must also take account of developments such as nurse prescribing and nurse practitioners. Although short-term courses such as intensive care training, bereavement and other counselling, improvement of inter-personal skills, control and restraint—to name but a few—do not lead to specific qualifications, they are still significant aspects of a nurse's training and advancement and give nurses an opportunity to refresh their skills.

The UKCC has now made it mandatory for all nurses to attend a five-day refresher course every three years to maintain their registration. It requires employers to meet the costs and plan the time for courses. Under the Bill, responsibility for the administration of funding for nurses' education will be transferred from the national boards of Wales, Scotland and England to health authorities and health boards.

Opposition Members and the professional and trade union organisations fear that post-registration training and education may suffer. Because regional health authorities will be concerned to prioritise resources, especially in the market-driven planning now prevalent in the national health service, they are more likely to be influenced by financial consideration than the clinical needs of a nursing staff trained in all specialties. They need to ensure that staff stay within the national health service and do not become disillusioned by a lack of educational opportunity and thus career advancement.

Regional health authorities will now be responsible for planning nursing education and will be primarily concerned with their regional responsibilities. They may be

[Mrs. Sylvia Heal]

unable to assess or contribute adequately to national nursing education needs or desires. Furthermore, they may be reluctant to invest in expensive post-registration education funding. There will be no guarantee that their investments will see fruition in the regions because staff may move elsewhere to take advantage of opportunities created by improved training and qualification.

We welcome the Government's express commitment to ring-fence the funds that the regional health authorities will administer but we remain concerned about how long that will last. Education is often the first to be squeezed at a time of cuts. The pressures of the health market which the Government have created mean that balanced books and a worried look over the shoulder at the competition are the immediate concerns of NHS managers and accountants. Longer-term planning, which is vital for education, will not receive the priority that is attached to praying that each financial quarter will be survived without having to close wards and hospitals, cancel operations, incur building repair expenses or experience increased waiting lists.

Many post-registration courses such as psychiatric nursing and health visiting do not last a matter of weeks but require years of dedication and training. We are worried that regional health authorities may not have the necessary outlook required to ensure adequate long-term and national provision and that that will be reflected in the allocation of funding.

The pressures of long-term planning will affect not just post-registration courses. Enrolled or second-level nurses are especially vulnerable when attempting to convert to first-level registration. The implementation of the UKCC's Project 2000 educational reforms includes plans to promote opportunities in nursing by conversion to first-level registration. The implementation of that policy will now be the responsibility of the regional health authorities. Although I welcome the Minister's comments about increased funding, there are currently 96,000 enrolled nurses, of whom at least 35,000 seek conversion, with only 2,430 places available.

When the additional money is spent on training nurses, it is important that every effort be made to retain their services over a much longer period, which may involve making the terms and conditions more flexible for women returning to work. We estimate that, given the current rate under Project 2000, it will take 14 years before all nurses have that opportunity for advancement. The regional health authorities must be aware of and able to respond through their educational strategies to the problem of the national perspective.

The Government's assurances on ring fencing are welcome but, unfortunately, inadequate. The commitment to ring fence for as long as necessary, as Baroness Hooper said in another place, will allow the Secretary of State arbitrarily to decide that, if he wishes to allocate the funds to some other project, he could deem the necessity to have ceased. Ring fencing needs to be enshrined in the legislation to prevent the funds from being diverted by regional health authorities or the Government. If the Minister believes that education in nursing is a vital investment in the profession and the nation, she will ensure that those funds remain for education only and will strengthen the Government's commitment to ring fencing.

The situation of nurses in opted-out trusts is of particular concern, as trusts are not obliged to provide for the education and advancement of their staff. It will be up to trusts to decide whether to pay for training and permit time off for it. If the Government's plans continue to force many more units to opt out of health authority control, training and standards are likely to suffer. Trusts take a much narrower view on long-term needs than regional health authorities, and nursing education is not even an obligation.

Mrs. Bottomley: What evidence does the hon. Lady have for that suggestion? All the evidence from the trusts is clear: their commitment to patient care and to their staff is at the forefront. For example, Guy's is seeking to tackle the problem of junior doctors' hours. It is a wild and mischievous allegation, for which the hon. Lady has not a shadow of evidence.

Mrs. Heal: Can the Minister give us that evidence? The opted-out units are no longer under the direct authority of the regional health authorities but report directly to the Secretary of State. The regional health authorities will now be responsible for education.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will my hon. Friend explain to the Minister that, in the trust in my area, newly trained nurses were told that there were no jobs for them? In addition, the existing nurses, who were given undertakings when the trust was set up that their posts would be protected, are now being told that all their jobs are up for re-examination and that anyone seeking extra education will soon be told that someone else is waiting to take her position——

Mrs. Bottomley *rose*——

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Minister cannot intervene on me.

Mrs. Heal: My hon. Friend's comments echo the concerns that already exist. Ministers regularly say that the opted-out units are independent, so the Minister cannot then argue that they are part and parcel of the structure. The health service is being fragmented.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady has failed to understand that the ring-fenced money held by the regions is for the trusts or directly managed units. Therefore, if such a cynical interpretation of the motivation of those committed professionals who are carrying forward the first wave of trusts were to apply, it would be irrelevant because the resources are ring fenced by the region and the trusts would be at no disadvantage. That cynical interpretation of the commitment of all those dedicated professionals who are carrying forward the first wave of trusts is so bitterly resented by the health service, which is why the Labour party has lost all credibility with the health professionals.

Mrs. Heal: Despite what the Minister has said, we are not embarrassed by our policy on health—far from it. We are saying that, under the legislation for the trusts, there is no obligation for them to train, despite what the hon. Lady has said.

Mr. O'Brien: May I substantiate my hon. Friend's point? I referred to the example of St. James's college in Leeds, which is a trust-funded college. It now discriminates against trained nurses taking the Project 2000 scheme. My hon. Friend has evidence. A person who is prepared to be named—I shall give the information if

called to do so—has told me about the discrimination on training in a trust hospital in Leeds. The evidence is there and my hon. Friend is right to bring the matter to the attention of the House.

Mrs. Heal: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Where is the evidence?

Mrs. Heal: My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) has already said that the information is there.

We are concerned about nurse education, which is why we believe that it will be crippling for the NHS and for the nation's health if, in years to come, we have poorly trained nurses who leave the profession because they are denied the opportunity of advancement and the capacity adequately to treat patients. Training does not make cash as extra-contractual referrals do, but it is an investment in Britain's health. The problem is that the Government will let opted-out units opt out of training and education. That will not happen under a Labour Government because units will not opt out.

We welcome the Bill and support it in principle. The desire to modernise the UKCC and the national boards, and to condition them for the 1990s is uncontentious and is supported by the Opposition, by the professional organisations and by the health unions. The Bill is a commitment to nursing and to the esteem in which the professions are held throughout the country. We are concerned about some issues and we may wish to raise them again later in the Bill's progress to safeguard the position of all nurses throughout the 1990s.

5.51 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's announcement about Project 2000 and its funding. I vividly recall speaking at a meeting of nurses when Project 2000 was first announced. Although nurses were delighted by the Government's saying that they intended to implement the proposals, there was understandably some doubt about whether resources would be made available for that. The Government have lived up to their word all the way along, and this afternoon my hon. Friend has said that the Government are backing Project 2000 with increasing amounts.

I venture to speak on the Bill, first, because I have a general interest in health and, secondly, because I am a lay member of the General Medical Council, a self-regulating professional body which has much in common with the United Kingdom Central Council as it will be and as it has been.

It may be something of a cliché to say that some features of our country are the envy of the world, and it may not always be true. However, it is undoubtedly true in respect of both hospital and community nursing. It is commonplace to hear anyone who has been looked after by nurses expressing the highest praise for their diligence and sympathetic care, whether in hospital or in the home. I personally endorse that sentiment, having spent time—happily only a day—during the recess in hospital as a patient.

Our nurses are very much in demand in the United States, in Commonwealth countries and in the middle east, and they do wonderful work in parts of the third world. The reason is simple. They have a high standard of education and of professional performance, which is what the Bill is all about.

The Bill simplifies and improves the systems of nursing education and of disciplinary procedures for the purpose of imposing and maintaining the highest possible professional standards. I wish to comment on two matters. First, the UKCC will continue to deal with professional misconduct, unlike the General Medical Council whose brief is to deal with serious professional misconduct. The definition of those two terms is a matter for discussion, to be decided by the respective councils and, if necessary, the courts.

Hitherto, the only power that the UKCC had in such cases was erasure from the register. As the Minister has explained, the Bill adds the possibility of suspension and, since the discussion in another place, the sanction of a caution. That is entirely admirable, because there are bound to be cases in which suspension and a caution will be more appropriate than complete erasure.

There is another dimension. As one of the two lay screeners on the General Medical Council, I see letters of complaint about doctors on which the council is unable to act. The reply to the complainants explaining why the council is unable to act has to be approved not only by a medical member of the council, but by one of the two lay screeners. I see a number of complaints that do not come near serious professional misconduct. Under the present powers, the GMC is unable to deal with them, yet the complaint, sometimes about one incident and sometimes about a series of incidents, may demonstrate that the doctor's behaviour is below the standard that patients are entitled to expect. At present, the GMC cannot deal with such a case. The GMC is addressing the problem under its performance review and my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that various proposals are under discussion and are likely to appear before the House in due course.

I cannot see that the Bill addresses a similar issue with regard to nurses, I am not talking about a specific offence of commission or omission, but about a nurse whose performance is simply not up to scratch. If that is the case, neither erasure nor suspension would serve any purpose, and a caution would help only if it were accompanied by more positive measures. What is needed is a mechanism for reviewing the nurse's performance, and for proposing and supervising some means of improvement.

One other clear difference between doctors and nurses is the fact that a doctor, once qualified and registered, is free to practise at any time regardless of whether he or she has been in regular practice and has kept up to date with medical developments. An example well known to the House is the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) who, as I understand it, could put up his plate as a general practitioner tomorrow morning despite the fact that he may not have seen a patient and certainly has not practised for 20 or 25 years. I hasten to add that he has made it clear that he has no intention of doing so. As an officer of the Hong Kong group, I might be tempted to consider other ways in which the right hon. Gentleman's talents might be directed—although you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might feel that that was a little outside the scope of the Bill.

It is, rather worrying that what I have described could happen. Let us suppose that a nurse who is trained, qualified and practising leaves the profession to raise a family and returns to it after an interval of some years. As

[Mr. Roger Sims]

I understand it, in the nursing profession there is a clear requirement that, on re-registering, a nurse must satisfy the UKCC every three years that she has kept her skills and knowledge up to date. That appears to me to be admirable, and it is an example from which the GMC could perhaps learn.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I have great sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point and if, in future, he seeks to amend the Bill to suggest some form of retraining, I shall be happy to support his amendment. Having said that, there is a mild barrier in the case of doctors. In practice, if not in law, anyone seeking to go back into general practice who had not undertaken the necessary training period would find it virtually impossible to get another job. I agree absolutely that, in theory, anyone could return to general practice, but in practice he or she might find very real barriers.

Mr. Sims: The hon. Lady is quite right, and I remind her that I used the words "in theory", although I think that there would be nothing to prevent a doctor from starting up in private practice. Clearly, it would be difficult to get a job within the health service, but we know that there are plenty of doctors in private practice.

I should like also to comment on the lack of lay involvement proposed for the UKCC. The UKCC is to be composed of 60 members in all, 45 of whom will be elected and 15 of whom will be appointed by the Secretary of State. But clause 1 gives the Secretary of State pretty clear guidance on the sort of appointments that he should make, and it looks likely that all 60 will be members of the nursing profession of one sort or another. That compares with a GMC of 100-plus members, of whom a dozen are lay members.

I fully understand the anxiety that all branches of the profession should be represented on the council and that there should be the right sort of geographical spread. My own involvement makes it difficult for me to be entirely objective about this, but I suggest that there should be some form of non-professional representation on the UKCC. One reason for that is that I think that lay involvement is right in principle. After all, nurses do not operate in a vacuum: they deal with patients all the time. Every one of us has been, or is likely to be, a patient. It is surely right that patients, as users of nurses' services, should at least have a voice on the council.

Secondly, I suggest that lay people have something to contribute to the UKCC's deliberations and work and, although I say it myself, I think that the professional members of the GMC would endorse the view that lay members have a useful contribution to make.

Thirdly, it would be good public relations for the council not to be seen as an entirely closed body. I am sorry to keep referring to the GMC, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is a comparable body of which I have some knowledge. There is a tendency for people to refer to the GMC as the doctors looking after their own, but having worked for the GMC, my own impression is that doctors quite often wish to be harder on their own than lay members might be. Be that as it may, the implied criticism is at least modified by the fact that people know that a lay element exists within the GMC. Whether we like it or not, public image is important nowadays, and I wonder whether it would not be in the interests of the UKCC to consider the benefit of lay involvement, especially where matters of professional misconduct are being dealt with.

I apologise for detaining the House with those thoughts. I hasten to add that my comments have been in a constructive spirit. The Bill seems to me to be entirely admirable. I hope that it will command the full support of the House and will receive Royal Assent before other events intervene.

6.4 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) on her debut; indeed, I thought it rather churlish of the Minister not to recognise that her opposite number was speaking from the Opposition Front Bench for the first time. I look forward to my hon. Friend making her debut as a Minister, and I am sure that that occasion will come in the not too distant future. When I was campaigning for my hon. Friend, I told the electors of Mid-Staffordshire that they would be sending a star to the House; my hon. Friend has certainly lived up to that already.

If ever evidence was needed that we are in a general election year, the Bill before us provides it. Why else would the Government at last be listening to the views of professionals and trade union representatives who work in the national health service, who for years have been giving the Government the benefit of their experience and knowledge of working in the health service, day in and day out, only to find their advice falling on deaf ears?

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), I am sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees. We are well aware of the problems faced by those who have given their lives to working in the health service. My hon. Friend and I have raised their concerns in this place on many occasions. It is regrettable that it has taken the Government until now—as they approach the day of reckoning at the ballot box—to show some belated willingness to take those people's knowledge on board.

For all that, the Bill is welcome and it is to be hoped that the Government's apparent Saul-like conversion to the concept of listening to our NHS professionals will extend beyond the immediate measures proposed in the Bill. Certainly, I know that my constituents—workers, users and passionate supporters of the health service—are looking to the Government to match their own commitment to the NHS.

One important reason why it is to be hoped that the Government's attitude, as demonstrated today, will remain is that the nurses' pay awards are soon to be announced. My colleagues in the NUPE group of Members and I hope that, this year, the Government will listen to staff representatives as well as their own pay review body. I am well aware that our nursing staff are anxious that, rather than the pay award being staged, leaving the health authorities to make up shortfalls of up to £44 million, it should be implemented in full on the due date and fully funded.

The enormous value of the jobs that our nursing staff do should be recognised not only through the words that Ministers utter in this House but through actions to back those words. If the Minister wants to give concrete evidence of the Government's commitment to the national health service, she will announce today, in reply to the

debate, that the Government will indeed fully fund that award and not seek to stage it. My hon. Friends and I look forward to hearing her make that announcement.

The general thrust of the measures in the Bill has commanded widespread support, as evidenced in the co-operation extended by my noble Friends in the other place to get the measures on to the statute book as quickly as possible. The Minister will be aware, however—from the contributions made in the other place by my noble friend Lord Carter among others—that there are still reservations on some issues that many of those working in the national health service would wish to have raised and taken on board by her and her boss, the Secretary of State.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire mentioned some of those reservations. I should like to back her up on a couple of issues so that we may be sure that, together, we have caught the Minister's ear and that the hon. Lady can pass on our concerns to her boss.

For example, the health service unions have expressed concern about the proposed changes to the constitution of the UKCC, to increase the council's maximum membership from 45 to 60, with the specification that two thirds be elected by the professions and the remainder appointed by the Secretary of State. Under that move, although the council would increase its membership, the opportunity to be a representative elected by the profession will be radically reduced. The Minister must recognise that.

Currently, 102 members are elected to serve the national boards rather than the council. It is entirely proper that there should be direct elections to the UKCC, but the Minister knows that the proposed number of elected representatives on the council would deplete representation by more than half. The Minister will also know that the health service unions think that this balance needs to be changed. She should give a commitment to take their views on board.

The Minister should assure midwives and health visitors that their voice will continue to be heard. I am told by some of them that if that does not happen they will feel isolated, unsupported and unable to influence policy. I am sure that the Minister will wish to allay those fears when she replies to the debate. That matter is especially important in view of the transfer of responsibilities for financing nursing, midwifery and health visitor education and training to the regional health authorities. That will mean that the RHAs will be responsible for determining the allocation of funds based on their own priorities and the regional interpretation of education and training needs.

The unions feel that this will create a gulf between policy developed by the UKCC and the implementation of that policy by the regions. The Minister has given some reassurance, which I accept, that she will do everything in her power to see that education and training in the NHS are extended and promoted. However, that does not go far enough, and I hope that, during the passage of the Bill, we shall have a more positive statement from the Minister.

In the context of Project 2000, my hon. Friends were right to impress upon the Minister the problems that are emerging in nursing education and causing a great deal of concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) was right about that. I have been informed by the nursing unions that enrolled nurses are afraid to come forward for the training schemes intended by the reforms, because there is no guarantee of a job to which they could return. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) also made that point. Many have lost motivation and have become demoralised by the fierce and unrealistic competition for the tiny number of places available. The Minister must surely agree that that is scandalous and should tell us the action that she intends to take. She has gone some way by speaking about extra funding, but nurses want more positive assurances.

The Minister must answer the questions that have been asked in the debate. Although in the main the Bill is not contentious, we shall attempt to improve it. The Government are at least listening to what is happening in some parts of the health service, but they have a long way to go to ensure that the people who staff our NHS feel that they have the commitment that they need from the Government.

6.13 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I shall be exceedingly brief, because other hon. Members want to speak in this short debate. We must be making history because, since 1979, I cannot recall a Department of Health Bill having all-party support. That is an astonishing development, but, of course, we are on the eve of a general election. As the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said, it suggests that, as the Government are about to face reality, they are trying to do something in the health service that might command broader support.

I should like to underscore points that have already been made and to stress some anxiety about the Bill. One of the worries is about the proposal to transfer responsibility for education and so on down to local level, with consequent pressure on budgets. Such strain could lead to erosion of the importance of education and related matters. In her response, the Minister should dwell on that, because I am sure that she remembers only too well the passage of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, the consequences of which may yet help to consign the Government to oblivion in the election.

The Minister will remember the lengthy arguments about community care, as will the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), about the ring fencing of community care. The hon. Member may well speak about that in the debate. The Minister and other members of the Government trotted out arguments about why it was not acceptable to have such ring fencing. The most remarkable argument of all from this centralising Government was that it would undermine local democracy. If it was not acceptable to ring-fence community care at that time, how can the Government stand equivalent arguments on their head and rightly accept ring fencing in the context of nurse education?

Perhaps the Minister could say more about the issue mentioned by the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) and discussed in another place—the stipulation that the function of the board in relation to midwifery is included in the legislation. However, a guarantee of the involvement of professional midwives in terms of direct representation is not mentioned in the Bill. Would it not be sensible to redress that? Judging by the Minister's opening speech or by pledges given by her colleague in another place, I do not think that the Government intend to exclude midwives in this way, and

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

it would be sensible to include a provision in the Bill. The Bill commands all-party support, and I do not anticipate a Division.

6.16 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I shall be brief. As a vice-president of the Health Visitors Association, I shall deal especially with the worries of members of that association and those of midwives. A good midwife is worth 10 doctors, a theory that I proved somewhat practically many years ago. Their special skills should not only be retained but fully understood, and I am sorry to say that I see no clear evidence in the Bill that those people will be fully consulted and their needs taken into account. It is pointless to produce glossy patients charters stating that people will have freedom of choice and consultation about the facilities they receive when they do not have access to midwives who are able to transmit their worries upwards and downwards within the profession.

It should be realised that midwives and health visitors are not only constantly learning new techniques and developing their skills, but that they frequently have to change their responses to meet developments in medicine and social care. That puts tremendous stress on the profession and requires a flexible, skilled and trained response from the practitioners in midwifery and health visiting. I hope that such matters will be addressed by the Bill.

I would be happier about the Bill if it were not so clear that the trusts will face great difficulties not only in the immediate future but in the continuing future in relation to nurses who seek further training courses, almost of any kind. In the first wave of trusts, the word "nursing" seems to have almost disappeared from the job descriptions. There are hardly any senior nursing posts listed in the trusts. That bodes ill for proper representation at every level of the professional structure.

The Minister is so reasonable and balanced that, whenever she appears, I know instinctively that the Government must be trying to put over something shady. They would not need such an apparently reasonable member of the House of Commons if their doings were above board. Therefore, the Bill must be looked at carefully. Although we may say, in a slightly dismissive way, that it is a straightforward, non-contentious Bill, it concerns the level of health care, not only for mothers for many generations to come, but for sick people at many levels of the health service, both within and without the hospital service.

In the past seven months, I have unfortunately had a rather close association with the health service as a patient, as the grandmother of a patient and as the daughter of a patient, and with a large number of London teaching hospitals. It is about time that the House of Commons realised that there is no point in bringing forward structures in which we talk about a high level of nursing care if, when it comes to the point, there is nobody on the wards capable of carrying out that level of nursing.

We should be concerned that a nurse can appear at the beginning of a shift, say, "My name is Susan, and I am looking after you," and then never be seen again because, like many others who are brought in in large numbers, she is an agency nurse, knows no one on the ward and is unable to have any relationship with the patients.

Like several of my hon. Friends, although I have a word of commendation for the Bill, I feel that we should be asking for more undertakings. It is nonsense to say that the money for education will be ring-fenced. In my area, the regional health authority is the most placid political lapdog of all the RHAs. It does exactly what its masters want, showing a level of dogma that, were it representing the Labour party, would warrant six-inch banner headlines in *The Sun*. Therefore, an undertaking that the RHAs will ring-fence money for training is not worth the paper that it is written on. Apart from that, I am sure that this is an excellent Bill.

6.22 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): It is pleasant to turn to a considered and measured debate on a Bill that commands general support, after the hype that we heard in the statement by the Secretary of State for Wales about local government finance. It is nice to have an atmosphere in which we can debate constructively the future of some of our great professions, particularly nursing.

I had better declare a family interest, in that my mother was a qualified nurse and for many years was a district nurse in north Wales, and my wife is also a qualified nurse and midwife and has recently returned to the profession after a career break. I know something about the practical problems of nurses and how devoted they are to their professions and patients. I remember in particular during some pretty wicked winter months the problems that my mother and some of her district nurse colleagues had in reaching their patients through snow and drifts.

It is right that we should look, from time to time, at the way in which nurses are educated and trained, and at how they conduct themselves. Therefore, this small Bill is to be welcomed, in as far as it goes. However, one or two points need to be underlined. One, as hon. Members on both sides have said, is that we must recognise the challenges that face nurses, and particularly health visitors, in the current climate in the NHS.

A number of health visitors are worried about the direction in which their branch of the profession is moving, in the light of the new responsibilities that general practitioner practices are taking on, which mean that their clinics are taking over work that health visitors used to do.

If those changes mean that health visitors are taking on more responsibility for such things as health promotion, they are welcome. There is an extensive need for health promotion, especially given the recent report published in the county of Gwynedd, which showed a great increase in the number of girls who take up smoking at the ages of 12, 13 and 14. The work done by health visitors in health promotion, especially in this sector, is valuable. If that work can be extended, we should welcome such a move.

The new powers on disciplining of nurses who transgress are to be welcomed. To have just one power, that of erasure, is to take a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Many cases could be dealt with either by a caution or suspension. The disciplinary bodies would have more flexibility in dealing with problems if they did not have to go to the full extent of erasure. The morale of nurses would be improved if they knew that, for minor transgressions, they would not face the ultimate penalty.

A number of us have rightly underlined the need to look closely at the Government's proposals for the devolution of training responsibilities to regional health authorities and health authorities in Wales. We understand that the Government have accepted ring fencing, but when I looked closely at the arguments advanced in another place, I noticed that we were not told how long ring fencing would apply.

I hope that the Minister will tell us whether it is to be for one year only or for a number of years. This is important for one basic reason—if regional health authorities and district health authorities are to have proper provision for training, it must be planned over a number of years. An assurance on that would be helpful.

I make a final plea. In some cases—this is not necessarily personal experience—I have seen that nurses find it difficult to go back into the profession that they left many years ago to raise a family. Often, they re-enter the health service at grades lower than those to which they should be entitled. It would be useful if the Government were to say that nurses, after a career break, should be welcomed back into the profession, given proper training and guaranteed a proper job at a proper rate of pay and proper grading.

I welcome the Bill, and hope that it will have a speedy passage through the House.

6.27 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), whose contribution I enjoyed. I thoroughly agreed with the points that she made, and in particular with that about full representation of the various regions—a point not made by the Minister. I want to take that up, because it is a question not only of the regions within England, but of the nations within the United Kingdom. Although this is a United Kingdom Bill, it does not explain how it will be ensured that there will be proper representation among the appointments that the Secretary of State makes, to take account of nurses, midwives and health visitors living and working in Scotland. There may be an answer, but we have not yet had it from the Minister.

If health boards in Scotland are answerable to the Scottish Office, I want the Minister to answer this question about funding for training and education for health boards in Scotland. Is it proposed that there will be a difference, and if so, what will it be?

In the discussions that I have had, midwives and health visitors in Scotland have told me of their concern about the changes in the practices that they are expected to undertake. The role of health visitors is being changed substantially in ways they are unhappy about. For a long time, midwives have been concerned about their role being undervalued and diminished by the high-tech treatment given by hospitals. It is essential that training and education give people occupying these positions the respect that they deserve and maintain the status of the profession, rather than diminishing it. The women who occupy most of the jobs in the profession feel that the latter is a more likely result.

When I intervened earlier, the Minister confirmed that there was nothing in the Bill about the section 32 arrangements of the Whitley council. If the Government do not introduce changes to the appeal procedures in the Bill, it is surely important to know when they are planning to do so. It is only weeks before we shall have a general election. I suspect that they hope to introduce changes at a later stage by means of a manoeuvre. If that is not their hope, I want an assurance from the Minister to that effect this evening.

It is pointless to complete a rigorous, expensive and highly specialised form of training if the health visitor or midwife finds that there is no job at the end of it. That has happened recently in Scotland's central belt. Health visitors were told, "I am sorry, but there is no work for you." Surely hon. Members on both sides can agree that the training of health visitors and midwives can be planned so that time is not wasted. In most instances, these people cannot apply for jobs in places throughout the United Kingdom. It must be recognised that they have family responsibilities in their own area.

6.31 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I was content with the Minister's reply when I intervened earlier, especially with the parts relating to the principle and practice applied to those applying to be enrolled for the Project 2000 scheme. The Minister said that, if I would provide details of the constituent to whom I referred, she would take the matter up, and I shall do so.

I have been provoked to contribute to the debate by the position adopted by trust hospitals. The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) asked for evidence, and I will supply it.

St. James's hospital in Leeds is a trust hospital with a nursing college attached to it. One of my constituents—Linda Bichard, who lives in Outwood—wrote to the Prime Minister on 7 January setting out details of her concerns. It is surprising that a letter received by the Prime Minister's office has not yet been passed to the Minister for Health. My constituent telephoned the director of nursing services at St. James's to inquire about enrolment for Project 2000. She is a qualified nurse with 14 years experience, a background which qualified her for a place within the scheme.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: If the hon. Gentleman's constituent is a qualified nurse, how could she be applying for a Project 2000 course? The course would prepare her to become a qualified nurse.

Mr. O'Brien: The young lady wishes to further her career within the nursing profession. She wishes to take advantage of the opportunities offered by Project 2000. If a person is dedicated to nursing and there are further qualifications that he or she can obtain, no restrictions should be placed on the person who wishes to obtain them.

As I have said, my constituent telephoned the director of nursing services at St. James's hospital in Leeds. She was told that her qualifications made her eligible for a position on the Project 2000 course. She was further advised that the decision of the nursing college to refuse to take her and others like her was an executive one. In the Cambridge area, however, a person with the same qualifications could be allowed to enrol. Therefore, there is discrimination. My constituents are losing out because trust hospitals are denying people such as Linda Bichard an opportunity which is being given to people in other areas by the national health service.

When my constituent wrote to the Prime Minister she set out her qualifications and explained that she was

[Mr. O'Brien]

engaged in part-time studies to obtain further qualifications so that she would be qualified to participate in the Project 2000 course. She explained that she was astonished when she was told by the director of nursing services at Leeds that, although she was qualified to embark on the course, her application was being refused. As I have said, she was told that it was an executive decision.

As Linda Bichard wrote, although many people drop out of the course, there are many others who are dedicated to the NHS and to the nursing profession, but are being told that there is no opportunity for them to further their aims within the nursing profession. Like my constituent, I find that astonishing. People wish to gain further qualifications and to help the nursing profession, but because of dogma—in this instance, and executive decision—they are being denied the opportunity to do so.

My constituent was told that she should contact the clearing house in Bristol to ascertain where the decision was taken and where enrolled nurses would be accepted for a Project 2000 course. On 7 January she wrote also to the officer in charge of the clearing house in Bristol. She explained her position and set out her qualifications. She told the officer that she had applied for Project 2000 training at Leeds college of nursing and that the local policy decision was not to accept enrolled nurses as candidates, regardless of their academic qualifications. She told the people in Bristol that she had discussed the matter with several organisations and that they had advised her to contact the clearing office to obtain a ruling. She wrote:

"I understand that this is not a nationally agreed decision and hope that you could furnish me with information on which colleges are accepting E/N applicants and perhaps how many are at present on Project 2000 courses."

Surely the Minister should investigate the case that I have outlined. The right hon. Lady intervened to tell the House that, if my constituent is qualified, she does not need to apply for the course, and that view has been supported by other Conservative Members, but that is not the position in the regions. My concerns are increased because Ministers and Conservative Members do not know what is happening throughout the country. We are being told about the results of Project 2000 which emanate from the Government's policy when Ministers are not aware of what is taking place in the regions.

As I have said, the Prime Minister has been notified of the position in which Linda Bichard finds herself. There is evidence that there are anomalies when applications are made for Project 2000 courses. Among the applicants are people who are dedicated to the nursing profession, people who are qualified and are taking on further part-time studies in their own time to gain more qualifications so that they can be accepted within Project 2000, but who in certain areas are being denied that opportunity.

If constituents of Conservative Members are being accepted on the course while my constituents are being denied similar access, I want to know why. I ask the Minister to deal with that matter when she replies. I am very concerned about it, and I hope that she will be able to give me some satisfaction.

6.40 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I was very pleased with the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal). This is the first occasion on which she has spoken from the Front Bench in an important debate. It may be a short debate, but it is certainly important.

Having listened to the Minister, I have become aware of something else. I want her to listen closely. It seems that, because we are coming up to a general election, the Government have thought again about the word "democracy". Clause 1 refers to elections to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. The Minister may smile, but I remind her that the Department of Health—especially when the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was Secretary of State—has ignored the professional organisations and the trade unions within the health service.

The former Secretary of State appointed people to the various health authorities, but he was not interested in any representation from the community. The Minister looks surprised. She should go to the regions and discover for herself what is happening there. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) recommended that she should do just that. Certainly, in my region I have protested loudly about the fact that representatives from the community have been denied places on district and regional health authorities. Instead, the Government have appointed bosses from industry. We need local representation—councillors, for example. They were elected to such positions until the Government got their hands around the throats of the bodies and destroyed democracy. Now the Government are attempting to introduce a little democracy into appointments to the UKCC.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire got under the Minister's skin when she talked about the fiddling in opted-out trusts. It was a sore point for the Minister when my hon. Friend questioned whether the trusts would spend money on nurses' training.

I attended a meeting of my local community health council last week. The House was not sitting, so I had the time to go and listen to some of the comments from those who represent the community on that council. Who was there to give a report? It was none other than the community physician, who talked about his annual report and the issue of community services.

The Government seem to be going down the wrong road in the provision of training for nurses, midwives and others who work in the community. I was a little concerned to discover that the report showed that the Government were not providing the necessary support for community services. They are ducking their responsibilities and giving them to local authorities, which have to provide that support.

I do not think that the Bill will work in the way the Minister suggests. I want the general election to take place very soon, because when the Labour party is in government it will implement this properly, although I shall not be coming back after the next election, as hon. Members know.

There are some good provisions in the Bill and we shall not vote against it today. The Minister is looking at her watch, but she will have enough time to say what she wants to say in response to the debate. I wish to make it clear that I do not accept that what the Minister said would happen will, in fact, happen. I do not accept that the opted-out trusts will spend money on nurses' training.

I have said my piece and shown how I feel about the matter. I hope that the Minister will respond in the right

way and provide some guarantees or assurances, but I wonder whether she will do so. I think that she has been put up for the job this afternoon by that wally—hon. Members know who I mean—the Secretary of State for Health. Nevertheless, I hope that what she has said will come to fruition.

6.46 pm

Mrs. Heal: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have enjoyed participating in the debate on what was thought to be an uncontroversial and uncontentious Bill. My hon. Friends have managed to inject some controversy into the debate. I am sure that, when members of the nursing, health visiting and midwifery professions read the report of the debate, they will note that the majority of contributions have come from the Labour Benches and that, with the exception of the Minister, there was only one contribution from the Conservative Benches. That is not an insignificant fact.

6.47 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. Like other hon. Members, I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) on her inaugural Front-Bench speech. We have become used to her contributions during Question Time, but this is the first time that she has led for the Opposition in a major debate.

This has been an important debate, and I am pleased that it has been marked by a spirit of consensus. The matter is important for the nursing, health visitor and midwifery professions. I felt a tinge of sadness when I realised that this might be one of the last debates in which I participated when the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) spoke. I felt a sense of nostalgia when he spoke.

I wish urgently to deal with a number of matters. First, on the point raised by the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), I visited St. James's hospital shortly before Christmas and I was impressed by the progress that has been made by the trust. Its new day unit for children is a remarkable initiative and is of a standard that any hospital in the world would find hard to beat. There have also been many other initiatives, such as the new £15 million redevelopment of renal medicine, general surgery and intensive care facilities, which began in August.

There is some confusion about the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and I shall certainly study it. It may be that his constituent is an enrolled nurse wanting to take a conversion course, in which case Project 2000 would not be suitable. These are complex matters, but I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I shall personally consider that case.

I am concerned by the comments about the match between enrolled nurses wishing to take further courses and the availability of such courses. There were about six conversion courses for enrolled nurses in 1985; now, there are 225. It is a condition of Project 2000 places that arrangements should be made for enrolled nurses. However, I recognise points made by Opposition Members about the position of enrolled nurses.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire referred to the role of enrolled nurses on the UKCC and we shall certainly consider that further. She referred to the various minority groups, each of which has a valuable part to play in nursing care. Once we look beyond nurses, midwives and health visitors, we take in community psychiatric nurses, practice nurses, mental handicap nurses and so on. We can all recognise, therefore, how easy it would be for the Bill to become enormously bureaucratic and prescriptive, so tying the UKCC's hands. As was made clear in another place by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, we certainly intend that the major interests will be properly represented on the board—possibly as officers in some cases. That matter is one for further discussion, and I look forward to the debates in Standing Committee when the intentions of this important Bill can be made clear.

Much has been said about the important role of the midwifery profession, whose special position dates back to the beginning of the century. The Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979 made provision for the midwifery committee, and that will continue with the UKCC. I assure the House that there have been no difficulties between the midwifery committee and the UKCC. It is important that they should have a proper and balanced relationship, and we do not intend to alter the pattern that was established by the 1979 Act, in respect of the terms under which reference would be made to the midwifery committee. It will no longer be the case that reference will be made to the boards, because the midwives' role has changed. However, there should be proper recognition of their role, and I entirely endorse the powerful words of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on the value of midwives. Few women Members of Parliament would not reinforce those words.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich made a somewhat tendentious point when she suggested that London teaching hospitals were entirely staffed by agency nurses.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I did not use the word "entirely".

Mrs. Bottomley: Then the hon. Lady said that they were largely staffed by agency nurses.

That point was raised in several ways by hon. Members, but there is no doubt that our ability to retain the nurses whom we train has improved markedly. One difficulty relates to those who go on courses and want to be sure that there are jobs for them when they return. The retention rate has risen faster than we expected, and in some cases there has been a mismatch between training and manpower needs. That must be more effectively addressed, but I assure the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich that the number of agency nurses fell from 7,400 to 7,000 in the year 1990.

We also have a record low wastage rate. The length of time that nurses are remaining in the health service is double what it used to be. The points made about the importance of continuing training are extremely important. The UKCC prepared a report on post-registration education and practice and, although it is not yet a requirement that there should be five days training every three years, already many regions are implementing just such a programme. I have been involved in training seminars for health visitors and community nurses in my constituency, and such activities are spreading ever more widely throughout the service.

I strongly endorse the comments made by many hon. Members about the importance of community nurses. It is too easy to think of nurses in an "Emergency Ward 10" or "Casualty" context, but we are all aware that the work

[Mrs. Bottomley]

done by community nurses—in terms of their particular professional skills, autonomy and individual judgment—is extremely important.

Health promotion and disease prevention—to which the hon. Members for Mid-Staffordshire and for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) and others made reference—are addressed in our "Health of the Nation" strategy. I am charged with responsibility for the wider implementation steering group, whose members include—apart from those representing the wider interests of the general public—nursing representatives. They are Beverley Bryans from the Royal College of Midwives, Sally Gooch, from the Royal College of Nursing, and Alison Norman, chairman of the Health Visitors Association.

That steering group is able, powerfully and effectively, to widen the debate from the concern about beds, ambulances and the infrastructure of health care to a broader health strategy. When we look back on this period of the Government's work, we will see not only the reforms and practical improvements—such as NHS trusts and fundholding practices—but the important introduction of the health strategy that prevention is better than a cure. That is the way to ensure that this country continues to combat illness and disease.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) was a little impetuous in referring to the review body. In my non-controversial remarks, I did not intend to draw attention to the 48 per cent. increase in nurses' salaries under this Government, compared with a 3 per cent. fall when Labour was last in power. That will serve as a salutary reminder to all nurses, midwives and health visitors, as they come to reflect on matters in the forthcoming weeks. I make that point only to move swiftly from it.

Mrs. Fyfe: If the Minister is so concerned about fair pay for nurses, why does she support the proposal to do away with the procedure for appealing against unfair gradings?

Mrs. Bottomley: The section 32 question and the issue of appeals are enormously complex, subject to much discussion and difficult to resolve. No one pretends that the present arrangements are satisfactory. The sooner that we bring an end to the appeals, the better it will be for the profession and the health service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) made, as ever, a distinguished and thoughtful contribution. He referred to the General Medical Council, and I thought that many nurses, midwives and health visitors might have a certain ambivalence about the way in which the GMC conducts its affairs. Arguably, our proposals will in some ways steal a march on some of the UKCC's mechanisms.

Nevertheless, most right hon. and hon. Members are aware of my hon. Friend's commitment to the nursing profession. Any who are not will be aware of it when he is able to make further progress with his private Member's Bill, to which we look forward with interest and enthusiasm.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst made an important point about lay representation. When it comes to the establishment of the UKCC, we certainly expect lay representation to play an important part.

This has been a useful, constructive and positive debate. The Bill has an enormously important part to play in reorganising the disciplinary framework, education and training of nurses, midwives and health visitors. I look forward to the opportunity to give it further consideration in Committee. Much work has been done in clarifying the Bill, and I have no hesitation in commending it to the House with great enthusiasm.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

NURSES, MIDWIVES AND HEALTH VISITORS BILL *[Lords]* [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill *[Lords]* it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of any provision of the Act.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

There being private business set down by direction of the Chairman of Ways and Means for consideration at Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *suspended the proceedings.*

On resuming—

King's Cross Railways Bill

As amended, considered.

7 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I refer you to page 1036 of the 20th edition of Erskine May, which deals with the handling of private Bills? Under the heading "Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading", Erskine May tells us:

"Unlike a public bill, a private bill, if it has been amended, is considered . . . on question put, and to this question amendments may be moved, for example, to secure the consideration of the bill on a later day or its recommittal."

I have raised my point of order in connection with the recommittal issue. I have tabled two proposals for recommittal, which appear on the Order Paper. One raises an extremely important matter relating to possible proceedings by the European Commission in relation to the environmental impact assessment, which has not yet been considered fully by the Committee appointed by the House to consider the Bill.

If the House does not require the Committee to reconsider matters relating to environmental impact which, as the Committee's report accepted, the Committee had not had a chance to consider fully, we may find that the entire proceedings are in breach of European law. Plainly, that should cause us considerable concern; yet according to the selection of amendments, no opportunity will be given for hon. Members to raise the issues involved and to propose a recommittal.

Can you, Madam Deputy Speaker, give us some guidance, and explain the circumstances in which a recommittal could be agreed to? What criteria are used to decide whether a recommittal motion can be considered?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): As the hon. Gentleman and the House will understand, Mr. Speaker does not give guidance across the Floor of the House. The crux of the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman is the selection of amendments for which Mr. Speaker gives no explanation. I can take the hon. Gentleman's question no further at this stage.

New clause 5

PROTECTION OF NEIGHBOURING PROPERTIES

"(1) It shall be the duty of the Board, if required to do so by the relevant owner of a specified property, to carry out the act or acts, referred to in subsection (4) below, required by that owner.

(2) A "specified property" means any property—

(a) in the London Borough of Camden within the land bounded by Euston Road, Midland Road, Goodsway, York Way, Pentonville Road, King's Cross Road, Swinton Street and Gray's Inn Road; and

(b) in the London Borough of Islington within the land bounded by York Way, Wharfdale Road, Caledonian Road, Northdown Street, Collier Street, Calshot Street, Lorenzo Street, King's Cross Road and Pentonville Road.

(3) A "relevant owner" means—

(a) in relation to subsection (4)(a), the freeholder or long leaseholder;

(b) in relation to subsections (4)(b), (c) and (d), the residential occupier; and

(c) in relation to subsections (4)(b) and (c), the business of commercial occupier.

(4) The acts referred to in subsections (1) and (3) above are—

(a) to purchase the property;

(b) to do works to the property to mitigate the impact of the works on the occupiers;

(c) to compensate the occupiers for the impact of the works; and

(d) to provide temporary rehousing during the works.". —*[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Smith: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may take new clause 6—*Environmental Code of Practice*—

"(1) it shall be the duty of the Board and the Company to comply in all respects with the Environmental Code of Practice for the construction of the works.

(2) The Code shall set out—

(a) general and specific requirements for minimising nuisances during the works;

(b) procedures for agreeing work method statements before the works commence;

(c) provisions, including works, rehousing or compensation for owners or occupiers, to mitigate unavoidable nuisances arising from the works;

(d) procedures for enforcing the requirements of the code and ensuring compliance with the work method statements; and

(e) any other appropriate matters.".

Mr. Smith: The new clauses relate solely to the protection of my constituents. In no way do they seek to prevent the carrying out of the works involved, or the implementation of the Bill as a whole. Hon. Members on both sides of the House who want the Bill to succeed can thus happily support the new clauses, securing thereby the protection of people living immediately adjacent to the proposed works. The new clauses should not be regarded as an attempt to prevent the Bill from proceeding, or to make its completion more difficult than might reasonably be expected.

I stress that point because in the past few days a mythology has grown up about tonight's debate. The debate is about the detail of the Bill—the works that are proposed, and their impact on neighbouring residents. It is not about whether King's Cross is the right location for the proposed development.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): My hon. Friend may well be a thoroughly honourable gentleman; I would not lay claim to such a reputation. I am sure that the House has heard what my hon. Friend has said, and that may be his intention, but some Opposition Members consider that the argument should be about the location for the development. I hope that my hon. Friend will not entirely lose sight of that issue—while remaining in order, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Smith: As ever, my hon. Friend has been extremely helpful: his intervention has set our discussion in context. He has been an untiring advocate of the interests of Stratford in connection with channel tunnel traffic, and I agree wholeheartedly with his views.

My hon. Friend has reminded us of the background to our debate: the real controversy over whether King's Cross is the right location. For once, however—to ensure that I remain in order—I shall not dwell on that at too much length.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Would not the King's Cross site benefit the whole country most? Rather than concentrating on the advantages to London and its outskirts, should we not consider what will benefit the country as a whole?

Mr. Smith: I entirely agree. If we were approaching the matter sensibly and rationally, the only important criterion would be how to ensure that the benefits of the tunnel applied to Great Britain as a whole—including Scotland, Wales and the north.

King's Cross, however, is not the perfect location. It provides for existing links with the north-east, but it currently provides for no direct links with the north-west. We have discussed with British Rail the possibility of links between King's Cross and Euston—perhaps by means of a travelator or, indeed, a bus. The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) mentioned that in our last debate. Certainly, there is no provision for links between King's Cross and Wales or the west country.

King's Cross is therefore not the ideal location for the provision of access to the entire country. It is, however, a good location for the provision of access to substantial parts of the country—a fact which must be borne in mind.

Mr. Robert Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does not my hon. Friend agree that, despite all the difficulties that he has mentioned, King's Cross is an immeasurably better location, given that the high-speed rail link will be connected with King's Cross by the year 2005 or, one hopes, long before that? Does he not agree that any alternative would be infinitely less likely to secure for people in the north-west of England, including my area of Merseyside, economic benefit from the channel tunnel? The only alternative that has been mentioned so far is Stratford.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is not necessarily right in making that assumption. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) may want to comment at greater length on that. It would be perfectly possible to link up a new international interchange at Stratford with lines both to the north-east and to the north-west by using the north London line or the Tottenham-Hampstead link. There are alternative possibilities, to which British Rail has not given sufficient thought.

During the debates on the Bill and on the issues surrounding it, I have been saddened by the tendency of some people to portray this as a north-south argument. It is not, and does not have to be, a north-south issue. Obviously I want to stand up for the interests of my constituents, and in a moment I shall explain further how the two new clauses seek to achieve that end. I am acutely aware of the impact that the works proposed in the Bill would have on my constituents who live in the King's Cross area, but I am also acutely aware of the need to ensure that channel tunnel traffic is enabled easily to get through to the north, the west and other regions of the country.

What I have constantly sought to achieve is a situation in which we do not pile everything into an already congested King's Cross—at present the busiest London terminal—in seeking a means of getting through traffic to all parts of the country. I believe that it is possible to achieve that without insisting that King's Cross is absolutely essential as the location.

In this morning's *Yorkshire Post*, there is an article which reiterates a number of misapprehensions about the King's Cross Railways Bill. For example, referring to those who support King's Cross as the terminal, the article says:

> "Without it, they claim, there will be no direct, high-speed passenger and freight rail link from the channel tunnel to Yorkshire and Humberside, robbing the region of the chance to trade successfully with the rest of Europe."

For a start, no one has proposed—British Rail has not proposed, and this Bill does not propose—that freight should go through King's Cross. The question of freight is entirely irrelevant to this Bill, which deals only with passenger traffic, as the Government have confirmed in answers over the past few months.

The *Yorkshire Post* article then quotes the director of the Yorkshire and Humberside partnership, a Mr. George Smurdon, as follows:

> "We have contacted all MPs in our region, urging them to be in the Commons tonight supporting the Bill."

That is fair enough. If one adopts the attitude that King's Cross is the only possible means of providing the north of the country with benefits, one is acting fairly by lobbying in support of it. Mr. Smurdon goes on:

> "I am advised there have been a number of amendments tabled by Mr. Chris Smith, the Labour MP for Islington, South and Finsbury, and these are likely to be viewed as a means of frustrating the Bill."

I hasten to put the *Yorkshire Post* right. On a number of occasions I have made it clear in the House that I regard this as a bad Bill. By the amendments that I have tabled, however, I seek to make it a better Bill and to make it rather more amenable to the interests of my constituents. The purpose is not to frustrate the Bill.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): My hon. Friend has referred to a report in the *Yorkshire Post*. I do not agree entirely with that report, but I should like to refer to the freight issue, although it is not covered by this Bill. There has not yet been any decision as to how freight will get from the north to Stansted. It should be remembered that freight, too, is an issue. I cannot allow this occasion to pass without referring to the concern of people in the north of England about the question of freight. Although I appreciate what my hon. Friend has said, I believe that we ought to express concern with regard to the lack of information about how freight will get from the north to the channel tunnel.

7.15 pm

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has identified a very real problem. We have been provided, either by British Rail or by the Government, with very little information about the provision for freight coming through the channel tunnel. I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for trespassing a little beyond the scope of the two new clauses, but this is an important question. At the moment, we do not have sufficient information or satisfactory assurances about freight. Concern about the ability to ensure that freight can be transported as rapidly, smoothly and effectively as possible from any part of the country to and through the channel tunnel is far more important even than concern about passenger traffic.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): We all accept that my hon. Friend desperately wants to protect the interests of his constituents, and it is right that he should do so. Indeed, anyone in his position would do

likewise. I hope, however, that he accepts that the objections from the north-west and from other areas of Britain are fundamental. If a proper terminus—with all that that implies—is not established at King's Cross, the cost to the rest of the country of choosing Stratford as an alternative, irrespective of the facilities provided, will be very high for people outside the London area. That is what concerns us. We accept that my hon. Friend's concern is genuine; I hope he accepts that we are desperately worried about the possibility of setting a precedent that would be extremely costly to the rest of the country.

Mr. Smith: Of course I accept that my hon. Friend is concerned. Indeed, if I were convinced that locating the terminus at Stratford—or, indeed, anywhere else—would deny the regions, especially the north and the north-west, opportunities that would be likely to be provided by location at King's Cross, I would recognise that there was a national strategic need to ensure that channel tunnel traffic could get through to the north and the north-west. I would do that despite my willingness to fight hard for my constituents and their protection, but I do not think that British Rail has effectively made the case that King's Cross is the only option that would achieve that goal.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said about the need for my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) to defend his interests. In addition to all the arguments which have been employed, there should be no mistake about the fact that this project is seen to be of supreme importance to the midlands, the north-east and the north-west. But there is another argument. We are heading into a major recession—a slump. Major public investment, especially in infrastructure, is one of the ways to effect a recovery. King's Cross would provide some of the employment required but, by opening up more rapid access to other parts of the country for channel tunnel traffic, it would create jobs in areas where unemployment is rising already.

There is always a balance of advantage. I am not saying that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury should not have said what he did, but he underestimates the extent to which the link is viewed as a lifeline by people for whom a deep slump is a serious and immediate prospect.

Mr. Smith: I do not in any sense underestimate the importance attached by many of my parliamentary colleagues to the King's Cross issue. I accept the argument made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) about the recession facing many of our citizens. Indeed, we have been in recession for well nigh a year and there is precious little sign of any amelioration. My right hon. Friend may well be correct in believing that things are likely to get worse rather than better. There is no difference between us about the importance of facilitating business and trade and of ensuring that public works programmes can be undertaken properly.

As regards the Bill, the difference between us is whether King's Cross is the only possible location, whether it is the right location, or whether it may cause more problems than it solves.

Mr. Tony Banks: Before this turns into a domestic row or a family dispute, I remind my hon. Friend and my other right hon. and hon. Friends through him that a proper assessment is one of the things that we lack. That is all that we are asking for. No doubt the Labour Front Bench will be giving us details of that later.

I am no more fighting for the interests of Stratford over those of the rest of the country than my hon. Friend is fighting for the interests of Islington over those of the rest of the country. I suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends that if on this occasion they support the Labour Front Bench on the need for a full inquiry, at least we can ensure that the decision eventually taken is in the interests of all of our constituents and that we are not divided because British Rail will not carry out a proper assessment of where in London the country needs that international station.

Mr. Smith: As ever, my hon. Friend is right. Consider the way in which we have gone about making the decision —use of the private Bill procedure—the changes of mind exhibited by the Government, and the fact that the Government's provisions for the eastern approach and the potential role of Stratford are still unclear. For example, we have not heard what the Government envisage at Stratford other than a station. We do not know how big it will be, what links will be provided to it and how the Government envisage that the station will develop. Many questions are unclear. Had there been a sensible approach to such issues, all those questions could have been put into the public domain from the start. We could have found a sensible way to plan what ought to be a major, strategic, national decision. The private Bill procedure is not a helpful way to do that.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I agree with the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). We appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has a duty to defend the interests of his constituents. However, before he or my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) completely rewrite our party's policy, I must tell them that the commission of inquiry that we envisage setting up after the general election will consider the route from the channel tunnel.

For many of us, there is no dissension about the fact that there is no alternative to King's Cross. It is not the railway management making that statement; I am making it, on behalf of our party. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that I do not do so at the behest of railway management. I spent too many years working for British Rail to be over-impressed with the supposed infallibility of that organisation.

If my hon. Friend feels that there is an alternative, it is his responsibility to tell us how much it will cost, how it will be possible to get from Stratford to Chesterfield, Liverpool, Manchester and all the other parts of the United Kingdom that this great project must serve, and what route the trains would take if we were unwise enough to accept Stratford as an alternative.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Those are tall questions which leave the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) far away from his new clause.

Mr. Smith: I shall be ruled by you, Madam Deputy Speaker, although there are answers to the questions put

[Mr. Smith]

by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). I alluded to some of them earlier when I mentioned possible routes from Stratford to the main east and west coast lines. The answers to questions of cost are included in the studies made by Colin Buchanan and Partners on behalf of the London borough of Newham. The figures that they have come up with show a remarkably cheaper project than the one envisaged by the Bill at King's Cross, where we are talking about a grand total of about £1·5 billion. I must question whether that is sensible expenditure, given potential competing priorities.

I do not wish to trespass outside the provisions of the new clauses which relate to environmental codes of practice—although such issues are not totally unrelated—but my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield made a valid point about public works during a recession. I remind him that, in the London region of British Rail alone, Network SouthEast says that it cannot afford £140 million to fund the renewal of the north Kent line, the £300 million Thameslink 2000 project has been blocked by the Government, £300 million is needed for new Networker rolling stock and £260 million is needed to modernise the London-Tilbury-Southend line.

Elsewhere, £750 million is needed to upgrade the west coast main line, £315 million for electrification of the midland main line, and £400 million for electrification of the trans-Pennine routes. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield is concerned about the importance of getting public works under way and investment in British Rail projects, I rate all those projects above the provision of a new low-level station at King's Cross.

I fear that, if the King's Cross project goes ahead, the £1·5 billion of expenditure will pre-empt a vast amount of other essential work needed elsewhere on the British Rail network.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I represent the other half of Islington. Is my hon. Friend aware that, in our borough, about 17,000 people are unemployed and that there is a massive housing waiting list? There are opportunities for social and housing developments in the area to the north of King's Cross station.

I should be grateful for my hon. Friend's confirmation that the real motive for British Rail's development of the channel tunnel terminal at King's Cross is mainly the mistaken belief that it can gain a great deal of money from increased land values to the north of the station for land which will be used primarily for office development.

Does my hon. Friend not think that it would be better if that money and those resources were used to develop the rail infrastructure? Does he agree that the Stratford option provides rail connections which are just as good, if not better, to the whole country rather than merely to specific parts of it?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is correct. Stratford has the potential to provide links through to Wales and to the south-west which are impossible from King's Cross—if we go ahead with the east-west cross rail proposal from Liverpool Street to Paddington, as I hope that we shall.

I fear that we have strayed from the specific issues of the protection of neighbouring properties and the need for an environmental code. I hope that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will forgive me if I have been responsible——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am responsible for allowing the hon. Gentleman to stray from the new clauses. I hope that, as we have had this preamble, he will now speak directly to the clauses before the House.

7.30 pm

Mr. Smith: I shall accede to your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought it important to ensure that a debate on the new clauses and later amendments did not become a north-south debate. Sadly, that appears to have happened, especially in the pages of reputable newspapers such as the *Yorkshire Post*.

In the debate on the carry-over motion, the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), who sponsors the Bill, commented on the work of Alan Baxter and Associates, who had made alternative proposals showing that, even if King's Cross were chosen as the location for the new terminus, it did not have to be located in the area of King's Cross identified by British Rail. I hold no brief for the detail of the proposals of Alan Baxter and Associates, but they should be given a fair hearing. The hon. Member for Keighley made a number of comments that were sharply critical of Alan Baxter and Associates. He said:

"It might be considered surprising that the firm refused to supply British Rail with a copy of its report prior to publication, even though much of the information it used was obtained in its capacity as consulting engineers to the BR board in relation to a planning application for a location to the north end of the King's Cross site. One may ask what account the firm took of the duties it owed of confidentiality and good faith, bearing in mind that, far from inquiring whether the BR board would object, it did not even say what it was doing." [*Official Report*, 25 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 686.]

The clear implication was that the hon. Gentleman believed that Alan Baxter and Associates was not acting in confidentiality and good faith.

Knowing that this debate was to be held, Alan Baxter and Associates wrote to me on 8 January as follows:

"In the 25th November debate, Mr. Gary Waller, in proposing the motion, made certain aspersions about our professional conduct in developing and publicising an alternative strategy for King's Cross. These we wholeheartedly deny. In particular, Mr. Waller and those advising him seem not to have understood that our proposals are based entirely on information available in the public realm."

I hope that that puts the record straight, and I trust that the hon. Member for Keighley will also put the record straight.

New clause 5 aims to put into statutory force the protection of neighbouring properties that British Rail has indicated orally that it is likely to be willing to undertake. It also seeks a small increase in the buffer zone of properties which need protection and which are accepted by British Rail as requiring better protection.

The purpose of new clause 6 is to set up an environmental code of practice for the conduct of the works. British Rail has said that it is prepared to undertake such a code, but it has not been agreed despite continuing discussions with the London boroughs of Islington and Camden.

New clause 5 provides statutory guarantees for the loose undertakings that British Rail has given to occupiers of homes and business premises directly affected by the

noise and nuisance of the works. It deals with the voluntary purchase of blighted property. It places a duty on British Rail not to purchase all properties in the buffer zone, but only if required to do so by the owner of the property. The largest owner of property in the buffer zone is the London borough of Islington, which will not want to yield valuable housing stock. *[Interruption.]* The sedentary interruptions of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) about the enormous potential public cost do not carry the weight that perhaps he might think.

Mr. Snape: Will my hon. Friend clarify the costs? I draw his attention to new clause 5:

"Specified property . . . in the London Borough of Camden within the land bounded by Euston Road, Midland Road, Goods Way, York Way, Pentonville Road, King's Cross Road, Swinton Street and Gray's Inn Road; and"—

in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—

"York Way, Wharfdale Road, Caledonian Road, Northdown Street, Collier Street, Calshot Street, Lorenzo Street, King's Cross Road and Pentonville Road."

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) rightly drew attention to the enormous cost of the King's Cross project, but new clause 5 rather undermines his economic case, as it would surely place a further enormous burden on the British Railways Board.

Mr. Smith: I fear that my hon. Friend is incorrect. The majority of the property within the boundaries prescribed by new clause 5 falls within the compulsory purchase powers of the Bill. The cost of purchasing the lion's share of the area covered by the new clause is included in the Bill that my hon. Friend so avidly supports. The new clause seeks to extend the boundary of the buffer zone by a small amount.

Mr. Snape: I apologise for intervening again, but my hon. Friend should read new clause 5. It demands of British Rail not only the purchase of property but

"to do works to the property to mitigate the impact of the works on the occupiers; to compensate the occupiers for the impact of the works; and to provide temporary rehousing during the works."

My hon. Friend could mop up the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) about public works with this clause alone.

Mr. Smith: I am afraid that my hon. Friend is again incorrect. I shall explain in great detail in a moment specifically what the new clause would do. If my hon. Friend has studied the Bill and the issues surrounding it as carefully as I suspect he has, he must be aware that British Rail has already told people living in neighbouring properties that they may well have to be rehoused at BR's expense for substantial periods of time while the work is carried out. The new clause would merely put into formal statutory terms the verbal undertakings that British Rail has already given. Therefore, the costs to which my hon. Friend refers are already part of the overall cost of the work that British Rail is preparing to undertake.

New clause 5 would provide for the voluntary purchase of blighted property; for noise insulation of the property if the noise of the construction works exceeds certain agreed levels; for temporary rehousing if the noise of the works exceeds agreed higher levels; and for compensation of any costs or financial loss due to the works. As we are talking about people who will live on top of a long-term, large-scale building site, those are entirely reasonable requests to make of those carrying out the development.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): The hon. Gentleman would perhaps agree that the new clause goes much further than he implies. It is clear from the new clause that the relevant owner of a specific property may at a whim decide that he wishes the developers to purchase the property or to compensate him. There is nothing whatever in the new clause to qualify that requirement. The majority of people living in the area now are not living in a haven of peace and quiet. Admittedly, there will be a great deal of work going on, but when it is completed they will not only have an improved environment but there will be rather more jobs than before the works began—a matter that clearly concerned the hon. Gentleman when he spoke earlier.

Mr. Smith: I cannot let the hon. Gentleman get away with that. First, he insults the King's Cross area by implying that somehow it is not a haven of peace and quiet, with all the implications that that remark carried. Of course it is an inner-city urban area, but I invite him to come with me to the communal garden area at the back of the houses in Northdown street, which was created some years ago by the Labour-controlled London borough of Islington. It is much appreciated by the people who live in those houses. It is an oasis of green space protected from traffic with provision for children to play where people can enjoy peace and quiet in the heart of an urban area. The hon. Gentleman is not living in the real world when he claims that the environment of the King's Cross area will be better after the new station has been built than it is now.

After construction, the project will comprise the biggest station complex in the world. The project will involve the clearance of a 10-acre site in south Islington and on the edge of Camden that is currently occupied by three entire blocks of city building. All the buildings will be demolished. A huge pit 40 ft deep will then be excavated across the whole site to take the eight-platform underground station. The foundations will be piled deep for the buildings to be constructed above the station. The walls of the station box will be driven into the ground in sections from one end of the site to the other.

The station will then be constructed. After it is finished, tall office blocks will be built over the whole area. The works will continue for eight years—six years for the construction of the station and two years for the subsequent superstructure work. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that all that and the end result will be a better environment for the people of King's Cross than the one they have now, he should come and talk to them. He will find that they do not agree.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I support my hon. Friend's argument. Does he agree that no hon. Member has ever suggested when a motorway or link road has been built or extended that the people affected should tolerate the noise and disruption, that their feelings and comfort should be disregarded, that they should not have the right of insulation, which is enshrined in statute,and that they should not have the right of purchase by the Department of Transport when their homes are blighted by the proposal?

7.45 pm

Mr. Smith: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The case for people in rural areas who may be affected by a motorway being driven past the bottom of their garden should apply with equal if not more force for people in the midst of an inner city, such as my constituents who will have work of this magnitude carried out at the end of their back yards.

There are three long rows of terraced houses that back directly on to the working areas proposed in the Bill: Balfe street, Northdown street and Keystone crescent. Some 23 houses there have back yards directly adjoining the site boundaries. The pneumatic drills, excavators, dumper trucks, pile drivers and cement mixers will operate immediately behind their small back yards. It is exceptional to have such an enormous demolition, excavation and construction project immediately behind ordinary family homes. Moreover, British Rail is proposing that there should be seven-day-a-week, 24-hour-a-day working on the site. Anyone who claims that that will not have a serious impact on the people in the houses immediately adjacent to the site is not facing up to the awful realities of what the construction site will mean for my constituents.

Indeed, British Rail fell into precisely that trap. In its environmental statement, which was published in early May 1991, its consultants on construction noise said that it was

"not practicable to predict with any certainty levels of noise and vibration associated with the building works at such an early stage of a project. However, general construction and demolition work is unlikely to have a major impact."

We cannot possibly accept that as an accurate assessment of the impact of the works. That was the British Rail position when the Committee of this House concluded its proceedings on the Bill on 8 May 1991.

Mr. Waller: I honestly think that the hon. Gentleman is distorting the position. Of course it is impossible to give precise predictions of how particular parts of the site will be affected at particular times, but British Rail has made it clear that it will include within its protection the purchase of certain types of property, double glazing and temporary rehousing where necessary and that it will respond as and when necessary to assist householders who are bound to be affected during such a major construction project. That is different from saying, as the new clause does, that every householder within the whole massive area should be entitled to require British Rail to purchase his or her property. That is a different and unreasonable proposal.

The hon. Gentleman also distorted the case when he spoke about what is proposed after the works are completed. Most of the works will be completed below ground. I accept that, above ground, an office development is proposed, but a new, generously sized urban park has also been proposed. I repeat that, when the works are completed, the environment will be considerably improved compared with the present acres of dereliction. Unless development takes place, there is no prospect of ameliorating that dereliction.

Mr. Smith: The urban park to which the hon. Gentleman refers is part of the London Regeneration Consortium scheme and it is well to the north of the site to which the Bill refers. That park has nothing to do with what will go on top of the low-level station once the box has been built. The hon. Gentleman is perhaps being disingenuous in citing the urban park in relation to the restitution of the 17 acres of property to which the Bill relates. The hon. Gentleman was wrong to suggest that the area to which the new clause relates is massive; I shall outline the specific area in more detail shortly.

The hon. Gentleman also criticised my new clause for including a right to enable the owner of a blighted property—we are not talking about an enormous number of people—to go along to BR and say, "I want you to purchase this property from me."

Imagine someone living in Keystone crescent who, for reasons of job or other pressing need, has to move. When he puts his house on the market he will have to tell any potential purchaser that in a year or 18 months BR will come along with bulldozers and dig a hole right up against the back fence of the property. He will also have to tell any potential purchaser that that work will continue for the next eight years and that, while it continues, those living in the property will require temporary rehousing. He must also reveal that the noise and vibration levels will be intolerable. In those circumstances, does the hon. Member for Keighley believe that that person will find an ordinary, private purchaser for his property? If he does, I challenge him to come up with the person who would be prepared to buy in such circumstances.

British Rail is the cause of the noise, disruption and disturbance, and I believe that it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that BR should carry the responsibility of purchasing such blighted property. BR could dispose of such property at a later date once the station works have been completed and the wonderful environment about which the hon. Member for Keighley has spoken has been created. In the long term, there is no real net cost to BR, and if it agreed to purchase property, that would offer assistance to individual owners now.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend agree that opposition to the new clause is equivalent to opposing the desire of people in inner-city areas who seek to protect or improve their environment? The hon. Member for Keighley seems to suggest that if the environment in which people live now is not very good, so be it—it can stay bad. People who live and work in the King's Cross area and who enjoy living there, want their local environment improved. BR is not intent on improving that environment, but the new clause will help to ameliorate the bad conditions in which many have to live now.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. My hon. Friend will also be aware that the people of King's Cross have devoted a lot of time and energy in the past 15 years to improving their housing conditions and the sense of community. That effort has been coupled with the good work done by the borough of Islington. Those people have now discovered not only that their local neighbourhood and community will be destroyed by BR, but that their area has been dismissed airily by the hon. Member for Keighley. They will find no comfort in that.

Mr. Benn: I have a lot of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says about environmental considerations. Everyone knows that big construction work brings with it environmental disadvantages. My hon. Friend should consider an area such as the north Derbyshire coalfield, which I have the honour to represent. For many years the local people have had to deal with the problem of mining

subsidence without any of the rights that my hon. Friend is seeking to include in the Bill. The pits have been closed, and with the desolation of the coalfield the people now have to to put up with opencast mining, which presents the most appalling environmental hazards. The one lifeline open to those people is a connection through a rail link, without the congestion of road, to new opportunities. Apart from the development of the scheme proposed in the Bill, the electrification of the midlands line is of fundamental importance to the people of my area.

To raise the environmental arguments to the scale proposed by my hon. Friend would mean that all the work on the new station would be delayed for years and so would the creation of new jobs. The desolation of my area and the environmental disadvantages that accompany that would also continue for years. My hon. Friend is overstating his case. He should balance his argument more fairly between the interests of his constituents and those in the rest of the country who would benefit from the rail link.

Mr. Smith: Two wrongs do not necessarily make a right. I accept that important issues have been raised in my right hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere about the consequences of opencast mining, but that does not mean that we should blithely accept that the environmental disruption on the scale proposed at King's Cross should be allowed with just a few verbal assurances from BR about protection of the people affected. Some statutory protection should be offered.

The new clause would not delay the Bill's progress, but it would simply put into statutory force what BR has already said it is likely to do in connection with noise insulation and temporary rehousing. It should not cause any particular difficulty to BR to accede to the requirements of the new clause. I do not believe that that would disrupt the progress of the work. Such acceptance would provide my constituents who live immediately beside the affected area with the knowledge that they have some sure protection.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that the dismay and concern that has been expressed about subsidence and dereliction in the coalfields has led to legislation being presented to the House to provide the sort of guarantees for which my hon. Friend is now asking? If the new clause is accepted, everything will be all square. If there was no legislative provision for people affected by the disruption that will take place at King's Cross, the works could be subject to even further delays as residents and occupants mounted campaigns to obtain legislation to provide those very safeguards. It would be far more sensible to ensure that legislative safeguards were included to begin with before the work got under way, so that people could feel reasonably confident.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes an effective point. Although I would not wish to be accused by my constituents of hastening the Bill's progress to the statute book, my hon. Friend has made a valid point about the way in which a degree of security and surety for the people immediately affected would make them a lot less anxious about their future.

British Rail said in its environmental report last May that general construction and demolition work was unlikely to have a major impact. Within two weeks, it contradicted itself. On 22 May, it held a meeting at King's Cross to inform local people about the works and the protective measures that it would provide. At that meeting, it admitted that the noise of the works would reach such levels that almost all properties around the site would require double glazing and that many residents in King's Cross road, Balfe street and Keystone crescent would have to be temporarily rehoused for extended periods during the works. That is a major impact, contrary to what British Rail had said two weeks earlier.

8 pm

New clause 5 seeks to set in statutory form the protection for neighbouring properties. It also seeks to provide for a small extension of the so-called "buffer zone" of properties likely to be affected by the construction work. During the Committee hearings, petitioners argued that the buffer zone should be extended because several properties not protected at that stage under the Bill would be as much affected by the noise of heavy construction traffic—up to 400 lorries per day—as properties inside the site boundaries.

In its special report, the Committee accepted the petitioners' case and made it

"a condition of our proceeding further with the Bill that the boundaries of the zone should be extended"—

I stress this—

"in line with the petitioners' request".

The revision that British Rail offered on the final day a year later omitted a row of properties on the east side of the southern part of Northdown street, which the petitioners had asked for. The Committee suggested that British Rail might give an undertaking to cover those properties. In the eight months since then, no such undertaking has been offered by British Rail. If British Rail will not give such an undertaking voluntarily, it behoves the House to insist that it should. The Committee that considered the Bill and reported to the House said that that row of properties should be included in the buffer zone but, so far, it has not been included.

The hon. Member for Keighley may rise later to assure me that British Rail will include that row of properties in the buffer zone, but unless and until we have that assurance, it is important that the House should say, "Hang on a moment, the Committee said that they should be included and they have not been included; the House believes that they should be included within the provisions of the buffer zone." That is the only extension that my new clause seeks to make. All the other properties included under the new clause—the so-called massive area to which the hon. Member for Keighley referred—are already in the buffer zone as a requirement of the Committee. The new clause simply seeks to include that row of properties which British Rail—surely by mistake rather than deliberation—forgot to include.

New clause 6 seeks to establish an environmental code of practice for the works. British Rail is currently offering an environmental code that will cover, first, work methods to minimise disturbance; secondly, procedures for the two local councils to approve work plans stage by stage; thirdly, trigger levels for double glazing and temporary rehousing; and, fourthly, procedures for dealing with complaints and breaches of the code. So far, so good: we must applaud British Rail for at least agreeing with the requirement of the Committee, which reported that an environmental code should be established, and for setting out those basic principles. But that does not go far enough.

which is why new clause 6 seeks to put into statutory form an insistance that British Rail should establish an environmental code.

British Rail has been negotiating on the details for three years with the two local authorities concerned. On the whole, it has been unyielding and unhelpful in its approach to the content of the code. Among the outstanding issues in relation to the environmental code are, first, seven-day, 24-hour working. The two local authorities are prepared to allow noisy work outside normal working hours only when there are clear safety and British Rail operational requirements to do so. British Rail, on the other hand, still insists on the right to programme noisy activities at any time if necessary for the

"efficient and economic construction of major engineering works."

So British Rail is saying that it can come in with pile drivers at 2 o'clock in the morning at will. I do not believe that that requirement accords with any environmental code worthy of the name.

Mr. Tony Banks: It would be much welcomed if British Rail were as insistent on coming in at will with trains, as we could very much do with those. My hon. Friend knows the area better than me but he should stress the fact that many people who live in the area also work for British Rail, and work shifts. That must also be taken into account. Even if the amendment is accepted, massive inconvenience will still be caused to many people in the area.

Mr. Smith: As always, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Many of my constituents who live in the King's Cross area work for British Rail or, for instance, the Royal Mail, and therefore work unsocial hours. They require sleep during the day and I suspect that their lives will be substantially disrupted by the works. The very least that we should be able to demand is that the hours during the night, when most people are trying to get peace and quiet, should not be disrupted by unreasonable work by British Rail. The local authorities do not require a total ban on work being carried out at night, but say that such work should be done only on proper grounds.

The second outstanding issue in relation to the environmental code is trigger levels for noise outside normal working hours. The local authorities want action to be taken if the noise doubles or exceeds a reasonable threshold of 65 decibels. British Rail's latest response to that requirement is that it is simply "not accepted". British Rail really should be more accepting and accommodating of the genuine concern about noise levels.

The third point concerns plant operation and vehicle movements outside normal working hours. The two local authorities want a rule that no plant will be started up for normal work before normal working hours and that any vehicle movements outside normal working hours will be subject to special approval. British Rail's response has been that that is "not agreed". No argument or reason has been given and British Rail has not taken on board the local authorities' reasonable concerns about the movement of lorries and heavy plant, and the starting up of engines and machinery. British Rail has simply said that it does not agree.

The fourth point concerns security cameras. The councils want an agreement that the security cameras mounted by British Rail should be allowed to cover residents' back yards and windows only with the consent of the occupier. British Rail refuses to accept any constraint on where the cameras can be pointed. I leave to your imagination, Madam Deputy Speaker, the real fears of people living cheek by jowl with sites where cameras are likely to be mounted as to where the cameras will be pointed at varous hours of the day and night, with consequent loss of privacy.

There is a further disagreement between the local authorities and British Rail in the current negotiations about the environmental code in relation to temporary rehousing. There is disagreement about the standard of accommodation to be offered. The councils want a specific hotel star rating to be laid down, but British Rail refuses, saying that the fact that it is offering full board shows the standard that it will provide. "Full board" may mean that the premises will have a kitchen and an eating area. All sorts of establishments, from Pentonville prison upwards, could provide that standard of accommodation. British Rail should be more forthcoming about the temporary rehousing that it is prepared to offer.

There is a dispute about the payment of costs as an alternative to rehousing. The councils want British Rail to pay the cost of rehousing as an alternative to actual rehousing if the occupier cannot move for some reason and has to put up with the noise. British Rail refuses to agree. If an occupier has to remain and suffer, he will get absolutely nothing. There is also a dispute about the occupier's access to arbitration. The councils want occupiers to have direct access to arbitration if there is serious disagreement between them and British Rail about their right to rehousing or about the accommodation offered. Again, British Rail simply refuses to allow that.

That is utterly unsatisfactory, as the councils have no right or responsibility to represent private occupiers to British Rail on those issues. British Rail has been thoroughly unreasonable on noise levels, vehicle movement, security cameras, hours of work, rehousing, and arbitration if there is disagreement about rehousing. New clause 6 seeks to say to British Rail, "You have to be more reasonable; you must establish an environmental code and you had better get down to the business of seriously agreeing that environmental code with the local residents who will be affected and with the local authorities which cover the area."

There is also disagreement about action on any possible breach of the code. The local authorities want it to be laid down that, if an operation under way appears to break the code, it should cease while the matter is investigated unless there are overriding safety or British Rail operational reasons for continuing. British Rail insists that once work has begun, it cannot be halted pending the outcome of arbitration. If British Rail gets its way on that provision, it can carry on breaching the code while it delays the argument about whether it has breached the code. That is unacceptable. We want an environmental code for the works and for the protection of the people who will be affected by the works. We want to insist in the Bill, through new clause 6, that the environmental code should be included.

8.15 pm

It is important to bear in mind the fact that the environmental code and the buffer zone need to be defined in the Bill because the Bill, with its specific powers for particular works, will override much standard legislation to control noisy building activities. The constraints

necessary to protect the people affected by the development should be written into the Bill because the normal constraints which apply to most building and development sites will not apply because the works have been permitted by means of a Bill. That is an extremely important point and gives added force to the argument about why a specific provision should be built into the Bill, both for the general protection of neighbouring properties and for the environmental code that is needed for the works.

The House cannot allow the Bill to proceed to another place without proper protection for neighbouring residents being enshrined in it. The people affected have no elected representatives beyond the House. There is no one as their representative to table amendments on Second Reading or on Report in the other place. Those affected are entirely dependent on the House to protect their welfare, their livelihood and their peace and quiet.

It is important for the House to take that need seriously. It is important for the people in the surrounding streets and the houses which back directly on to the massive development site that British Rail will impose on them that we write into the Bill statutory protection and a statutory environmental code. New clauses 5 and 6 seek to do that in the interests of the people affected, and we must consider not only people affected by the Bill, but those who are likely to be affected by similar proposals elsewhere. I hope that the House will consider it important to enshrine that level of protection in the Bill because there is no other place we can expect to do so.

Mr. Tony Banks: I entirely support the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on new clauses 5 and 6. I am disappointed that so many Opposition voices have been raised against his argument about environmental protection for his constituents. It has been more or less suggested—nay, probably stated by one or two hon. Members—that the only reason why the new clauses have been moved is to frustrate the Bill and to delay its passage to the point at which it becomes non-viable. That may well be my intention, but it certainly is not my hon. Friend's intention. I was disappointed to hear my very dear and right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) deploying an argument that I regard as somewhat bankrupt. I wish that my right hon. Friend was still here so that I could say this to him.

Mr. Cryer: Insult him to his face.

Mr. Banks: No. I would be insulting him to his back, because he sits in front of me. I shall make sure that my remarks are pointed out to him, as he probably does not spend a great deal of time reading my speeches in *Hansard* —but then who does?

Mr. Snape: You do.

Mr. Banks: Au contraire. I most certainly do not bother to read them, because I know what a load of rubbish they are before anybody hears them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield seemed to suggest that, because so much blight had been associated with opencast mining in his area—and we accept that—the people of Islington should somehow be prepared to accept a latter-day equivalent. I put it to him that that is an untenable position. I entirely accept my right hon. Friend's argument about the disadvantages, disruption and adverse economic impact of opencast mining. I have been up to his area. I was active during the recent miners' strike, taking support from east London to the miners. We could see for ourselves the deprivation that they had to suffer—both individually, as workers, and in their communities.

I stoutly defend my right hon. Friend's right to defend his constituents from such economic blight, but it is unacceptable to use that as an argument that another working-class area—the area of Islington—should accept similar blight. Labour Members at least should join together to ensure that working-class people—whether in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, Islington or Stratford—are protected. The fact that we are divided in that respect does our arguments no justice.

Mr. Corbyn: Is my hon. Friend aware that, when the Department of Transport seeks to drive motorways or major roads through leafy suburban areas or wealthy, Tory-voting parts of the country, it bends over backwards to provide environmental projects to try to ameliorate the effects of the roads and thus gain people's temporary support to allow it to build them? It is disgraceful that it should not do the same for people living in densely populated inner-city areas.

Mr. Banks: Of course I accept that argument. There is a class dimension here, as there is with all legislation and all the matters that we discuss in the House. I should have hoped that those on our Front Bench could have seen that argument as well. I realise that class politics is no longer fashionable on the Labour Front Bench; indeed, some would say that it is not particularly fashionable on the Back Benches either.

The issue that we are discussing tonight is the environmental protection of working people in the area of Islington. The Labour party says that there will be a terminal at King's Cross—although the Government have said that there will also be some form of terminal at Stratford. The Labour party is agreed that it looks far more viable for the fast route to come through the east Thames corridor—approaching London from the east rather than the south-east.

I put it to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East that, having given those assurances, he should say that it is necessary, in the national interest—that is what he has been talking about—that the people of Islington should be properly compensated for having to suffer in the national interest.

Mr. Snape: I am always delighted to hear about class politics from those who are better educated than I am, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) for that.

On my hon. Friend's second point, I repeat that the Labour party has officially made known its view that, from the point of view of serving the rest of the country, King's Cross is the only viable site. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, there may well be an argument about the particular scheme that is proposed, because, thanks to the Government's obsession with property values and money-making, British Rail has felt that it has had to approach the project from that point of view. But there is no argument about the site. If my hon. Friend intends to reiterate his view that Stratford is the right place, he must

[Mr. Snape]

tell us how the north, the west and Scotland would be served from Stratford and how much it would cost to provide such a service.

Mr. Banks: As you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have said several times, this is not the time to argue that case. My hon. Friend and I have argued it and will continue to do so; I want to keep coming back to it. Unfortunately, however, that is not possible at this precise moment.

I put it to my hon. Friend that, if we are to have terminals at both King's Cross and Stratford, he must start addressing the environmental impact in the Stratford area as well. The Government have said that there will be a station at Stratford, and those on the Labour Front Bench have said that the route should come through Stratford. On this occasion, there is a modicum of agreement between those on the two Front Benches with regard to the route.

I want to know what sort of environmental impact there would be on Stratford. We do not want a line plunging through the middle of the east end. If people in King's Cross may have problems, we in Stratford weigh them by the skipload. I want my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East to say that he will take into account the impact on the east end of having a station at Stratford and a station at King's Cross, because so far that seems to be the proposal—unless my hon. Friend is saying that we should not have a station at Stratford, merely a line going straight through it, which would give us all the disadvantages and not a modicum of advantage.

Mr. Snape: I remind my hon. Friend again of our party's policy. The Committee has been given a comparatively short time—six months or so, as we envisage it—to report on the actual line of route from the channel tunnel. My hon. Friend keeps saying that he wants a whacking great terminal at Stratford. No doubt, just like my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, he will come back to the House with some artfully argued amendments, demanding an environmental impact study in respect of his constituency. That is all good parliamentary tactics, but it does not get us much further with the building of a railway line.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not getting very much further with the debate on the new clause, which deals with environmental matters. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) will now refer to them.

Mr. Banks: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker; I was slightly derailed on that point.

The environmental impact is not confined to King's Cross; it extends way beyond that area—throughout that part of London and to the south-east as a whole. I shall be addressing the new clause specifically, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I put it to you that, given that we are considering such major works, it is difficult at times to confine the debate to a specific locality. The environmental impact on King's Cross itself is fairly easily assessed—although, as I said, that impact will go way beyond the area dealt with in the new clause.

As I understand it, the construction of the low-level station at King's Cross and other works covered by the Bill will involve the loss of 83 homes and the displacement of 326 residents. It will involve the demolition of four listed buildings and the destruction of well over 10 acres of property in two conservation areas. It will also involve the destruction of a two-acre inner-city nature reserve of great value to the local community. A whole range of environmental damage will be caused by the development.

All my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury seeks is some assurance that can be offered to his constituents, and constituents in surrounding areas, that, as far as is humanly possible, they will be protected from the sort of suffering that we know can be inflicted on people by major works such as those proposed.

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend has correctly identified the scale of the British Rail proposal and the enormous impact that it will have over a substantial area but has omitted to include in his list of important environmental issues the amount of traffic that will be generated by the new station. In evidence submitted to the Committee at a very late stage, even the Department of Transport estimated that, at peak hours, traffic in the area is likely to increase by some 70 per cent.

My hon. Friend undoubtedly knows that King's Cross is already one of the most congested spots in London—both above ground and below ground—yet, as a result of the present proposals, we are now to have a 70 per cent. increase in surface vehicle traffic in the immediate area. That will place an intolerable burden on the area and will clog up a large segment of London's traffic network.

Mr. Banks: That is precisely why my hon. Friend has tabled the new clauses. I hope that the House will accept them. I had not forgotten the point that my hon. Friend makes: I had just not reached it.

A 70 per cent. increase in traffic flow along the Euston road during evening peak hours should concern not only my hon. Friend's constituents but all Londoners who are slowly being poisoned by traffic. The capital city, certainly in July, regularly enters a dangerous phase of photochemical smog. The Government have only three monitoring stations in the whole of Greater London. One of them is in my constituency, for whatever good that does, there is another at Vauxhall Bridge road and I think that there is one in west London.

Photochemical smog is one of the greatest environmental hazards faced by the capital city.

8.30 pm

Mr. Corbyn: Is my hon. Friend aware that London has record levels of serious asthmatic conditions among young children, that they are getting worse year by year, and that they are directly related to the volume of traffic and exhaust emissions? Areas such as my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) are among the worst sufferers in the country.

Mr. Banks: I understand and accept my hon. Friend's point. One of the matters affecting my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury rather than my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is the destruction of the two-acre inner-city reserve park. Hon. Members who saw the excellent programme on television a few nights ago will appreciate how much work has gone into the building of that nature reserve.

It is all very well for hon. Members to disparage and sneer at the lack of rural attractions in King's Cross, but the people there are doing their best to introduce a little rural pleasure to that area of inner-city deprivation, and they should be supported. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East will make sure that they get such support from a Labour Government. They are entitled to ask for it from Labour, because they have been loyal Labour supporters and voters for many years. They expect Labour, in opposition and, more important, in government, to protect their interests. Up to now, they are not getting that support.

I have an almost bottomless reserve of affection for my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East, but I have just spotted the bottom of that reservoir, and it is not a pretty sight. I expect him to say that the clauses are appropriate and that Labour will give people the support they expect. If they add to the cost of the scheme, the money is well worth paying, in view of the national and international importance of King's Cross and Stratford. The people of Islington have a right to expect a great deal of support.

Mr. Snape: I am sorry that the bottomless well of affection to which my hon. Friend refers has proved to be a mirage, if I may mix metaphors. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is a shadow Treasury Minister and I have no doubt that on the accession of a Labour Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) could make representations about the amendments to him. I do not know whether he will get the same reply in six months as he is getting tonight.

Mr. Banks: I accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is in an interesting position—even more interesting than that of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East. If there is an additional cost as a result of accepting the new clauses, it is well worth paying in view of the agreed national significance of the scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has said that the additional cost will be minimal. I am prepared to accept that, and I am surprised that two Front Benchers are not prepared to trust each other sufficiently to accept it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury seeks a specific tightening of the assurances that have so far been given by British Rail. I do not trust British Rail, which, throughout the proposal, has attempted to con the House. It cleverly exploited the differences in the Opposition by suggesting to us that, if King's Cross is not chosen, great damage will be caused in the north-east and the north-west.

People who want to go straight from Paris to the north-east and the north-west do not care whether they pass through King's Cross or Stratford. They just want to get to Newcastle, Manchester, Glasgow or Edinburgh as fast as possible. Many of the people who want to go from Paris or Rome to Edinburgh, Manchester or Glasgow will probably fly, because it is a hell of a long journey from Paris to Peterborough—it will take about eight hours, even with all the links working—and longer to go to Manchester or Glasgow. That matter is not often considered when looking at the vexed question of the fast channel link and the King's Cross railway.

My hon. Friends from north of Watford seem to have swallowed British Rail's argument hook, line and sinker, and they have been sorely deceived. That is why I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East, when he is in an elevated post as a Transport Minister, will back away from the bald statement that Labour is totally committed to King's Cross. With some alterations, amendments and investment in the area of Stratford, we can get all the links that my hon. Friend speaks about, without any need to go into King's Cross.

Mr. Snape: How?

Mr. Banks: I would like to tell my hon. Friend how, but I can see that I am risking your anger, Madam Deputy Speaker. If I had to choose between my hon. Friend's anger and yours, I would risk the anger of my hon. Friend any day of the week.

Mr. Snape: I shall not ask my hon. Friend to make that choice.

How quickly could one travel by rail from Stratford to Birmingham, and will my hon. Friend compare that with the travel time from Stratford to Doncaster? My hon. Friend might get a spark of interest from the Chair if he concentrated on the latter rather than the former.

Mr. Banks: I shall look carefully at the trip to Doncaster. I do not have a timetable with me to work out the travel time. I have made it clear that additional investment will be needed in east London so that the link can be made. People who wish to travel to Doncaster do not need, or may not even want, to go through King's Cross. There are some dangers in the King's Cross area. Did not a former DPP experience one of them for himself? I would not like to expose my hon. Friend to such temptation, although I know that he would resist it with great aplomb.

The issue relates to how we can protect the people who live in King's Cross from the real impact of such a major development. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, it will involve six years of construction with 24-hour, seven-day working. Would any hon. Member like to be in close proximity to that level of work? It is outrageous. We do not have many major developments these days, and will not do so again until we get in a Labour Government, but many of us have known the problems associated with such developments.

All that my hon. Friend is asking is that the people who will be closely affected be given by British Rail an assurance, on which they can depend, that they will get the compensation, the consideration and the treatment they deserve, which will ensure that they will suffer the least inconvenience while this massive, international, highly significant scheme is going ahead in the national interest. Why should they be asked to make all the scacrifices? It is easy for hon. Members to minimise this—they will not have to live next door to such a development.

The acceptance of these new clauses, far from holding up the progress of the Bill, will speed it up. I am almost arguing against my objectives, so perhaps I should vote against the new clauses. I can see the people of King's Cross supporting the development if they are given these assurances, although I know that those in the area who are interested in the strategic argument realise that King's Cross is the wrong place for the second international station.

[Mr. Banks]

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury will intervene in my speech to tell me to what extent new clause 6 could be affected by the requirement from the European Commission for a proper environmental impact assessment. By that, I do not mean the environmental impact statement about which the Minister talks. There is a big difference between a statement attached to a private Bill and an environmental impact assessment carried out by someone who is independent of the promoters. Would the EC requirements give any material benefit to my hon. Friend's constituents?

Mr. Chris Smith: I addressed the issue of the European Commission and its view of the inadequacy of the environmental impact assessment work that has so far been done on the King's Cross proposal when we debated the motion to carry over the Bill. The EC strongly made the point that it was wrong to divorce consideration of the environmental impact of the station from consideration of the environmental impact of the line that gets to the station. That view may still hold.

As I understand it, the EC is still very much of the view that the British Government and British Rail have yet to accord with the provisions of the unanimously agreed directive that the Government signed on the importance of a proper, thorough environmental impact assessment of the works that are proposed at King's Cross. The environmental code to which my hon. Friend has referred will not help in that respect, but it might at least be an earnest of intent.

Mr. Banks: I am glad that my hon. Friend has again spelt this out: it is something to which our Front-Bench team should listen with rapt attention. If the EC says that the two should be taken together—the link and the international station—how can the Labour Front Bench spokesman say that we are already committed to the station at King's Cross but that we shall look at the link? That is the point. The two must be taken together and, as far as I am aware, the Labour Front-Bench team supported the EC, so there is an inconsistency here.

However, I do not want to be inconsistent in my approach, so I shall return speedily to new clause 6. The requirements in it are perfectly reasonable. My hon. Friend has given assurances that he is not trying to use new clauses 5 and 6 to hinder the Bill. I accept that, as should all right hon. and hon. Members, on both sides of the House. My hon. Friend has made the point, and I have underlined more than once, that all he is seeking is effectively to enshrine within the Bill the assurances given by British Rail to the people who live in that area and to the two local authorities.

I would not put it past British Rail to say something to a person's face and then do something completely different behind his back. We know that it is getting desperate with this scheme. At times, I think that it would like to see the scheme hit the buffers, because office development is not as profitable now as it was when the scheme was first mooted.

8.45 pm

Nothing surprises me about British Rail, so it would not surprise me if, having led us along this path and let us waste our valuable time, just as it wasted the time of that valuable Committee, it suddenly decided to announce that it was not going ahead with the scheme anyway, because it was no longer economically and commercially viable. In the end, we shall hold the Government responsible for such a fiasco if it comes about, as they have effectively washed their hands publicly, although no doubt they have said a number of different things privately, of the scheme.

If we have learnt nothing else during this long, protracted and painful process, we have at least learnt that the private Bill procedure is no way to build a railway or to get involved in significant projects. That is a broader issue, so I shall end merely by saying that these new clauses are reasonable in their wording and have been reasonably argued, if not by me then by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. I commend them both to the House.

Mr. Waller: I completely absolve the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) of any suggestion that he is not acting in good faith. On the contrary, he is clearly acting in what he sees to be the best interests of his constituents—that is what we are all elected to the House to do—and he deserves every praise for that.

Let me make it clear to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) that British Rail is committed to this scheme. It is important not only to people in the north of England and in Scotland and, more particularly, to business and industry in the north but to commuters in other parts of the country and in London and the south, who will enjoy considerable benefits when the scheme is completed. Commuters north of London will have a better service into St. Pancras than that which they enjoy to King's Cross. There will also be a benefit to travellers north or south of London who want to cross the capital and who will be able to reach a wider range of destinations without changing trains.

Such an advantage in transport infrastructure is crucial to the future of the country. British Rail has declared its commitment to it and has proceeded with the Bill in spite of a very lengthy series of stages, particularly the Committee stage under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). It was the longest Committee stage of any private Bill since that which led to the construction of the Great Western railway in the last century.

Having said one or two favourable words about the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, I am afraid that I must disappoint him because it is not possible for the promoters to accept his new clauses. New clause 5, which relates to the protection of neighbouring properties, would confer special rights on owners or occupiers of property in the vicinity of the proposed works. Those owners and occupiers of the land that would be subject to the powers of compulsory purchase to be conferred by the Bill are already protected under the general compulsory purchase code.

In addition, the British Railways Board has undertaken to provide further protection for owners and occupiers of properties in the areas affected by the proposed works. That protection relates to the circumstances of each case. It is important that there should be a degree of flexibility, which perhaps the new clause does not provide. That would include the purchase of certain types of property, double glazing and temporary housing. It is a fact that many properties are either unaffected or affected hardly at all. It would be unreasonable to expect—this is what the

new clause provides—that any of those householders could require British Rail to purchase their properties regardless of the circumstances.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that properties that may not be immediately adjacent to the building site may be severely affected by the noise generated by work taking place on the site, especially by the movement of heavy plant and vehicles in the immediate area of the site? Does he accept also that the Committee said that the buffer zone should be extended beyond the point which British Rail had originally intended? Does he agree that British Rail has failed to provide for a full extension of the buffer zone as requested by the Committee?

Mr. Waller: It is correct that the Committee asked British Rail to consider an extension to the area covered by the voluntary purchase scheme, but it did not insist on that. It was concluded that such an extension was not really justified.

British Rail has not been dogmatic in any way in the approach that it has adopted to those who do not live within areas in which construction will take place. Considerable compromise has been allowed for, and discussions will continue to take place.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is incorrect when he says that the Committee did not insist that the buffer zone should be extended. Part of page 17 of the report read:

"We consider it fair that the boundaries of the zone should be extended in line with the petitioners' request."

It added:

"We therefore make it a condition of our proceeding further with the Bill that the promoters should give an undertaking to do this."

That appears to be an insistence that that should happen.

Mr. Waller: I do not have the Committee's report in front of me. I can say, however, that it is obvious that the Chairman and other members of the Committee would not have allowed the Bill to emerge from Committee unless the promoters had satisfied them that they had met satisfactorily the conditions that had been imposed. The fact that the Committee allowed the Bill to proceed speaks for itself.

Mr. Smith: This is an extremely important matter. It relates to a specific row of houses on the east part of the southern section of Northdown street. That row of houses was included in the petitioners' requests. Therefore, the Committee's report referred specifically to the houses. They are not, however, included in the area that British Rail agrees is affected. That is the point at issue. British Rail has so far failed to accord with the requirement of the Committee.

Mr. Waller: I am not in a position to comment specifically on the row of houses to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I shall ensure that the promoters write to him about the matter. I hope that they are able to satisfy him that they have taken account of the concerns expressed by the Committee. As I said, the Bill was passed by the Committee. The fact that it has returned to the House speaks for itself.

The further protection that is required by the new clause—it would be in addition to what has already been offered—would impose ill-defined and unduly burdensome obligations in relation to many properties that may or may not be affected by the Bill. The protection that has already been offered, when taken with the compensation code, is exceptionally generous for the owners and occupiers of affected properties.

The promoters have to take account of other considerations. I do not think that it is a wise use of public funds—that is essentially what we are discussing—to require the promoters to purchase a substantial number of unaffected properties at the whim of the owners. The requirements to carry out works of mitigation, to provide compensation and to provide temporary rehousing in undefined circumstances are examples of precisely the sort of loose drafting that would ensure future argument or litigation. New clause 5 would provide scope for argument to continue in the courts for a long time rather than providing the go-ahead for a development which is needed badly and which would advantage people in London as well as those in other parts of the country.

New clause 6 is also unacceptable. It would impose upon the promoters a duty to comply with an environmental code of practice which is frankly unnecessary. The promoters are in the process of agreeing a detailed code of practice bearing on the proposed works with the London boroughs of Camden and Islington, which are the local authorities concerned. There is no prospect—this is what the hon. Gentleman implied—that British Rail will carry out whatever works it desires at will. Indeed, it is still negotiating with the local authorities. With good will on both sides, I think that a fair agreement can be negotiated.

The present position is that British Rail has put forward its latest proposal and the ball is in the local authorities' court. No doubt they will be responding shortly.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman speaks of good will on both sides. I am sure that progress could be made if good will were to be shown on both sides. Negotiations have been taking place for three years and precious little good will has been shown by British Rail. I went into a series of issues in some detail for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, and it is clear that he was not paying much attention. British Rail has been obstinate and obdurate on many issues. He must prevail upon it to show much more good will in the negotiations than it has displayed hitherto.

Mr. Waller: The code covers the various matters that are set out in new clause 6. It is intended that its provisions will be incorporated in the contracts to be entered into between the promoters and their contractors. The local authorities, supported by the hon. Gentleman, have made demands which I think would not be regarded as in the interests of the wider community and of the taxpayer if they were taken at face value. British Rail has statutory obligations, which extend beyond the interests of the people living in the immediate vicinity.

The code is not a static set of commands with words carved in stone. It will continue to be subject to discussions between the promoters and the local authorities, and there will be consequential updating and revision. I regret that that is something that is not provided for in the proposed environmental code in new clause 6. British Rail's code goes considerably further. For instance, it seeks to control noise and other disturbances, such as dust, at source. It provides for control of methods of working and the noise

[Mr. Waller]

level permitted. Of course, those noise levels are lower at night and at weekends than during the normal working day.

Any attempt in the Bill to set out the contents of the code, so rendering them static, would be undesirable because it would remove that element of flexibility which would benefit local inhabitants and which is crucial if the code is to be capable of revision as and when necessary. It is not the sort of provision that could be sensibly included in an Act of Parliament in the limited and ill-defined manner proposed in the new clause, without raising again the prospect of future argument and litigation. As I said only a few moments ago, the prospect of perpetual litigation is something that no one with the interests of the area at heart could contemplate with equanimity.

9 pm

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman appears to be under the impression that the environmental code specified in new clause 6 is an inflexible instrument. It is not. If the hon. Gentleman had read the new clause, he would know that it expresses the content of the proposed code in extremely general terms. It does not lay down in any restrictive manner the sorts of matters that should be included. It simply ensures that a code will be established and that it will deal with some of the important issues. The hon. Gentleman should realise that, far from being an inflexible instrument, the environmental code will be of a general nature and will not restrict British Rail in the way that he suggested.

Mr. Waller: I read new clause 6 before the debate, and I have just read it again. It does not appear to suggest anything other than a static document with no scope for the continuing co-operation—which I hope will be a feature during the construction work—between the local authorities, the contractors, the promoters and the local residents.

I wish to say a word about the issue of traffic, which has been specifically mentioned. The hon. Gentleman spoke as though there would be a dramatic increase in traffic, to the disadvantage of the area. That matter was closely considered and it was summarised in the environmental statement published in May 1991, which concluded:

> "The effects on road traffic are generally positive. Traffic flows on the major roads will increase but the proposed road improvements will achieve compensatory improvements and in addition a large number of residential roads will experience significant improvements."

Mr. Tony Banks: Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell the House who wrote that statement?

Mr. Waller: The promoters were required to produce an environmental statement—

Mr. Banks: Who wrote it?

Mr. Waller: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has read the major technical reports provided for the promoters by a large number of consultants, who have reputations to protect. It was on the basis of those reports that conclusions were reached. If the hon. Gentleman wants to cast aspersions, he must do so not only on the promoters but on the large number of consultants who produced the reports on which the conclusions were reached.

Mr. Banks: I certainly cast aspersions on the consultants. Looking for an honest consultant is rather like looking for an honest lawyer—they are rare creatures. If British Rail appoints consultants, obviously those consultants are given a specific brief that almost inevitably leads them to the conclusions that British Rail wants. If British Rail was so confident that the new development would lead to a reduction in road traffic, it should have appointed a truly independent person to make the report. That is why we need an environmental impact assessment, not an environmental statement made by the promoters. It is clearly in the interests of the promoters to make the best possible case.

Mr. Waller: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has such a poor opinion of consultants.

Mr. Banks: And solicitors.

Mr. Waller: As I am neither a consultant nor a lawyer, that is water off a duck's back for me.

The issue of traffic has also been considered by the Department of Transport and other authorities. The views to which I referred are certainly not held by British Rail alone.

There were a number of references to Camley street natural park. Although it is true that the existing park will be lost, it is intended to retain a small area of land throughout the construction period to serve as a vanguard for the future. More importantly, it is intended to establish a new park under the auspices of the London Wildlife Trust on completion of the works; this would be 40 to 50 per cent. larger than the existing park—which would have consequent benefits for habitat diversity and educational use.

To those who claim that it will not be possible to develop a new park, I say that the existing park was created in a very difficult urban environment, which demonstrates the possibilities that exist for restoring a high-quality park in future, for the benefit of local residents.

There was some comment about Alan Baxter and Associates, which came to its own defence and informed the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that it was totally blameless. However, that consultancy has been unable to deny that it came by the information that it used in producing its report as a result of working for British Rail; nor has it answered the accusation that it showed a lack of candour in failing to tell British Rail what it was doing, not responding in particular to a request for a copy of the consultancy's press statement, and discussing its proposals with third parties without telling British Rail what it was doing.

I remind the House that, at the time, Alan Baxter and Associates was acting as a consultant to British Rail in respect of part of the railway lands site. The remark of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) about consultants may have been specifically directed at that particular group.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Gentleman may have compounded the error into which he led himself on 25 November. The letter from Alan Baxter and Associates, which I quoted earlier, clearly states:

"In particular, Mr. Waller, and those advising him, seem not to have understood that our proposals are based entirely on information available in the public realm."

The hon. Gentleman failed to acknowledge that simple fact.

Mr. Waller: I do not believe that all the information used by Alan Baxter and Associates was in the public realm at the time that the consultancy obtained access to it—although it is true that, perhaps partly as a result of that group's report, it is now in the public realm. However, I stand by what I said—and I know that others within British Rail feel very aggrieved about the way in which that particular consultancy acted without candour at the time in question.

No response has been made to the argument that the alternative proposals do not offer the transport benefits that can be provided only by locating the new facilities as the Bill suggests. Unless there is a two-level station, with the international and Network SouthEast facilities located below the existing InterCity services, there will not be the vital interconnection which is a central feature of the Bill's proposals. Without that interconnection, it will be necessary for people to travel a considerable distance, perhaps by travelator, rather than walk only a few yards up or down an escalator.

Let me add that the alternative proposals do not permit the operation of international trains to King's Cross before the completion of a new rail link from the channel tunnel. The works would probably continue for very much longer than the hon. Gentleman would like. Certainly, the alternative proposals would be no less destructive to homes and highways than the British Rail proposals on which they claim to improve.

I feel that the promoters have gone out of their way to ensure that the inevitable disruption is minimised as far as possible, and that they will continue to do so. Of course, no one believes that it is possible to create a new station on such a scale without causing inconvenience, disruption and many environmental disadvantages in the short term. In the long term, however, the local environment will be very much improved.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the national strategic transport advantages will be considerable, and that the Bill's proposals are vital to the future not only of those living in the north but of many people living much closer to London. I hope that the House will reject the new clauses, and allow the Bill to proceed further.

Mr. Corbyn: Representing as I do the constituency neighbouring that of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), let me place on record my support for his new clause—and, in particular, my appreciation for all the work that he has done in trying to protect the interests of his constituents. He has received precious little help from people who should have given him more assistance. More to the point, however, the Bill's promoters have displayed a disgraceful ignorance of the area and the community that will be affected, and a cavalier approach to the environment of inner-city dwellers.

There are those in the House, and elsewhere, who believe that Islington is a sceptred paradise in which everyone is wealthy, and in which people spend most of their time eating in bistros and drinking in wine bars. That is not an accurate image of the borough. Any hon. Member who cares to journey down the corridors to the Library and consult the constituency unemployment lists will find that both Islington constituencies are in the top 20. There are 17,000 out of work in the borough, and the unemployment rate in the area affected by the scheme is very high.

I hope that many local people will read the comments of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) in the local papers, and will be appalled. The hon. Gentleman suggests that theirs is not a very nice area now, and that it therefore does not matter if it becomes pretty grotty during the construction phase and is not improved subsequently. That is a disgraceful approach.

I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, as a sponsor of the Bill, would be slightly better informed about the contents of a House of Commons report on this subject before speaking in the Chamber. I should also have expected him to recognise that the fund of good will for British Rail and its property development antics in the King's Cross area ran out a long time ago. Assurances from British Rail mean absolutely zero. If, as the hon. Gentleman seems to suggest, British Rail is prepared to accept the environmental requirements presented by the borough of Islington and local people, why does it oppose new clause 5? Why should it do so, unless it has no intention of implementing those requirements?

The hon. Gentleman mentioned various things that had happened in the area, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. People have sought to improve their environment. Adventure playgrounds and gardens have been constructed following local initiatives, for instance.

The hon. Member for Keighley came out with the throwaway line that the Camley street open space could be moved elsewhere. Does he appreciate the graft, the backache and the heartache that went into obtaining the site, and the crucial support that was given at the time by the Greater London Council? Does he realise how long it takes for a tree to grow, for a habitat to be established in which frogs and newts can breed? Does he know how long it takes to produce a habitat that will enable all that wildlife to return to an inner-city area?

Bringing that about is not like building an office block or a road. It takes years. The hon. Gentleman, however, merely suggests destroying that habitat and moving it a few yards away, where it will be part of a larger site. The children who developed the park, and all those living in the King's Cross area, would have more respect for the hon. Gentleman's views if British Rail said, "Not only will we keep the site; we shall provide more space for the expansion of a vital inner-city lung." But they are not doing that; they are offering a larger site some distance away—with all the destruction that that would involve.

Mr. Waller: The hon. Member is not correct. The current proposal provides exactly what he has asked for, but there will be an enlargement, an addition. However, if the railway connections are to be improved, the park will be lost in the short term, because a new line will go straight through it.

Mr. Corbyn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making my point for me. The park may be restored at a later stage. However, as I have tried to explain, a park is not like a living room carpet, which can be taken up and put down with little difficulty.

9.15 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend will be aware that the proposal is not only that the Camley street natural park should be destroyed for the purpose of putting the lines through, but also that there should be a considerable time —several years at the very least—before the beginning of work on reinstatement, let alone on the growing of all the flora and on the development of the habitat to which reference has been made. Later we shall come to an amendment whose purpose is specifically to provide a time scale for the Camley street natural park. At the moment, there is no guarantee that restoration will be achieved in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is quite right, and I shall be pleased to support the amendment to which he has referred. However, hon. Members ought to be aware that this is a living community. The people in it want to see the area improved. If they are to be the victims of some degree of national planning, the House ought at least to do them the courtesy of listening seriously to their representatives as they present their proposals for protection and improvement of the environment. Hon. Members appear to be totally ignorant of these needs.

If a massive pit or some such project were proposed for a constituency in the north or in Wales or the south-west, would the same attitude be adopted? Here, the attitude seems to be that, as this is an inner-city area, it does not matter. If British Rail is allowed to get away with treating these people in this way, damaging the environment and increasing the volume of traffic on the Euston road by up to 50 per cent., the same thing could happen elsewhere. As was said earlier, two wrongs do not make a right.

The provisions of new clause 5 are very important. As I explained in an intervention, when the Department of Transport is keen to get people in a suburban area—a Tory-voting marginal constituency—to accept the development of a major road or motorway, it bends over backwards to assure them that their property values will be protected, that, if necessary, they will be bought out, that banks will be reconstructed for noise insulation, and so on. I agree that all those things should be done—at least, I would agree if I believed that new motorways were necessary, but in any case, I agree with the principle. Why cannot the promoters of the Bill accept that exactly the same principles apply in respect of this densely populated inner-urban area?

Any house owner in the area who wants to move finds it absolutely impossible to sell his property. Who would buy a house that he knew to be alongside an enormous construction site? People are entitled to protection of their investment. That is why British Rail should be compelled to accept new clause 5, which covers the point very well. It is clearly expensive for BR to do so, and I do not doubt that, although I do not know the exact costings. I should have thought that the hon. Member for Keighley would have had the costings at his fingertips, because he was presumably briefed on such matters by British Rail.

Many of the properties are owned by the London borough of Islington, which has no wish to reduce the total housing stock but wishes to improve the quality and quantity of housing because there are many people on the housing waiting list, many homeless people and many concealed homeless people.

Islington council will not willingly give up property, but will be seeking compensation for damage to properties that it owns and for the costs that it incurs by having to move tenants away from the area because of the work being carried out.

There has been much argument over the proposal, and some hon. Members have suggested that the people of King's Cross have to pay for the national need. I regret that way in which BR has so cynically manipulated opinion within the House to create a north-south divide on the issue. We are seeking environmental protection for people who live in our borough. We are seeking to protect house owners who might suffer as a result. If BR is taken at its word, it should be supporting this new clause.

New clause 6 mentions compliance for a series of works to be done. If the hon. Member for Keighley had bothered to talk to us about the buffer and boundary zones, he would have found that page 17 of the report by the Committee which examined the King's Cross Railways Bill, published by the House on 26 June, said:

> "We consider it fair that the boundaries of the zone should be extended in line with the petitioner's request. We therefore make it a condition of our proceeding further with the Bill that promoters should give an undertaking to do this."

Unless I have misunderstood, my hon. Friend's clause seeks to put that on the face of the Bill. I fail to understand why the House is apparently opposing the new clause.

On the question of the environmental code of practice for works being carried out, there have been experiences of voluntary codes of practice in other parts of the borough. The contractor agrees that he will not do certain things and will do others only at certain times, but unless they are backed by the force of law, such codes are useless.

When Arsenal football club sought to develop the executive boxes and the south part of the football ground, it agreed a voluntary code of practice which, among other things, excluded Sunday working. Every condition was broken in some way, including Sunday working, and there was no comeback. Every time the main contractor was approached, he said that it was a question of what the sub-contractors did, and that he had no control over them.

New clause 6 is essential if we are to protect the lives of people in the area during the construction phase. Is it right for people to be expected to put up with 24-hour working, seven days a week, with BR doing any work it likes at any time? It is not fair and proper. It would cause noise and increased traffic in an area where traffic is already heavy. Should my hon. Friend's constituents be expected to tolerate huge lorries seven days a week, 24 hours a day, travelling from the development with spoil or bringing construction materials in? They should not have to put up with that—no one should have to put up with that sort of work, noise and interference with their lives.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, many people in the area work in public services. In particular, it has been a residential area for those working in the post office and the health service and on the railways. Various security companies and the local authority are major employers in the area, and many of the residents work shifts and need to be able to sleep during daylight hours. They also deserve some consideration when deciding the way that the work is done.

When hon. Members who support the Bill and oppose the new clauses claim that there will be an improved environment at the end of the work, I wonder what sort of

improved environment it will be. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West mentioned the problems of increased traffic in London. Many people using the station—not the majority by any means, but a considerable number—will be arriving or leaving by road in taxis, private cars or other means.

Pollution in inner London is horrific. Those who believe that London can take more traffic would do well to remember the health of our children, the extent of asthma, the problems of photochemical smog in the summer and the appalling air quality in the pre-Christmas period because of the still air. London's air was dirtier than Mexico City's and other places that are a byword for traffic pollution. London cannot take any more pollution. The Bill will only increase the amount of road traffic in an already overcrowded area.

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. Has it occurred to him that King's Cross was selected because it had better transport links than any other site? The demand for taxis is lower than in any other central site because of the good access by train, bus and tube. Those who are concerned about smog and other environmental disbenefits caused by traffic movements should remember that King's Cross is the best possible location to avoid those problems.

Mr. Corbyn: There will be 15 million extra passengers a year using King's Cross. I do not know how often the hon. Gentleman uses King's Cross.

Mr. Waller: Every week.

Mr. Corbyn: Good. When he has a bit of time on his hands, he should see the crowds that use King's Cross underground station between 7.30 am and 9.30 am on a weekday. It is hard to see how more traffic or more people could get through the area.

British Rail has not thought about the consequences of its proposals. Traffic jams on the Pentonville, Euston and Marylebone roads will be made worse by the car and taxi traffic that will be generated by 15 million passengers seeking to enter or leave the station by road vehicle.

Mr. Tony Banks: British Rail is not the slightest bit interested in how many additional road movements are caused by its proposals—it is not a road authority. My hon. Friend surely remembers the London Labour group asking the then Secretary of State for Transport who the strategic authority for such movements was, and he said that we should ask British Rail. We did so, and British Rail said, "We are not the strategic authority; we are a transport authority. We run the railways." It could not give a monkey's toss how many cars, taxis or buses are involved, because that has nothing to do with BR. But it has a lot to do with us and the people who live in Islington.

Mr. Corbyn: If I were not a vegetarian, I would have said that it was passing the buck around the room. We met the then Secretary of State for Transport, who claimed that we should go somewhere else with every environmental or transport problem in London. Everybody was responsible for transport in London except the Secretary of State. The reality is that this cock-eyed proposal has been made because of a lack of planning, of consultation and of a serious environmental impact assessment.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend criticises British Rail, but does he accept that it is the prisoner of Government policy? It is not British Rail's fault that it is forced to depend on Thatcherite policies of enhanced land values to pay for transport improvements. Inevitably, many of the criticisms that should be made of the Government are being made of British Rail. That is extremely convenient for the Government, who want everybody to criticise British Rail, as it will help their case for closure through privatisation.

Mr. Corbyn: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am pro-rail. I want increased rail usage and development. I use the railways a lot. I do not believe in the development of an enhanced road system when our railways would be perfectly adequate if only more money were put into them, which the Government clearly are not doing.

I sometimes wonder about British Rail. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that it is a prisoner of Government policy, which says that it must sell some of its existing capital assets for all new works. Sometimes it appears to be an awfully willing prisoner of that policy: that is my anxiety.

This is an important Bill and we are going through an important process that highlights the inadequacies of the private Bill procedure. We see the wrong-headedness of a major development taking place on the back of the private Bill procedure with no real planning permission and no planning applications or the like. I hope that, as a result of our experience of this, people will examine the process.

I wonder whether the golden egg that British Rail thought it had got hold of when it realised the potential for office and other developments to the north of King's Cross station, will ever be laid. Land values in London are dropping fast as the recession gathers pace.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): That is happening everywhere.

9.30 pm

Mr. Corbyn: Everywhere, indeed, but we are talking about the particular development at King's Cross.

British Rail has staked everything on selling land to create an office development to the north of King's Cross. That will make it more money that the socially needed houses that should be built on the whole of that site, except on the areas needed for parks. What happens if it does not go ahead with the whole scheme? All the time spent in Committee and all the millions of pounds spent on legal representation, publicity, consultants and others will be wasted.

The House should think more seriously about the need for access to the channel tunnel for the entire country. It is fallacious to argue that King's Cross is the only place where the main station can be developed.

I ask hon. Members to consider that the two new clauses deal specifically with the effects of the development on people living in the King's Cross area in terms of their property, the noise, the environment and the area. The effects are specifically irrespective of the location of the station. I invite hon. Members to consider the effects on the community represented so ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and how hon. Members would feel if the same works, the same disruption, the same noise, the same pollution and the same dirt were to result from a major development in their

[Mr. Corbyn]

constituency passed by a vote in this House. They would be appalled. Therefore, they should support the new clauses.

Mr. Cryer: I shall be brief. I did not intend to speak until I heard the response from the promoter. The new clauses do not affect the principle of the Bill; they would merely provide protection for the people who live in the vicinity.

My hon. Friends asked serious questions, but the promoter, on behalf of British Rail, did not answer any of them. It is a contempt of Parliament for British Rail and the promoter, knowing that questions will be asked—they had seen the amendments—to fail to provide adequate information. They strike an arrogant attitude. One wonders whether the agreements on a voluntary code—the substitute for new clause 6—for the decent operation and conduct of the civil engineering works so as to minimise the intrusion on the people who live nearby will be carried out by people so careless of the debate here in Parliament. The promoter had an opportunity to assuage fears, but he failed to do so.

The promoter did not deny that a row of houses had been omitted from the area of protection. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has sought to include it. The promoter has said that he will write and explain the circumstances. That is not good enough. If we are debating this issue in Parliament, we can reasonably expect to receive assurances and proper statements from the promoter. People in British Rail knew that this debate was to take place. They are being [illegible] —expensively, I suspect—by private Bill promoters. They should be able to answer the queries that have been raised today.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) said that it would be an extraordinary obligation on BR if it were to be subject to the decision of house owners who, at a whim —to use his words—sought compensation from BR. On the contrary, it is BR that will, at a whim, be able to refuse a householder compensation when that householder has to face construction noise and invasion of his peaceful privacy. "At a whim" is an emotional phrase.

The hon. Member for Keighley sought to suggest that a person who wanted to move somewhere else would, at a whim, be able to invoke the procedures set out in the new clause. The hon. Gentleman ignored the fact that as any such person will be living on the periphery of a massive construction site—the biggest in Europe—he will be unable to move anywhere anyhow. Equally, the BR board could, at a whim, ignore the pros and cons and the case for decent justice for an ordinary householder and simply dismiss such a call for compensation. That could happen unless the board was under a statutory obligation to meet that claim.

I do not know the area around King's Cross, and I accept that some properties might be on the margin with regard to compensation, but given the magnitude of this civil engineering project, why should we not strike the balance in favour of those affected rather than in favour of those who want to press ahead with that construction project?

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman is describing an imaginary situation. BR would not, at a whim, act as he has described. I have carefully explained how the promoters are in the process of agreeing a detailed code of practice relating to the construction works with the London boroughs of Camden and Islington, which are carefully protecting the interests of those living within their boundaries.

It would be total nonsense for me to start negotiating across the Floor of the House about such things as the number of decibels to be allowed in particular parts of the site, vehicle movements, where security cameras should be located, or how many stars a hotel should have when people are allocated temporary rehousing. I cannot negotiate about the terms of arbitration. It is impossible to have an environmental code of practice which is carved in stone and does not allow for the kind of necessary flexibility to provide for the very talks that are bound to continue in order to reach agreement, not only before the works begin but as they proceed.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening, and I regret to say that I suspect that that is characteristic of his attitude today. I have moved on to discuss new clause 5. I have already mentioned the one row of houses that the promoters have excluded from the provisions under which the BR board could be required to purchase if a householder suffered intrusion due to civil engineering work.

The hon. Gentleman has taken umbrage at my use of the phrase "at a whim" in relation to decisions taken by the BR board. Why does he take umbrage when those words are used in relation to the BR board, especially when he uses them about property holders in the area affected by those civil engineering works?

The hon. Gentleman has asked why people should be able, at a whim, to require BR to purchase their homes. Why is the hon. Gentleman unable to attribute the characteristics that he attributes to the BR board to the ordinary people living in the area? Why does he not believe that those people will make a balanced, mature, considered judgment? If he is ascribing such characteristics to BR, it is only fair that he should ascribe them to the people who live in the area.

Mr. Waller: The answer is that the promoters are reaching detailed agreements on a range of issues with the local authorities concerned. If the new clause were passed, it would provide an unqualified right to all those living within the boundaries, whether or not and to whatever extent they were affected, to require the board to purchase their property, compensate them, and provide temporary rehousing, irrespective of the kind of housing in which they lived at the time of the works. In particular, they could require the board to carry out any other appropriate matters. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is a reasonable requirement, I disagree with him.

Mr. Cryer: I am terribly sorry, but new clause 5 does not include subsection (2)(e) of new clause 6, as the hon. Gentleman is trying to do. I am discussing new clause 5 and the obligations that would follow for people affected by major civil engineering works. I do not wish to continue the argument for much longer because my hon. Friends wish to vote on the matter.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Member for Keighley made a substantial error in his intervention. He said that anyone living in the area would have the right to sell his property

to British Rail. The vast majority of people living in the area specified in new clause 5 are tenants of the London borough of Islington and cannot activate the provisions of paragraph (a). The hon. Gentleman has not read the new clause.

Mr. Cryer: Another point that underlines my hon. Friend's remark is that subsection (2) of new clause 5 defines "specified property" in order that it is not a general right but a specific and defined right for a limited number of people. I am surprised that, having had the new clause tabled with the possibility of selection, the hon. Member for Keighley did not say how many properties would be affected.

Concern for workers and working areas does not stop at the boundary of Watford. We are concerned wherever people are adversely affected. There is a strong case for improving rail links and investment in railways, to transfer some of the freight from our heavily clogged roads on to the railways. The Department of Transport has been working against that for the past 20 years or more. We want that position reversed, but if major civil engineering works are to be involved, the House should reasonably impose protective measures to ensure that people who are adversely affected receive proper statutory protection. Voluntary codes of practice are all very well. If people were universally of good will, we would not need legislation. The legislation is necessary to provide assurances for people who are potentially adversely affected.

I intervened only because I am amazed that the promoter has not accepted the new clauses. He may be worried about one or two words but he should accept them in principle with a view to ensuring that the protection is statutory. Statutory protection means that people are bound by it, whereas voluntary codes can be pushed to one side. Embarking on such works, not for a few months but for eight years, means that there must be a firm base for statutory protection of everyone involved before the work starts. That is why I hope that the House will accept the new clause.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend understands these things better than most people in the House. The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), speaking on behalf of the promoters, said that discussions about a code were going on with the London boroughs concerned. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) may like to venture a point about the extent to which we can trust British Rail. I know that my hon. Friend has more trust than I do in that respect

If we do not write those provisions into the Bill, there will be no sanctions against British Rail if it tells the boroughs, "We are sorry, but we are not interested and we cannot reach agreement." Who could then impose sanctions on British Rail? The House could not.

9.45 pm

Mr. Cryer: I am willing to defend British Rail because it has great difficulty in providing public services throughout the country against the background of attacks by the Government and of Government cuts. Support has been whipped up for the privatisation campaign against British Rail. British Rail provides a vast service network, by and large fairly successfully.

British Rail is a corporation, so we should bind it to its duties and obligations under law. It is a large corporation, so its personnel will change. The chairman of British Rail may give assurances in perfectly good faith, but he may be replaced. The next chairman may disregard those assurances and say that the civil engineering completion is the sole criterion and that British Rail will have no such care for people living in the area.

If we want to provide some guarantees for people who will be adversely affected by this major civil engineering project, we should ensure that the House is the guarantor. We are the best guarantor of people's position and we pass legislation to provide guarantees. Is there universal good will among the members of the British Rail board, the local authorities, the people living in the area, the contractors and the sub-contractors? Sub-contractors are often employed at rock bottom rates through competitive tender, and they will have to cut corners to make a profit over the next eight years.

If everyone was covered by multicoloured good will, we should not have to legislate. If there was good will all round, the House would be redundant. There is no universal good will, but there is cut-throat competition, bad practice and bad faith. Against the background of human experience, I suggest that new clauses 5 and 6 would be a decent safeguard for people who will have to face muck and noise for eight years.

Mr. Chris Smith: By leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will pick up one or two points from the debate on the two important new clauses.

The speech by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) was a deeply inadequate response to the needs of the people of the King's Cross area and to the arguments of my hon. Friends and myself. The hon. Member began by admitting that British Rail has undertaken a number of voluntary agreements to do precisely what is set out in new clauses 5 and 6. By making that admission, he gave away almost the entirety of his case against inclusion of new clauses. The new clauses seek only to enshrine in the Bill the protection that British Rail has already said that it intends to provide on the whole. Through the new clauses, we are trying to ensure that that happens.

The hon. Member for Keighley went on to refer to what he said were the "many" properties affected. I have already dealt with part of that point by informing the hon. Gentleman, who seemed unaware of the fact, that a large number of the properties within the boundaries referred to in new clause 5 are in local authority ownership. The local authority has no intention of going along and presenting BR with those properties, and certainly no desire to do so, as it desperately needs them to provide housing for the people of my constituency. There are some owner-occupiers in the area, however, and I believe that they are entitled to basic minimum protection from the blight that will affect them throughout the next eight or nine years. The hon. Gentleman should not dismiss their concern so lightly.

The hon. Gentleman said that the environmental code proposed in new clause 6 was likely to be inflexible, but precisely the reverse is the case. If he reads the new clause, he will see that it does not prescribe noise or decibel levels or hours of working. It merely says that agreement should be reached on those specific issues. I went through a whole series of matters that British Rail has recently been discussing with Camden and Islington. British Rail is apparently determined not to reach a reasonable agreement with those two local authorities on an

[Mr. Chris Smith]

environmental code of practice. By including such a provision in the Bill, we should be placing additional pressure on British Rail in an attempt to ensure that it behaves more reasonably. The new clause would not tie British Rail in knots or create an inflexible structure. It merely says that there must be an environmental code and tells British Rail to get on and reach a reasonable agreement with the boroughs about it.

The hon. Member for Keighley then referred to the traffic impact of the proposed station and the so-called environmental statement, which he held up for the whole House to see. The traffic section of that statement was written by a firm called Halcro Fox and I think that I am right in saying that it actually claims that the traffic impact of the creation of the new international station—which, as we have heard, will deal with an extra 15 million passengers a year—on York way, Euston road and Marylebone road will be "negligible". That statement was disproved by the Department of Transport's own evidence to the Committee, which came at a very late stage in the Committee's proceedings and was published after that environmental statement. That evidence showed that, especially at peak hours, there will be a substantial traffic impact. Of course many people leaving channel tunnel trains will want to get on an already overcrowded underground system or transfer to trains heading to the north and so on, but a large number of them will want to take taxis, board coaches and be met by friends in cars. The proposals will have a very substantial traffic impact on the surface in an already over-congested area.

Mr. Corbyn: The traffic impact will not be confined to York way and Euston road, bad though it will be in those two places, but will extend into central London, with an increased flow of traffic attempting to get to King's Cross, and particularly to the north and east, as people making long journeys by train are brought to the station from the suburbs by car with heavy luggage and because of the difficulties of the King's Cross interchange. The traffic impact has been grossly underestimated.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. We all know what happens to London's entire traffic flow when one or two key points in the vehicular traffic network clog up. That is precisely what will happen at King's Cross as a result of the proposals.

The hon. Member for Keighley dared to say that the effects on road traffic would be generally positive. I challenge him to come and tell that to the people of King's Cross, who as a result of the proposals will be living with traffic jams outside their homes day in and day out.

The hon. Member for Keighley also said that, if the station was not built at King's Cross, there would have to be complicated provisions such as travelators. He ignores the fact that British Rail proposes a travelator between King's Cross and Euston to get people to the north-western lines. The hon. Gentleman should say less about travelators and complex interchanges.

The hon. Gentleman also ignores the important point that I raised, and which was picked up by my hon. Friends, about the importance of the row of houses on the east side of the southern part of Northdown street. It is not good enough to say that British Rail will write to me about that. We need an absolute commitment from British Rail that it will include those houses, with the others in the affected area, in the properties to be looked after as part of the buffer zone.

The hon. Member for Keighley dismissed many of the issues still at stake in the discussions on the environmental code as not being in the interests of the wider community. I fail to see how allowing pile driving at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning next door to residential homes is in the interests of any community, let alone the people who live in the immediate vicinity of the work.

I remind the House of the overwhelming environmental impact on people in the King's Cross area. The scheme involves the loss of 83 homes, the displacement of 326 residents, the demolition of four listed buildings and the destruction of a two-acre inner-city nature reserve. It involves the loss of 168 workplaces providing 1,620 jobs and the loss of 58 shops, 38 of which provide key services to local people. It will have a construction time of about eight years and will entail deep pile driving for the subsequent buildings and the sides of the box that will be created. A vast 40 ft hole will be created immediately beside people's homes. That will have an enormous environmental impact.

My two new clauses do not seek to stop the Bill. Nor do they seek in any way to interrupt the smooth progress of essential British Rail operational requirements. They seek to enshrine protection for the people immediately affected, and I warmly commend them to the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 7, Noes 191.

Division No. 34] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Cryer, Bob
Flynn, Paul
Madden, Max
Nellist, Dave
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Tony Banks.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Donald
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Batiste, Spencer
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Blunkett, David
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Chapman, Sydney
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Crowther, Stan
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, John
Freeman, Roger
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gregory, Conal

Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCartney, Ian
McGrady, Eddie
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Mates, Michael
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rathbone, Tim
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Snape, Peter
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Strang, Gavin
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Donald Thompson and Mr. John Greenway.

Question accordingly negatived.
Bill to be further considered on Thursday 16 January.

Tourism (Northern Ireland)

10.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I beg to move,

That the draft Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 5th December, be approved.

I have said before to hon. Members, and I say again, that Northern Ireland has had remarkable success in bucking the current economic trend. It has, for example, contained annual growth in unemployment to a level substantially lower than elsewhere in the country—4 per cent. in Ulster compared with almost 60 per cent. in Great Britain. This is not, of course, in any way to minimise the seriousness of job losses that have been announced in Northern Ireland. However, the relative buoyancy of its economy is, I suggest, very well reflected in the various imaginative investments that continue to be made across the length and breadth of the Province.

The past six weeks have been very difficult for Northern Ireland, and especially for Belfast. Attacks by the IRA on the city and citizens of Belfast caused extensive damage. One such attack destroyed the high street tourist information centre. The fact that the staff at the centre picked up the pieces and were open for business the following day is a prime example of the resilience and resolution of the people of Belfast and amply proves that such attacks achieve nothing except the destruction of jobs and the deferment of economic improvement. The Government intend to match that resolve and fortitude by making good the damage. I am certain that the House will join me in congratulating the people of Belfast and in expressing our deep appreciation of the successes that the security forces have been achieving.

Tourism in Northern Ireland, as I shall illustrate, has unique potential for growth—and with the added impetus of this proposed legislation, it will make a major contribution to economic development in our region.

Visitor figures for 1990, for the second year, were at an all-time record level of 1·153 million. No fewer than one in five visitors came to Northern Ireland exclusively for a holiday, compared with one in nine 10 years ago. Of all holiday visitors in 1990, 102,000—or almost half—came from the south, a more than 50 per cent. increase over the previous year; and a quarter of holiday visitors, 55,000, came from Great Britain—an increase of more than 60 per cent. on the previous year. Those truly remarkable results owe much to the enterprising professionalism of the reconstituted Northern Ireland tourist board and show very clearly that Northern Ireland is being accepted again as a uniquely attractive holiday destination.

That is just the start. The scenic, recreational and cultural attractions of Northern Ireland compare with the world's best and are at least on a par with those of our neighbours in the south. The full potential of tourism in Northern Ireland has yet to be achieved, as can be seen from the fact that, whereas tourism in the Republic presently accounts for 6·8 per cent of gross national product, and provides some 82,000 jobs, the comparable figures for Northern Ireland are 1·3 per cent. of GDP and about 10,000 jobs.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of both Great Britain and the Republic to the growth of tourism in

[Mr. Richard Needham]

Northern Ireland. However, also of tremendous importance to Northern Ireland are tourists from North America, Europe and Japan. They too are coming in increasing numbers; there is much further potential in those markets.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Does the level of employment have anything to do with the fact that the Republic spends on average £8 per head on every visitor, whereas Northern Ireland spends only £2?

Mr. Needham: I am not sure that levels of unemployment bear any relationship to the spending in the south of Ireland on tourism, compared with spending in the north. However, as the hon. Gentleman will find when I conclude my remarks, I agree and accept that much more could, should and will be done to increase spending in promoting Northern Ireland as a tourist destination.

We can be encouraged by the current growth of tourism to Northern Ireland, but if growing numbers of tourists are to visit our magnificent attractions, we must improve the quality and standard of the facilities to look after them. That does not mean that we should not be proud of what we have already done. An outstanding example was the major programme of events held during Belfast 91. That included the world rose festival, but taking pride of place in the programme was the immensely successful visit of the tall ships to Belfast lough. Apart from its success in enticing a multitude of overseas visitors, that attracted half a million people from all sections of the community, who thronged the streets in one of the biggest shared celebrations in the city's history.

I am certain that Londonderry, with its Impact 92, will have an equally exciting year of enjoyment, and that tourism in Derry will be one of the main beneficiaries.

The challenge is also about tackling the impediments to the growth of tourism. Perhaps the most demanding of the challenges is to improve the quality of the services that we offer our visitors, as well as promoting the best of Ulster. The solution must lie in significantly stepping up the promotional efforts of the Government, Northern Ireland tourist board, the Industrial Development Board, and other interests. Close collaboration between all concerned will be essential if we are to achieve that success.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am sure that the Minister would add good transport links to the list of requirements—and, if possible, new access routes into Northern Ireland. With that in mind, I deeply sympathise with his predicament in losing some of his budget as a consequence of the horrors of terrorism and the need to pay for the structural damage that it does. However, can he still give an assurance—obviously, this is of interest to my constituents—that the prospects for Ballycastle as a point of entry and egress are still very much alive?

Mr. Needham: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. We have discussed that issue, and I agree with him that it is of great importance to improve on the links between Scotland and Northern Ireland—not least, at Ballycastle.

The need to improve quality in everything we do was starkly illustrated in the recent Horwath consultancy report. It concluded that in general our hotels and guest houses did not satisfy the needs and expectations of the tourist market and offered poor value for money. It recommended a concerted drive to improve quality if we were to have any hope of matching the demands of the market, and it emphasised the importance of better training. I am determined, as is the NITB, that, together with the industry, we will meet the desired standards and make the improvements required.

The order gives us the vehicle for achieving the strategy for tourism that the Government have developed over the past two years in association with the industry. It puts the board in the central role in tourism development and increases its powers, so that it may carry out the challenging task of increasing the competitiveness of the industry.

I believe that a maximum membership of nine will ensure more effective decision-making. The nine-member board already in place is, as I mentioned earlier, achieving excellent results. The board will operate at arm's length from the Department, and will assume direct operational responsibility for all tourism development programmes, including the major programmes sponsored by the European Community and the International Fund for Ireland.

It is vital that the board works closely with the key interests in tourism, so that a coherent and sensible approach is presented and understood by all. Consultative arrangements to achieve that aim are specified in the order.

A new, more flexible scheme of selective financial assistance is to be introduced to strengthen the board's ability to persuade the industry to bring forward worthwhile projects. A preliminary scheme already in operation has attracted a promising range of projected new developments.

That is a most important provision. All tourists and holidaymakers, when they sit down to plan a holiday, want to know with absolute certainty that what they are being offered has been thoroughly checked out, comes up to scratch, and represents value for money. That must be a main priority for the tourist board.

The regulatory arrangements proposed in the order require all tourist accommodation to comply with a set of minimum standards for various categories of establishment. Let me put that simply: it prohibits the provision or offer of tourist accommodation that has not been certified as meeting those minimum standards.

Although no major changes are made to the tourism powers of district councils, provision is made for closer co-operation and partnership between the board and the councils in the provision and marketing of tourism products. Let me stress that such co-operation is absolutely essential to the strategy for tourism: I congratulate both the NITB and the councils on how well they have started the process of working together. I believe that the success that has followed the meeting of February 1991 augurs very well for future co-operation between them.

As a token of the Government's commitment, and to demonstrate the importance that we attach to increasing the number of visitors to this most beautiful part of our country, we have this year increased the tourist budget from £6·7 million to £10·9 million. The order, and that financial commitment, must give the industry the best start in 1992 for which it could ever have hoped. It now has a statutory framework, and enjoys financial support at a level unequalled at any time in the past.

I commend the order to the House.

10.21 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I join the Minister in congratulating the people of Belfast on the resolution and fortitude that they showed during the Christmas period of cowardly terrorism in the Province.

This is a nice, non-controversial little order with which to start 1992—although I cannot guarantee that the current mood of conviviality will continue as we approach the inevitable general election. I do not intend to take up much of the time of the House: indeed, I do not expect to speak for more than seven or eight minutes—little longer than I took last time I spoke. I know that hon. Members representing the Province will want to describe the beauties and tourist amenities in their constituencies. Let me, however, make a small plea to those who visit the Province on holiday: if they go via Wigan pier, they will be given an excellent and cordial welcome.

As the Minister has explained, the order sets out the duties and responsibilities of the NITB. The contents and aims of the order are wholly acceptable to the Opposition: we are strongly in favour of what the Minister is doing. Tourism is an important industry, not just in Northern Ireland but in the island of Ireland as a whole. Despite the cowardly activities of terrorists who aim to disrupt normal life in Northern Ireland, the industry continues to grow, as the Minister has pointed out. More and more people are not being intimidated, and not being dissuaded from visiting a beautiful country.

I wish to pay a special tribute to the enthusiastic and assiduous way in which the Minister has promoted the tourist attractions of Northern Ireland. I am sure that he, in turn, will wish to pay tribute to Commissioner Bruce Millan and the European Community for the considerable help that they have given in funding many of the tourist projects that have proved so successful not only in Northern Ireland, but in the island as a whole.

As we enter 1992—the year of the internal market, the year when barriers will come down—tourism is set to play an important part in the efforts to develop and improve the regional economies of the Republic of Ireland and of Northern Ireland. A successful tourist policy will result in the creation of jobs and the diversification of economic activity and will bring many benefits, in terms of vastly improved amenities, to the local population.

To help the economies of the island of Ireland to catch up with those of the more prosperous parts of the European Community, we must find ways of increasing economic activity. Tourism is undoubtedly one of the most promising growth sectors, and it is in that sector that the most important issues we face can be addressed and standards raised in absolute terms.

I have referred to the role that the European Community has played in the advancement of tourism in Ireland as a whole and in Northern Ireland in particular. I should like to spend a little time providing some detail. The tourism programme, which has been funded from the European development fund together with the European social fund, is designed to make full use of the natural advantages of Ireland as a whole and of Northern Ireland in particular—the features that make Ireland particularly attractive to foreign visitors. The late 1980s and the early 1990s have seen growth in the tourism industry. The European programme seeks to build on that growth. That means enhancing existing potential as well as creating new specialised attractions in the regions.

I understand that, with European Community support, the tourist boards of the Republic and of Northern Ireland are concentrating on niche marketing. They are emphasising the aspects where the island has something special to offer—sporting activities, such as angling, boating on rivers and at sea, golf, riding, cycling and walking, and the cultural and historical heritage. A centralised genealogical service will be set up for the benefit of emigrants' descendants who wish to trace their ancestors. Historic houses and interpretive centres will be conserved and developed.

Both the European programmes pay particular attention to protection of the environment—one of the most precious assets of the island of Ireland. Both make provision for assistance in marketing—a matter that is particularly important in Northern Ireland. Those programmes build on previous European assistance programmes for tourism—in particular, programmes relating to border areas. Experience has shown the importance of training measures funded out of the European social fund to ensure a supply of well-qualified staff to meet the increasing tourist demand.

These Europe-funded programmes will play an important part in boosting tourism in the island of Ireland, thereby contributing to greater economic prosperity. Not only will that benefit the populations of the north and the south, but countless visitors will be better able to appreciate the natural beauty and the heritage of northern Ireland and southern Ireland.

In addition, tourism has an important part to play in the creation of jobs in both the north and the south. For example, the Ballyconnell canal project—the initial stage of which was opend by the Taoiseach and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—will result in the opening up of a navigable waterway from the Shannon to Lough Erne. I very much hope that, when it is completed in a couple of years' time, my family and I will take a trip on the canal.

The European Community has produced a booklet which, as the Minister knows, sets out several projects in which the Community has been involved and the amount of money that it has put into tourism in Northern Ireland. I cite the project with which I am most familiar—the Foyle railway in Derry. My good friend Alfie O'Connor, is the secretary. The money spent on that project has not merely added tourist potential to Derry but created jobs. It has done something that other expenditure has not done in the past. The booklet published by the European Community outlines the vast amounts of money that it has put into tourism in Northern Ireland, and the way in which the local economy is being rejuvenated.

The order will regulate the activities of the tourist industry in Northern Ireland to ensure that good standards are set and maintained and inspections are regularly carried out. That is what is required and why we welcome the Minister's proposals.

Has there been a fall-off in visitors to the Province from north America since the Gulf war? Many visitors go to the mainland of the United Kingdom before travelling to Ireland or Northern Ireland.

A passage in the order relates to the tourism functions of district councils. My party and I are not opposed to the extension of powers which are included in the order. It gives district councils the power to do a number of things to enhance the potential of tourism. District councils in Northern Ireland do not have to put up with the poll tax or capping, as district councils do in the rest of the United

[Mr. Roger Stott]

Kingdom. Are there any revenue implications for district councils in carrying out the functions set out in part V? Will there be any capital costs to local councils? If so, who will pay for them? Will district councils have to include those costs in the annual budget and in the rates levied on the community or will the Northern Ireland Office accept the costs of the additional facilities that district councils will now be able to provide?

In the time that I have known Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland, since my appointment to the Opposition Front Bench, I have come to love the place. It has wonderful scenery and wonderful people. I only wish that a peaceful climate would emerge in that country so that more people could go to see it. In the meantime, the order facilitates the tourist industry to Northern Ireland and we therefore give it a fair wind.

10.30 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I join the Minister and the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) in paying tribute to the courage and resilience of the Ulster people who, despite massive destruction and death, carry on with business as normal. I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Minister who, despite threats from the IRA, has visited many places where he would be an immediate target for a terrorist attack. Members of the security forces and business men throughout Northern Ireland do not have security in their homes or even in their places of work, but that has not deterred them from doing their jobs. That great resolve has enabled Northern Ireland to survive more than 20 years of appalling atrocity.

Despite terrorism, tourists are still attracted to the Province. Many come from the United States of America and Canada, some from Germany and some from Japan. I had the pleasure of showing a former member of the Japanese Government around parts of my constituency in North Down.

Northern Ireland and the people of Ulster have been given a bad press by the media, especially by television. That is bound to have an adverse effect on attracting tourists to the Province, especially from Great Britain. Many terrorist incidents are not reported on national television, even though a similar incident in Britain would receive prime coverage. Television tends to depict the majority of the Ulster people in the worst possible light. Its presentation of Ulster people as bigoted and unfriendly is a cruel defamation, but on the basis that if a lie is repeated often enough people will begin to believe it, that lie could easily take root in Britain.

I denounce that image of Northern Ireland as a lie. It is high time that television companies in Britain, and some of those abroad, started being fair to the people of Ulster, who are the finest people in the world. Of course I am biased, because I live in Ulster and I know and appreciate the fine qualities of its people, who are warm-hearted, kind, hospitable, humorous and caring. A Northern Ireland Minister may begin his duties full of fear and trepidation, but once he arrives in the Province he realises that he is in a land that is good and kindly. Northern Ireland Ministers never wish to give up their job and return to the mainland.

President Buchanan, the 15th president of the United States of America, was one of more than a dozen United States presidents with Ulster origins. He said that his Ulster blood was a priceless heritage, and in uttering those words so long ago he could easily have been speaking for the people of Northern Ireland today. When people come to Northern Ireland, they discover the truth about it—the magic of Ulster, about which we heard from the Minister and the hon. Member for Wigan. That is why I support any measure to encourage more visitors to the Province. I doubt whether the tourist board has displayed the vigour necessary to project the appeal of Northern Ireland, but the most costly advertising and promotion can be undermined and vitiated by television bias against Northern Ireland.

Let me nail the lie, so endlessly repeated, that the Scots first came to Northern Ireland when the plantation of the north-east of Ireland took place 300 years ago. Historically, the Ulster people were the first people to occupy any part of the island of Ireland. The people of what is now Scotland crossed the 22 miles to Antrim and Down, which are plainly visible from Scotland. The patron saint of Ireland, St. Patrick, was a Briton who was taken under duress to Ulster, spent most of his life in Northern Ireland, and died there.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Like the Minister.

Mr. Kilfedder: Yes, the Minister was taken under duress, but he does not want to leave us now.

The IRA and its sympathisers keep shouting, "Brits out of Ireland." If St. Patrick returned to Ireland today, I assume that the IRA would tell him, as a Brit, to get out of Ireland—and if it could, it would like to murder him. St. Patrick got rid of the snakes from Ireland. If he came back today, he would feel it a duty to get rid of those who parade as IRA patriots—the gunmen and the evil men who haunt our Province and kill people, destroy buildings and take away jobs.

Tourism will help to generate more jobs and to improve employment prospects in Northern Ireland. Far too many people in the Province are unemployed, and my constituency is no exception. Anything that will help to provide more jobs is to be encouraged. Perhaps the Government could help by providing more finance to clear up litter, which is all too easily seen on our streets and beaches. Perhaps they could force local authorities to deal with the fouling of streets by dogs, which seem to be about in such vast numbers. Certainly, any street I walk in Bangor seems to have been visited by a fair number of dogs in the previous 24 hours.

Tourism is not only about providing amenities for tourists to Northern Ireland. As article 2 makes clear, a tourist includes a person travelling for pleasure within Northern Ireland. For me recreational amenities created for tourists are also for local people. Local people already enjoy the benefits of a visit to the Ulster folk and transport museum in my constituency, and to the Dundonald ice bowl in the other part of my constituency within the council area of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). Those attractions should be there for local people to enjoy.

More people should come to Northern Ireland. People do not realise the cultural heritage of Ulster and the Ulster people. In my constituency, the town of Bangor is the site of an ancient abbey which many centuries ago sent out people to bring light to Europe, which was then in darkness. Bangor is one of the few places on these islands

marked on the mappa mundi. We have suffered invasions —I cannot remember the precise date, but I think it was about the year 600, when the Vikings destroyed the abbey and slaughtered the scholars there. Nevertheless, Bangor continued and still exists today.

That is the answer that we give to the present-day marauders who are out to destroy Northern Ireland economically and in every other way: the Ulster people will survive and endure.

10.42 pm

Mr Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I shall have to disturb the peace and harmony of the debate because I must make my usual formal protest about Orders in Council for Northern Ireland business. There are 34 articles and three schedules in the order. We have one and a half hours to debate them. As everyone knows, we cannot change one comma or full stop. The Minister will not be surprised that I protest about that. Indeed, he would be disappointed if I did not.

My second protest is that we are now creating yet another quango. The Minister will have the power to appoint the members of the tourist board. He will appoint the chairman, then the deputy or vice chairman, and so on. Tonight we are in double jeopardy: first, we are putting this through by Order in Council and, secondly, we are to create a quango responsible to no one but the head of the Department.

A great chance has been lost tonight, as I believe that a number of councillors should be on the tourist board by right. However, I would not expect all the board members to be councillors because one needs a sprinkling of professionals. Nevertheless, councillors should have been given the opportunity to show what they can do. Hon. Members who represent different parts of Northern Ireland will seek to talk them up tonight; councillors would act likewise, regardless of their political party. If we had councillors on the tourist board, at least some of its members would be responsible to the people who elected them and representative of those people. It is important to stress that.

Why is the tourist board report for 1990 not yet available? The report for 1989—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. If hon. Members want to make comments, we should all hear them so that they can be recorded in *Hansard*.

Mr. Forsythe: Inquiries were made to the appropriate part of the Department and we were told that the 1990 report would not be available for a couple of days. That was most unfortunate as it meant that I was unable to look at the report, which has now been handed to a colleague. I am glad that we finally have that report, but it should have been in October. Surely we should be able to expect the report within six months of the end of the year.

Mr. Needham: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not rising earlier to make the matter clear. I apologise for the fact that the 1990 report was not available earlier. The hon. Gentleman is right that it should have been. The report is on a new format and, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, there have been changes in personnel. I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that, from now on, we will do everything in our power to ensure that the report is available within three rather than six months of the end of the year.

Mr. Forsythe: I welcome that, and I thank the Minister for his consideration in this matter.

There are few, if any, United Kingdom maps and leaflets on Northern Ireland. In other words, there is a division between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. There are leaflets and maps showing the whole of the island of Ireland, but that is not enough. According to the tourist board's annual report for 1990, 53 per cent. of those who visited Northern Ireland came from Great Britain, and they spent £83·25 million. Why do we not produce maps and leaflets for those visitors? Why do we not have a tourist office in Scotland, given that 11 per cent. of tourists came from there in 1990 and spent £15·5 million in Northern Ireland?

It is a shame that the Minister is not wearing his other hat, because there is a problem in an area of my constituency concerning two different roads—the Killead bypass and the A26. The Killead bypass was promised for the beginning of 1992 and the A26 was promised for the beginning of 1993. The work on those roads is to remedy two bottlenecks outside the international airport which we are told is to be privatised. Even if the airport is left as it is, there is a bottleneck in the road leading to the south of the Province and beyond, and a bottleneck in the road leading to the north of the Province from the airport. There appears to have been extremely poor planning, with a bottleneck on either side of an international airport, and perhaps more thought should have been given to the fact that sufficient money was not available.

There has been much publicity about the poor condition of the rivers. Although fisherman have made allegations about how those conditions were caused, and suggestions about what should be done about them, no action has been taken by the Department of the Environment or the Department of Agriculture.

There is a great deal of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of fishing areas and water conditions in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister consider setting up a new authority to replace the present set-up, in which the Department of Agriculture looks after the development of rivers, and the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland acts as a protection and conservation body? Would it not be possible to have a body which would look after both aspects?

At present, river inspectors are controlled by the Department of the Environment and river bailiffs are controlled by the Fisheries Conservancy Board. The conditions of those two "workmen" are entirely different —a river inspector is treated differently from a bailiff. Ultimately, that is because of finance. The amount of money available to the Fisheries Conservancy Board may not extend to creating employment conditions for bailiffs as good as those for river inspectors. Would it not be better to have an organisation to look at the overall problem? In those circumstances, will the Minister consider allowing councillors—elected representatives—to be on that body, or perhaps to form it completely?

Article 11(4) of the order says:

"where any instalment of principal or interest or both principal and interest due on foot of any loan made under this Article is more than 31 days in arrear, additional interest at such rate as may be specified in or determined in accordance with the scheme under this Article shall, notwithstanding any statutory provision or rule of law to the contrary, be chargeable on that instalment as from the date on which it fell due and shall be recoverable therewith."

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): On the point about the provisions for charging penal rates of interest, does my hon. Friend agree that it is especially disturbing that that will arise under the provisions of a scheme which will override any other statutory provision or rule of law to the contrary? The scheme is a remarkable form of delegated legislation which will override statutory law and the rule of

common law, and will be made without any form of parliamentary control. Is that not as outrageous as the practical effects of the provision?

Mr. Forsythe: I agree. The problem arises from the way in which the order goes through and from the fact that we are dealing with another quango.

Article 13 uses the words:

"to be inspected by an officer of the Board".

What qualifications will the officer have when he inspects a property? Is he to be a member of the board, or will he be a professional?

Article 20 deals with fees. Surely it would have been a good idea to give some idea of the fees to be charged, instead of simply saying:

"In making regulations under this Article the Department shall ensure, so far as is practicable, that the fees payable in respect of the inspections mentioned in paragraph (1) shall be such as to produce an amount sufficient to meet"

the expenses of the board. That could have been put better to give us an idea what the fees would be.

I refer now to article 30(1). At present, councillors can consult the board. According to the order, councillors will now be required to consult with the board. That is a change which I hope that the Minister can explain to us. Article 30(2) says:

"A district council may acquire land otherwise than by agreement for the purposes of this Article."

Why is the acquiring of land different from the requirement in article 30(1)?

Article 31 uses the words:

"A district council may, with the consent of the Department of Finance and Personnel, transfer to the National Trust".

Why is there a difference in that article? Why does it refer to the Department of Finance and Personnel?

Article 32 says:

"A district council shall consult with the Board before exercising any powers conferred by the Article unless those powers are to be exercised in combination with the Board."

The order is saying that all 26 councils in Northern Ireland must consult with the board before they do anything, apart from the two items that I mentioned. I ask the Minister to refer to that point in winding up.

Schedule 1 deals with the appointing of the membership of the board. Will the Minister tell us who the "Head of the Department" is? Is it the Minister himself, or is it the permanent secretary?

How will the procedure for appointing members to the board work? Will their names be taken out of a hat, bearing in mind the fact that the schedule says that the members will be appointed

"from among persons who appear to him"—

the Minister or the head of the Department—

"to have experience in any field of activity which he considers is relevant"?

What criteria will the head of the Department use? Will he refer to the fair employment legislation as well as to other Northern Ireland legislation before making those appointments? When the Minister, or whoever does the job, forms the board, will he ensure that all the sides in Northern Ireland are represented and that the people concerned come from all the different communities?

I ask again why there are no council representatives on the board by right. A councillor could be appointed, but he would be appointed at the will and pleasure of the head of the Department. The point is that the councillors of the 26 councils in Northern Ireland have no right to be on the board.

Paragraph 3(3) of schedule 1 says:

"The Head of the Department may at any time by notice in writing to a member of the Board remove him from office."

What does a member have to have done to be removed from office? Would it not reflect upon the Minister's—or the head of the Department's—ability to appoint if he suddenly had to remove someone from the board? What will be the criteria for removing someone from the board, and in what circumstances would that be done?

Schedule 1(4) says:

"Where a member becomes or ceases to be the chairman or a deputy chairman . . . the Head of the Department may vary the terms of appointment."

Does that mean that someone can remain a member of the board even though he is no longer its chairman?

I can understand the provision which states:

"The Board may pay to each member of the Board such remuneration and such allowances as the Department may determine."

That is what we would expect, but will the Minister please explain the following:

"Where a member of the Board is in the employ of any other person, the Board may make to that other person, in consideration of the services of that member to the Board, such payments as the Department may determine."

Does that mean not only that someone who is on the board representing a firm will receive his remuneration, whatever it happens to be, but that his firm will receive remuneration in respect of his absence? If so, that is a great departure from all normal practices in these matters.

What sort of quorum will be required? The schedule states:

"The validity of any proceedings of the Board shall not be affected by any vacancy among the members".

Let us suppose that seven of the nine are no longer members of the board. Can the board function with two members? What quorum will be required to enable the board to continue its business?

I wish to allow other hon. Members the opportunity to speak, but these important matters merit discussion. The Minister appoints the tourist board, and the board can then appoint advisory committees whose members need not necessarily be members of the board. Without reference to the Minister or to anyone else, the board can appoint advisory committees, which are then their own masters and can decide how their business is run. They are unelected, unappointed and unfettered in the work that they do. Finally, how will board allowances compare with advisory committee allowances?

11.4 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I join hon. Members who have paid tribute to the people who work in the tourist industry in Northern Ireland and face considerable adversity in the task that they have to accomplish. It is difficult to mention tourism in Northern Ireland without facing the fact that considerable disadvantages have to be overcome, or at least taken into account. They stem, of course, from the security situation in Northern Ireland or, perhaps more accurately, the perception of that situation by those who are outside the Province.

If I was presented with a tourist brochure from Beirut or Yugoslavia or some other war-torn part of the world, it would take a fairly good salesman to convince me that I should take my family to such a place for my next summer holiday. The media have placed Northern Ireland in that

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

bracket, and it is against that backcloth that the tourist board and those involved in the tourist industry in Northern Ireland have to carry out their work.

When I approach the subject of tourism, the first aspect I have to question is the strategy and direction of the Northern Ireland tourist board. In 1989, the Government published a brochure entitled "A view of the future: Tourism in Northern Ireland". It outlined a strategy which would have called people like me defeatists because we recognised that, because of the terrorist campaign, there was overwhelming difficulty in selling Northern Ireland as a tourist venue.

The brochure suggested that the vigorous campaign to bring the holiday visitor to Northern Ireland would continue. I do not think that the statistics outlined by the Minister in the debate or others that have been made available subsequent to the publication of the brochure showed that that strategy had succeeded. It is the wrong strategy, because this is not the time to concentrate on that end of the tourist market.

I do not say that we should give it up. There must still be a vigorous effort to attract tourists to Northern Ireland, but the overall effort of the Northern Ireland tourist board should be directed at bringing back the business man and his family, because, by and large, people who come to Northern Ireland and see it for themselves see that it is not as it is painted by the media and they are prepared to return to the Province. It would be much more productive to go to those who come regularly to the Province and encourage them to bring their families for holidays. The tourist board should concentrate on the obvious specialist holidays, such as genealogical tours, with to a view to increasing the number of holidaymakers, particularly from North America.

The other important tourist is the home visitor, if that is not a contradiction in terms. There is an obvious understanding by people who live in Northern Ireland of the security situation, and they know where it is quite safe to go. The people of Northern Ireland should be given great encouragement to spend a holiday at home at least once every other year and to take their holidays in Northern Ireland. Grants should be given to the operators of tourist facilities throughout the Province to encourage local people.

I join colleagues across the Floor of the House in their protest about the means by which we have to deal with orders such as this, which are on important subjects that require a great deal more time in debate than we have been afforded tonight. Furthermore, many reasoned amendments to this order could have been tabled, and I am sure that we should have managed to convince the Minister that he should accept them. I am sure that he does not believe that his orders are so perfect that they are like the laws of the Medes and Persians and should not and cannot be changed.

I shall deal first with the definition of a tourist amenity. I rather suspect that there is an overriding opinion within the Northern Ireland tourist board that a tourist amenity is only something that the Almighty made. The people of Northern Ireland have a lot more than most people in other parts of the world to thank the Almighty for, in terms of the beauty and scenery of their country, but a tourist amenity goes much further than that.

Recreation provision is an important tourist amenity. If one wants to bring families to Northern Ireland, one has to be aware that young people will not be content simply to go to the glens of Antrim, the Antrim coast, the causeway, or the Mournes, although all that is attractive and they could do some fishing around the constituency of the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe).

There are recreational facilities all around the Province that should be sold better by the Northern Ireland tourist board, although it seldom notices them. It should recognise the important part that some of our recreational facilities play in bringing tourists to Northern Ireland, by which I mean bringing them exclusively to such facilities.

The Minister will know that I am closely connected with the recreational facility of Dundonald international ice bowl and its leisure park. Every week, people come from the rest of the world to take part in competitive games—ice hockey teams, ice skaters and bowling teams. When the full-scale park eventually reaches fruition, even more people will be attracted to even wider facilities. Leisure facilities play an important role, but one that is not properly recognised by the Northern Ireland tourist board.

Several hon. Members have already spoken about the local government aspect. The Minister is making available a wealth of money to the Northern Ireland tourist board and to tourism in Northern Ireland. However, does he recognise that local government makes a singular contribution to tourism, and that it should have as much right as any other organisation to receive money from public funds aimed at tourist ventures? Like the hon. Member for Antrim, South, I notice that district councils are expected to consult the tourist board before embarking on the building of a tourist amenity. Therefore, will the Minister follow me as I go through the order looking for definitions?

The early part of the order defines "tourist amenity" as

"an amenity, facility or service provided primarily for tourists".

It defines a "tourist" as

"a visitor to Northern Ireland, a person spending his holiday in Northern Ireland or a person travelling for pleasure within Northern Ireland".

Under those definitions, Dundonald international ice bowl would be a tourist amenity. Indeed, it would be a tourist amenity on the basis that it received 50 per cent. of its funding from the tourist grant of the EEC.

I hope that the Minister will make it clear—I do not want there to be doubt down the line—that we are talking only about consultation. I hope that permission is not required from the Northern Ireland tourist board. After consultation has taken place, will a local authority face a limitation on the sum that it can spend on what it deems to be a leisure or tourist provision? Will a fiscal constraint be placed on a local council at that stage?

The hon. Member for Antrim, South, who I think was involved in local government, will recognise that there has not been a very full relationship between the local authorities and the tourist board. I would not want to put it as high as a strained relationship. As the tourist board saw such a small role for district councils, the councils ended up having their own tourist-based organisation. Given that relationship, the Minister has an excellent opportunity to try to bring together the various interests that are fighting the battle to bring tourists to Northern Ireland. That can be done by having a definite role for

local authorities within the board and by providing places for the authorities as of right on the board of the tourist board.

It seems that there are certain circumstances in which the tourist board can make a grant or a loan, for example, to encourage tourist provision for Northern Ireland. The order suggests that the tourist board could become involved in matters relating to the tourist industry. It seems to suggest that the board could become almost commercial. I wonder what restraints the Minister might have in mind to place upon the board in the exercise of its functions by associating itself with various tourist interests in Northern Ireland.

I give the Minister every encouragement in his task of attracting tourists to Northern Ireland. Some of us have had an unhappy view of the tourist board, especially when it thought it pertinent that the red hand of Ulster should be removed from its emblem to be replaced by a distorted shamrock. That showed, perhaps, the way that the tourist board was thinking. I considered that a retrograde step. The board should not involve itself in politics in the way it has. I encourage the Minister to take up the task of raising tourism to a higher level. I suggest that he concentrates on the areas of tourism in which, in the present security circumstances, it is more realistic to seek to increase business.

11.19 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): By now, the Minister will be aware that, in general terms, the order is welcomed on both sides of the House, but that we are grossly dissatisfied that we have not been given an opportunity to improve it and to remedy its deficiencies by amendments. The order has many flaws and many matters that require explanation, but it would be impossible to touch on them in any detail tonight. Nevertheless, we welcome the fact that, after four decades, since 1948, we now have a consolidated order—I had better not call it a Bill—bringing these matters together. We hope that it will streamline the administration of tourism in Northern Ireland and that the duality of decision making—the duality of activity between the Northern Ireland tourist board and the Department of Economic Development tourism division—will now be removed.

I hope that that will happen, but I question a rather sinister little sentence in article 5, which states that the Department of Finance and Personnel will issue to the board

"(a) directions of a general or specific nature as to the exercise by the Board of its functions".

I hope that there will be minimal interference and that the advantages of streamlining finance, personnel and decision making will be brought about by the order.

Like other hon. Members, I deplore the fact that the large pool of expertise and professionalism in local government has not been harnessed and utilised through the order. Indeed, article 4(3) says that the board should "establish machinery for consulting", and it is a great pity that the Minister did not outline the shape of the consultation, how it will be implemented and who will be involved. Perhaps he will do so when he replies, or later through correspondence. The article refers to outside bodies, but it does not refer to local government. There is an enormous pool of experience and know-how in local government that has not been tapped. That is a serious omission.

I hope that the financing figure that the Minister quoted tonight—an increase of £6·7 million to more than £10 million—will mean a real increase, and is not simply the sum arrived at by adding the money spent by the tourist board and that spent by the tourism division of the Department of Economic Development. It must be a real increase in money going into the market place, as it were, for tourist promotions.

The greater the flexibility in the allocation of that funding through grant aid to the various facets that would encourage amenity and accommodation production, the better—and that should be the aim of the board. There is a preoccupation—if the House will forgive the pun—with accommodation in the order, in that more than half the articles deal with registration, expansion and all that pertains to grading of accommodation

The board is to undertake a new and sweeping activity. It is noticeable that the legislation which applies to the remainder of Great Britain has not been implemented. I hope that Northern Ireland is not to be the guinea pig, and I hope that this will be a fruitful exercise. We all agree that tourists are entitled to know the quality and standard of service for which they are paying. A sensitive approach is required, however, because there are various levels in any tourist market. I hope that there will not be a theoretical and useless application of standards, because the accommodation will have to address very diverse markets, from the family in the guest house to five-star hotels. I hope that the fees charged will be reasonable and acceptable, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Antrim, (Mr. Forsythe).

Omitted from the list of overnight stopping places in the order are caravan sites, youth hostels and activity centres, which all provide accommodation. I hope that the order will be extended to cover them. Indeed, it could go one step further. In many parts of Northern Ireland, there are festivals in which the local community participates and private homes are used to provide one-off overnight accommodation. I trust that they will not be expected to register.

One aspect deliberately omitted from the order is the inspection and registration of catering facilities. As one who has obviously enjoyed tourist facilities in recent times, I take the view—as do many others—that good accommodation and good food are the two bastions of an enjoyable holiday. It appears that accommodation is to be registered, but that no importance is to be attached to the quality of food. It is important, at least in some voluntary way, to offer some assessment to tourists of the quality of food that they may expect at a particular establishment, and thus appeal to them through their stomachs. Having said that, I was interested to note that the new draft order for local government also specifically excludes the inspection of catering establishments by health inspectors.

I echo the sentiments already expressed about board membership. It is a great tragedy that it does not include any tourism professionals. While not wishing to cast any aspersions on those appointed to the board, I note that four of them are from marketing-oriented firms. A great opportunity has been missed to benefit from the wealth of experience that local government can offer. The Minister rather pre-empted tonight's debate, to the extent that nine of the board's members were appointed on 25 July 1991, irrespective of tonight's debate.

I draw the Minister's attention to the necessity for rural regeneration. Farm diversification is important to

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

Northern Ireland's rural regeneration, and will serve as the linchpin of tourist development. I refer, for instance, to the use of the farmhouse as a guest house. The board must take a sensible approach to that dimension.

I thank the Minister and the tourist board for undertaking a study of the whole South Down area, including the districts of Down, Newry, and Armagh. Such a trans-district council study is required, because specific district councils are too small. That study will highlight one of the most scenic parts of Ireland—the mountains of Mourne, allied to St. Patrick's country. With reference to the comments made by the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder), we have enough Roman/Welsh/English evangelists, and were quite happy with the one that we had in 432. Perhaps one of South Down's great tourist attractions is the ancestral home of the Earl of Kilmorey. However, I will leave that subject for another night.

I have a number of brief questions to ask the Minister. Will the board inform local government of the consequences of the details of registration? Will the fee really relate to the market? Will there be clarification in respect of farmhouses and private houses? Will accommodation grants be made directly available to develop that sector, and will there be full co-operation with Bord Failte promotions, publicity, and scheme sharing? Finally, will the tourist board share with local government responsibility for fully developing employment in Northern Ireland's tourist industry?

11.29 pm

Mr. Needham: We have had a fairly wide-ranging debate, involving no fewer thant 73 questions of detail. That goes some way towards proving a point on which we all agree—that the Order in Council system is not the best way to conduct these matters. That, however, is a matter for Opposition Members to decide in the talks to which they have referred: they can decide how they wish to reach an agreed change in the current procedure.

I shall try, in the limited time available, to answer the points that have been made. If I cannot do so now, I will write to hon. Members in full. If they then wish to discuss their points with me, I shall, as always, be only too delighted to see them for that purpose, rather than discussing any of the other political matters that may be mentioned in the papers.

I thank the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) for his kind comments. I join him in congratulating Commissioner Millan on the way in which he has supported Northern Ireland whenever we have visited him to talk about the application for grant from the EC. Some £30 million is now being made available by the EC up to 1993-94, plus an additional £7 million under "Interreg", which will go both north and south. Some £100 million will be spent on tourism over the next five years. That is an enormous sum being spent on what I consider to be an important way of promoting Northen Ireland's economy. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is going to take his holiday on the Ballyconnell canal. Perhaps while he is there he can explain to the few he meets who may wish to join his party why they will not be able to do so.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the fall-off in visitors from the United States. There is no such fall-off; indeed, this year there has been a modest increase in the number of visitors from North America. Northern Ireland is the only region in the British Isles to have achieved such a result, and I feel that we should congratulate everyone in Northern Ireland who managed to make such a success of it.

District councils have a crucial role to play in the development of tourism in Northern Ireland. They already have an enormously successful record. We need only see the history park of Gortin, or visit Kinnego bay, Castle Archdale or Enniskillen—and a whole range of facilities that many of us have visited with our families—to observe the professionalism and competence exercised by district councils. They may raise as much money as they wish for such tourist measures—here I should also mention the Triad scheme in Armagh—in the knowledge that grants will be available from the EC, the International Fund for Ireland or even the tourist board.

The hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) talked about the bad media. I think that he was being modest in using such language. He was extremely eloquent about the history of Northern Ireland; perhaps only Finn McCool would have been upset, as he was not given a mention. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are changing the law on litter: we are tightening it up. I believe that one way in which we can improve litter collection is to examine the organisation that local government currently applies.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) suggested that the tourist board was a quango. Like its English, Scottish and Welsh counterparts, it is; the point is that we are setting up a board which, whatever the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) may say, is staffed by people eminently qualified to undertake the job of planning, structuring and seeing through a tourist strategy for Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for South Down said that four marketing people were involved. We need marketing people when it comes to selling Northern Ireland, but the chairman of the board has a long professional background of providing the highest grade of tourist amenities.

The hon. Members for Antrim, South is quite right that the head of Department is the permanent secretary. Under the relevant legislation, that has always been the case. However, the Minister does not just stand quietly by—in a "Yes, Minister" scenario—waiting for the permanent secretary to tell him what to do. The phraseology to which the hon. Gentleman referred is used in planning legislation also. The Department's responsibility is the Minister's responsibility.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if each of the 1,300 public houses in Northern Ireland were to provide two bedrooms, the amount of accommodation for tourists could be almost doubled? Might it not therefore be prudent to include in the Northern Ireland tourist board a representative of the retail licensed trade? That vital part of the tourist industry ought to be properly represented.

Mr. Needham: I take my hon. Friend's point. Mr. Lavery, who is on the Northern Ireland tourist board, runs the Guinness operation in Northern Ireland, so he has some interest in these matters.

The point that I want to make goes to the crux of points that were made by the hon. Member for Antrim, South

and the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) —whether councils should have a right to representation on the board. I do not accept that they should, although that does not necessarily mean that there should not be a councillor on the board. There is no reason why there should not be, provided that his concern is what is best for Northern Ireland as a whole. In my view, councillors must concern themselves more with the ever-increasing number of amenities being developed in their areas. As I have said already, some councils have done extremely well, but many could do better. I believe that over the years the number of amenities throughout Northern Ireland will increase. It is up to the councillors and their officials to ensure success in that field.

The Northern Ireland tourist board should be as independent of Government as possible. Its job is to bring together an overall tourist strategy for Northern Ireland —a strategy whereby provision is not duplicated unnecessarily, financial priorities are set, and money is put into schemes to which everybody can subscribe.

The hon. Member for South Down said that, unfortunately, not enough attention was paid to consultation machinery and how it would work. That is something that will have to evolve. I agree with the hon. Member for Belfast, East that the process had not always been as good as it might have been, but that does not mean that it will not improve. I do not want to put ropes around those involved in the consultative process by telling them that they have to do things in one particular way or another. As I have said, the first meeting in February 1991 was very successful. I do not want to define matters too tightly.

What is a tourist amenity? I should prefer to leave that to be worked out by the board. Of course, a tourist amenity should be primarily for tourist development. I have no wish to shackle local authorities in the development of facilities, which may have a large tourist element or a not-so-large tourist element. I want to see those thousand flowers bloom.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Belfast, East that we should not have a strategy for the promotion of tourism in Northern Ireland. From the surveys that have been carried out, we know that a large number of people want to come to Northern Ireland and to see a positive image of the Province. Those who have visited the Province love it and want to come back. This order gives us the means to make that possible, to set the standards and to provide the certification and registration facilities. It pumps in the money, and it gives everyone a role in the achievement of the objective. This is a very important means of increasing employment in Northern Ireland, improving the image of the Province, and making sure that its beautiful countryside and excellent facilities are made available to a greater number of people.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 5 December, be approved.

Metrolink (Greater Manchester)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

11.39 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I am grateful for the opportunity to have this debate on an issue that is causing great concern to many of my constituents. I am afraid that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport will hear a rather sorry story.

On 1 November 1991, notices appeared in local papers to say that the direct rail service between Altrincham and Manchester would cease from Christmas eve until the middle of April 1992, when the metrolink would take over. The estimated period of closure from Christmas eve until April 17 is considered by many people in my constituency to be too long, especially as it had been announced initially that the changeover period would be only two to three weeks. Because I was concerned about that, I wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport. I received a reply from him on 27 November in which he said:

"I am aware of the delays mentioned by your constituent, which I understand are due to late delivery of rolling stock as well as engineering adjustments to ensure adequate clearance along the line. I understand however that the Passenger Transport Executive are confident"—

I emphasise the word "confident"—

"that the new timetable for the opening of the project will be met. The Bury to Victoria line will open in February, the city centre section in March and the Altrincham to Piccadilly section in April."

So much for his confidence: I am told that today at a press conference it was announced that the opening had been delayed even further.

During the interval, when there are no trains on the direct route from Altrincham to Manchester Piccadilly, people are being asked to use a replacement bus service. No doubt, some people will decide that they will go to their place of work in Manchester by car. Many commuters in my constituency travel from Altrincham to Manchester for work. Whether they go by bus or by car, it will mean more traffic on roads which are already overcrowded. Going by bus will add considerably to the length of time that will be spent travelling, which is not an especially attractive proposition for many people.

Throughout the argument, the one ray of hope was the Chester to Manchester railway, which would still be operating. That railway goes from Chester to Hale, Altrincham. The service would make a call at Navigation Road, go across to Stockport and on to Manchester. I had hoped that at peak times that service could be increased or, if that were not possible, at least trains with a higher passenger capacity could be provided.

To push things along, I wrote to Sir Bob Reid, the chairman of British Rail, on 16 December 1991. I thought that I wrote quite a reasonable letter, because I said:

"I am very concerned about the fact that the Metrolink in my area is running behind schedule. All trains on the commuter service from Manchester to Altrincham will cease on Christmas Eve and the Metrolink is not due to start until mid-April at the earliest. I shudder to think of the consequences with all that extra traffic on the roads.

I am told that there are going to be meetings this week and I am wondering if British Rail could perhaps run more trains through peak hours on the Chester to Manchester Piccadilly service? These trains would halt at Hale, Altrincham, Navigation Road, and then go straight across to Stockport and Manchester. This at least would be of great help for many of the people in the area and take some cars off the road.

[Sir Fergus Montgomery]

There is a degree of urgency here and I should be most grateful if you could let me know whether this is feasible."

That was on 16 December. I got a quick reply, dated 18 December, from Keith Hill, the parliamentary relations assistant, who said:

"The Chairman has asked me to thank you for your letter of the 16 December. A reply will be sent to you as soon as possible."

Lo and behold, this morning I got that reply. It was a copy of a letter sent to the chief executive of Trafford council on 19 December which said:

"Many thanks for your letter of 16 December."

So the chief executive of Trafford council wrote on exactly the same day that I wrote to the chairman of British Rail. The letter went on to say:

"The Manchester-Sale-Altrincham railway line is operated by British Rail in our role as contractor to Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive, who are responsible for both policy and funding.

Greater Manchester PTE have asked us to cease operations on this route on 24 December to allow the new operator, Greater Manchester Metro Limited, to carry out conversion works. I note your concern about the length of time which these works will take, but am unable to comment as this is a matter for Greater Manchester Metro Limited.

The Manchester-Stockport-Altrincham-Hale route is also operated by us as a contractor on behalf of Greater Manchester PTE. Discussions have taken place between ourselves and Greater Manchester PTE in respect of the possibility of provision of extra services and/or capacity on this route, but I have to advise you that Greater Manchester PTE have decided that they are unable to fund such extra provision.

I trust this answers the points you have raised."

In his covering letter, Sir Bob Reid said:

"I am sure you will agree that this is self-explanatory and there is nothing I can usefully add, other than to say that Metrolink plan to run replacement buses in advance of their new train services."

It is strange that, having received an acknowledgment on 18 December, I had to wait until this morning for a reply from Sir Bob Reid, which was a copy of a letter dated 19 December 1991 that had been sent to Trafford council. It took four weeks to send me a copy of a letter written three days after my original letter. That does not reek of efficiency in British Rail.

I am concerned about the end of that letter and the PTE's decision not to fund extra train services but instead to rely entirely on a replacement bus service. I am sure that whoever made the decision is not a commuter in my constituency who must travel to work in Manchester every day. I wonder why the travelling public in my area were not considered or asked for their opinions before a decision was made. If only there had been more forethought, some of the inconvenience could have been avoided.

I still maintain that increased use of the Chester to Manchester route would have avoided some of the congestion that we are now experiencing. I agree that that route does not offer too much comfort to my constituents, who use the stations between Altrincham and Manchester Piccadilly. I feared that buses would fill up in the Altrincham area, which would have made things intolerable for people who wanted to board at intermediary points. More people using the Chester to Altrincham and Manchester line would have allowed more space on the replacement bus service, but somewhere along the line somebody in authority decided otherwise.

Another snag for people using the replacement bus service is that buses terminate not at Piccadilly station but at Chatham street in Machester. I have asked a number of my constituents who are regular travellers for their comments. The letters that I have received make interesting reading. There have been continual comments about the difficulties for people who need to get to Piccadilly station to journey to other parts of the country.

A constituent told me of a friend who took her mother to Piccadilly station so that her mother could return to Halifax. They used the bus service because there was no train service and were alarmed to end up not at Piccadilly station but down a pokey back street well away from the station. It is believed that that stop will cause considerable hardship to elderly and disabled people in the area. If we have a spell of bad weather in the next few weeks, my constituents will suffer much more inconvenience.

The length of time taken to make the journey by bus will make the working day much longer and will cause difficulty at places of employment, with people arriving late through no fault of their own. A lady in my constituency, part of a one-parent family, says that by using the train service before Christmas she could arrange to put her child in a nursery school, get the train to Manchester, do her job, catch a train back and at the end of the working day be fairly certain of the time she could collect her child from the nursery school.

That has all disappeared. The lady tells me that she has tried the Chester to Manchester route and that the trains are extremely crowded, with standing room only at peak hours. Another constituent told me that, on 6 January, last Monday, the 8.15 am train from Altrincham had about 170 people standing in addition to the 150 who were seated. He believed that to be well in excess of the maximum recommended loads. He echoes the point of so many travellers in asking why no extra carriages have been provided on the Chester to Manchester route. I hope that my hon. Friend can take that up with British Rail. My constituent also poses the pertinent question why the passenger transport executive asked the transport users consultative committee to collect objections and report back to it, when it appears to have ignored every recommendation.

If urgent action is not taken, more people will use their own cars, causing even more congestion on the roads. One man told me that he has decided to use his car because the journey takes so long by bus. He has found three other people to take the other seats in his car and they share the cost of parking, which apparently makes it cheaper than any form of public transport. When metrolink finally functions, people like those four are likely to decide that, instead of using it, they will continue travelling in a car together and sharing the costs. With the long delay in metrolink reopening, there is a danger that other passengers will take the same action.

As my hon. Freind may have guessed, I am unhappy —that is an understatement—about the situation. Those responsible for metrolink must listen to the legitimate complaints of the travelling public. Once the conversion period is over, many potential passengers may have made other arrangements, as have the four people whom I mentioned. Metrolink will have to think carefully about fare levels and I hope that they will be no higher than the existing fares.

I hope that, in the immediate future, metrolink will monitor the situation to find out the main difficulties

facing people trying to get into the city of Manchester and that it will alleviate some of the inconvenience caused. Even at this late stage, I hope that metrolink talks to British Rail, in the hope of strengthening the Altrincham-Stockport-Manchester route. If more of the trains called at Navigation Road after the Altrincham stop, at the very least the situation would be improved, with more and more people using the route and easing the congestion for other passengers along the line.

I hope that tonight my hon. Friend can assure me that the situation will be monitored and that, if the PTE finds that action is needed, urgent action will be taken to alleviate as much hardship and inconvenience as possible for my constituents.

11.53 pm

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) for allowing me a brief intervention in this debate.

My constituents welcome metrolink, but they are disappointed that the original start date in November has now been postponed to February or March. They want it quickly because it will undoubtedly improve the links through my constituency into Manchester where many go for business, leisure and work.

A couple of lessons about the construction of the link through Bury can be learnt. The Minister should take note of them and pass them on to the Greater Manchester passenger transport executive. First, the times of construction are important. Many of my constituents have houses backing on to the line and they were caused a great deal of inconvenience by construction going on until very late at night. Those of us who have or have had young families know the difficulties that that can cause. In future, when such lines are constructed, we should try to limit construction to times that will not cause such disturbance.

Secondly, it is important to heed the lesson about the alternative transport that should be provided. When the rail link to Manchester from Bury was discontinued during construction, alternative bus services were provided for rail link users. That was a satisfactory arrangement, but the bus service was not additional to existing services, which were merely re-routed.

Many of my constituents, particularly those in Prestwich, lost services that they had used hitherto. Many were elderly and they suddenly discovered that the bus service that they had used to get them into Prestwich and to parts of Manchester was no longer available. They suffered a great deal as a result. I pay tribute to their fortitude and I pay particular tribute to Mrs. Rachel Lawton, who has been vigorous in the defence of those passengers. Sadly, the passenger transport executive has not made proper alternative arrangements and my constituents have been caused a great deal of hardship this winter. I hope that that hardship is coming to an end.

As a result of those lessons, I hope that, in the future, others will not have to suffer similar problems.

11.56 pm

The Minister for Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLouglin): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) and for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) on starting the new season of Adjournment debates. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale has taken a keen interest in this matter on behalf of his constituents, which he has often pursued with my hon. Friend the Minister of State. Before I respond in detail to the points that my hon. Friend has raised, I should like to say something about the Manchester metrolink scheme.

Most people recognise that the light railway scheme, which is nearing completion, will mark a major improvement in Manchester's transport infrastructure. First, it will replace existing British Rail services from Bury and Altrincham with a fast, modern and comfortable light rail system. The British Rail stock being used along those lines needed replacement, and I am sure that passengers will be more than happy with the modern, light rail vehicles which are to come into service soon.

Secondly, the system will, in addition, link those two services to the heart of the city centre via a new street—running section, with seven new stations. Access to the city centre, and between the north and south of the city, will be greatly improved. That is likely to play a part in encouraging motorists to travel by metrolink rather than by car, so reducing congestion and pollution. However, I noted what my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale said in this respect and I shall deal with it later.

Thirdly, the system will provide a direct link to BR's main line station at Piccadilly when that section opens in June, which will be of great benefit to many travellers. Fourthly, the system will be accessible to mobility-impaired people, whereas the existing services are not. All the railway stations are being upgraded, with ramps and lifts provided to allow mobility-impaired people to have access to the vehicles. In the street-running section through the city centre, profiled platforms will enable the vehicles to be accessible. Those features will help not only mobility-impaired people but also those with prams, luggage or heavy shopping.

This £135 million project has required a great deal of preparation and effort on the part of all concerned—principally Greater Manchester passenger transport authority and executive, and the Greater Manchester Metro Ltd., which won the contract to design, build and operate the system. The project could not have gone ahead without the substantial grant of £53 million provided by the Government.

I know from my visit to the light rail exhibition in Manchester last November that the system has attracted wide interest and attention, not just in this country, and is likely to attract visitors to the city in the months and years ahead, as well as being of great benefit to local residents.

I have gone into the advantages of the system in some detail because it is essential to be aware of those when considering delays to the system's opening, so that those delays can be put into their proper context. I have a great deal of sympathy with the position of some of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, which he has so eloquently described, and also with some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South on construction. There are lessons to be learned. Light rail schemes are being promoted throughout the country and I hope that we can learn from some of the points he made, because construction can be annoying and irritating for people if it is done at the wrong time of day. I shall ensure that other people's attention is drawn to that point.

It is not surprising that, with a project on this scale with so many new features, unforseen problems can arise, and

[Mr. Patrick McLouglin]

timetables can, unfortunately, prove over-optimistic. It is of course vital, as I am sure my hon. Friend will agree, that the system should be subject to the most stringent safety requirements, and should not be opened until all those requirements have been properly satisfied. I do not think that there will be any difference between us on that.

The delays are nevertheless extremely regrettable, and it is disappointing, to say the least, that the first section will not open until early March. The project is the PTE's responsibility, as promoter of the scheme, and the contractor is responsible to the PTE. However, I will try to outline what I understand from the PTE to be the main reasons for the delays.

First, the Bury line, which was inherited from British Rail, required more work to be done on it than was originally anticipated by the contractors. In particular, a proportion of the track had to be renewed, and the amount of bridge refurbishment work which was needed was greater than had been expected. Secondly, the delivery of the vehicles, which are being supplied by Firema of Italy, was later than scheduled, with consequent delays to the rest of the timetable. Thirdly, the task of ensuring that there were adequate clearances for the vehicles along the street-running section through the city centre was more extensive that first thought.

Fourthly, there were other works as a result of safety requirements, in particular containment works at Piccadilly Undercroft and Victoria Stations. I am sure that my hon. Friends will agree that there should be no skimping on safety, and some of those problems have taken longer to solve than was anticipated. Fifthly, the amount of work that needed to be done on the Altrincham line was undersestimated by the contractor. As a result, it has had to be closed for longer than originally envisaged, and British Rail was unable to give the contractors much by way of access before the line closed.

It is for the PTE to comment in detail on the relative importance of these and other factors, but it will come as no surprise to anyone who has been involved in a major construction project, with so many novel aspects, that there should be some delays owing to unforeseen circumstances.

Even without those delays, however, I understand that it would have been necessary to close the existing lines for up to three months, in the case of the Bury line, to enable the work on metrolink to be completed. Inconvenient though this may be, for a major project of that sort, some disruption is inevitable.

I turn now to the difficulties being experienced by some of my hon. Friend's constituents, and to the action that has been taken to minimise them. I recognise that, during the transitional period between the closure of the British Rail services and the opening of metrolink, travellers have experienced and will continue to experience some disruption. However, I am assured that the PTE is doing everything possible to try to minimise the inconvenience to passengers.

In the case of the Bury line, which closed in August, passengers can use replacement bus services. I understand that the PTE carried out a detailed survey of passengers' needs before drawing up its plans for those services. The bus services were then organised as a mixture of limited stop express services and services that stop at all points previously served by the railway, so that passengers can choose the service that best meets their needs. I am told that, although these routes were put out to tender, operators agreed to run them commercially, without the need for any financial support from the PTE.

I understand that, for most passengers, the increase in journey times experienced has not been as great as expected, and that road congestion has not been a major problem. I am told that very few complaints have been received by either the PTE or by the Transport Users Consultative Committee, and I should add that my Department has not received a single complaint about the replacement bus services on the Bury line since the BR service closed. That shows one area in which the PTE went to a great deal of trouble.

In the case of Altrincham, I understand that the PTE is confident that the replacement bus services provided will also be sufficient to meet the demand, and will provide an adequate, albeit not an ideal, substitute for the rail service in the short term. I recognise that the circumstances of the Altrincham line are such that passengers transferring from rail to bus are likely to experience a significant increase in their journey times, in contrast to the position on the Bury line. It is too early to judge the extent of this increase, as it is only a week since most people returned to work following the Christmas break.

I am sure that the PTE will carefully consider any representations about the adequacy of the replacement bus services and will consider whether any improvements or changes are needed. My hon. Friend has described some of the many inconveniences that some of his constituents have already felt, and I will ensure that those complaints are passed on. I will ask the PTE to investigate ways in which to improve that service.

My hon. Friend has also described the problems of his constituents who use the alternative rail route via Stockport, and he has made some suggestions for alleviating them. I will ask the PTE to explore further with British Rail the practicability of that.

I recognise that, in the short term, there has been a regrettable disruption to the travelling public, given that there is an interval of several months between the closure of BR's services and the opening of metrolink. I believe, however, that the PTE has done a great deal to try to minimise the inconvenience to passengers. I realise that my hon. Friend is not convinced of that at present, and that he feels that a lot more needs to be done. We must ensure that we both make representations to the PTE to see whether we can go some way to help his constituents and those who have to travel on the line.

From the information available to me, it seems that the arrangements made by the PTE have worked well on the Bury line. I hope that that will also be the case eventually on the Altrincham line and, as I have said, I am sure that the PTE will consider any representations made by my hon. Friend and his constituents most carefully.

I believe that any difficulties that passengers have experienced during the transitional period are a small price to pay for the introduction of a modern and innovative scheme from which they will benefit—a system which will be much studied and admired by cities elsewhere in this country and abroad when it is complete.

Although I understand why some people may choose to use their cars during the interim period, I am confident that, when metrolink is up and running, it will soon win them back. It is essential that it does so, because one of the

ideas behind the scheme is to try to relieve some of the congestion and to provide a good, reliable transport service for my hon. Friend's constituents and for the other people in and around the area. When metrolink opens over the next few months, it will provide a major improvement to Manchester's transport network of which the city can justly be proud.

We have been told tonight of a number of examples of improvements that can be made as other light railway schemes come to the fore and as suggestions are made. I will ensure that those are passed on so that the changes can be made and so that the lessons can be learned, because a number of places, such as Sheffield and the midlands, are considering such a scheme. They will look with envy to Manchester, because it will have the first scheme up and running.

I am sure that, when it is up and running properly, my hon. Friend's constituents will be well satisfied with the vast amount of Government money which has been put into the scheme to ensure a good and effective transport system for all those in the constituencies of my hon. Friends.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 14 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

CONTINGENCIES FUND 1990-91

Ordered,

That there be laid before the House accounts of the Contingencies Fund, 1990-91, showing:

(1) The Receipts and Payments in connection with the Fund in the year ended the 31st day of March 1991.

(2) The Distribution of the Capital of the Fund at the commencement and close of the year; with the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Textile Industry

1. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to assist job creation in the textile industry in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): The Department of Employment delivers a wide range of training, enterprise and employment measures through the Employment Service, training and enterprise councils in England and Wales and local enterprise companies in Scotland.

Other agencies, including the Rural Development Commission, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, play an important role in encouraging and stimulating enterprise in many sectors, including textiles, in rural areas.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is the Minister aware that countries such as Spain are considered suitable cases for special EC support because 18 per cent. of their work force are directly involved in textiles? Is the Minister aware that districts in the United Kingdom such as my own, south-east Scotland, have similar percentages of people employed in textiles but do not qualify for either national or European support? Will he assure us that he will talk with his ministerial colleagues to ensure that the resources available to local enterprise companies and training and enterprise councils are sufficient to enable them to support the existing textile industry and promote diversification?

Mr. Jackson: I very much appreciate the importance of the knitwear and textile industry in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Although the unemployment rate in his constituency is well below the Scottish, and indeed the British, average, the textile industry in his district is going through bad times. The Government are helping to diversify: Scottish Borders LEC is purchasing Jedburgh information centre to help promote tourism, and the food processing and fish farming industries are developing and being supported in the district. Scottish Enterprise and Lothian and Edinburgh LEC are taking important steps to develop designer knitwear initiatives within the textile industry. I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's comments to my colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland, as it falls to him to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about the designation of the district for European Community purposes.

Sir John Farr: Will my hon. Friend look into the possibility of starting a form of the small engineering and firms investment scheme for small textile and knitwear firms in rural districts to encourage them to modernise and to re-equip their companies with up-to-date machines?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend's question is one for my colleague the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. One problem with my hon. Friend's suggestion is that there are European Community rules on the subsidies given to the textile and other industries. However, I shall refer his point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. McMaster: How can we believe that the Minister is serious about creating jobs in the textile industry when he will not even protect the ones that already exist? Is he aware that when the Conservative party came to power in 1979 many thousands of people were employed in the thread industry in Paisley and now only one mill remains, which employs 340 people and is threatened with closure this year? Is he going to stand by complacently while more and more people join the dole queues, or will he take action to save the jobs in the textile industry in Paisley?

Mr. Jackson: We all know that the textile industry is an important industry which currently employs 400,000 people—48,500 of whom are employed in Scotland. During the past 10 years, the industry has been protected by the multi-fibre arrangement. The success of companies in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, my constituency and elsewhere in the country depends on their efforts, and the Government can do only a limited amount. The textile industry is still successful and employs many people, but its success depends on its own efforts.

Job Training, Chelmsford

2. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Essex TEC to discuss job training in Chelmsford.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the chairman of Essex training and enterprise council on 28 November. He is aware of the excellent contribution that Essex TEC is making to the training and enterprise needs of the area, but he has no plans to visit it in the immediate future.

Mr. Burns: When my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State next meets the chairman of Essex TEC in Chelmsford, will he congratulate him on the splendid work that that TEC is doing in encouraging job creation, which in the past six months has led to 315 new small businesses starting in that area? Does my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary agree that that belies the guffaws and

complaints of the moaning Minnies on the Opposition Benches, who constantly do down the excellent training that is available throughout Essex and the rest of the country?

Mr. Jackson: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks, which were heard also by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, and I will convey them to Essex TEC, which is doing an excellent job. Its current budget is £28·75 million, which is a substantial sum from the taxpayer. It has 4,400 young people in youth training places and 1,300 people in employment training places. I am glad that my hon. Friend appreciates the good job that that TEC is doing.

Mr. Ashton: Is not it a fact that all those training places were not needed in Chelmsford in 1979 because the young people there had jobs then, under a Labour Government? Is not unemployment the reason for the massive increase in the number of training places?

Mr. Jackson: The whole House will be rather amused by the hon. Gentleman's interpretation. We all remember the serious problem of increasing youth unemployment in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Our training programmes —which are operating on a scale two and a half times larger in real terms than those of the last Labour Government—arose as a response to that problem, which existed when Labour was in office but about which that Government did nothing.

Overseas Visitors

3. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the volume and value of overseas visitors for 1992; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): The British Tourist Authority's latest forecasts are that there will be 18·3 million overseas visits to the United Kingdom in 1992, resulting in expenditure of around £8 billion—8 per cent. higher than the estimated expenditure for 1991.

Mr. Gregory: I congratulate my hon. Friend on those excellent estimates. Does he agree that it is about time that Labour acknowledged the importance of tourism, rather than keep referring to jobs in a Mickey Mouse and candy floss industry? Will my hon. Friend consider instituting a national tourism week, such as that organised in the United States, to draw attention to the importance of tourism and to its employment factor? Furthermore, will my—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Two questions are enough.

Mr. Gregory: A national tourism week would draw attention to the growing importance of tourism in the United Kingdom.

Mr Forth: I share my hon. Friend's frustration at the way in which the Opposition persistently regard jobs in tourism without any seriousness, given the major contribution that tourism consistently makes to the economy of my hon. Friend's constituency and to the whole country. My hon. Friend works very hard with local tourist bodies to promote York as a tourist centre, and very successfully too. I will certainly bring my hon. Friend's imaginative suggestion of a national tourism week to the attention of the tourist authorities to see whether they can take it up positively.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does the Minister acknowledge that we on these Benches recognise the importance of the tourist industry to Wales? However, whereas the Scottish tourist board is entitled to market Scotland overseas, the position in Wales is not the same. What is the Government's attitude to the Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Wales) Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan), to give Wales equality of treatment in that regard?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend's Bill has received close scrutiny and attention by the Government, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the outocme of those deliberations will be known to the House shortly.

Mr. Barry Field: Does my hon. Friend agree that one reason why we are so successful in attracting visitors from overseas is the strength of the United Kingdom market? Will he congratulate the English tourist board on its initiatives in promoting domestic tourism, and consider what more can be done to highlight its profile—just to perk up the aspidistras in guest houses and hotels throughout the south of England and elsewhere?

Mr. Forth: Yes. I am happy to pay tribute to the excellent efforts made by all tourist boards and authorities throughout the United Kingdom which in their different ways do a splendid job of promoting this country's tourist potential. Some 17 million or 18 million people from abroad choose to visit this country each year. That alone is a testament to the excellent work that is done. A large number of those visitors end up on the Isle of Wight. I am surprised that, on this rare occasion, my hon. Friend did not mention the Isle of Wight, so I am delighted to do so —and to pay tribute to the work that he consistently does on behalf of his constituents.

Industrial Relations

4. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the long-term improvement of industrial relations.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I have regular discussions with representatives of the CBI on a wide range of issues, including the long-term improvement of industrial relations. I have at present no plans for a meeting on the particular subject mentioned by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that although the law can help to improve industrial relations, it is not enough in itself? When he next meets representatives of the CBI, will he impress on them the importance of greater employee participation as a means of improving industrial relations in the long term?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, it was for that reason that, together with the CBI, I launched an initiative to increase employee participation in industry. I also launched a similar initiative in the European Social Affairs Council.

It is of the utmost importance that we encourage employee participation to take place on a voluntary basis,

in the way that best reflects the circumstances of each firm and industry, and not as a result of some statutory straitjacket imposed by Brussels.

Mr. Wallace: I accept that employee participation should be tailor-made for each industry. Does the Secretary of State accept, however, that, if industries are not willing to act accordingly, a backstop must be provided to prevent some employees from being deprived of their rights of participation?

Mr. Howard: No employees are deprived of their rights of participation. When it comes to consultation and employee involvement, however, it is very much better for such processes to take place on a voluntary basis. I believe that the best practices of British industry are second to none in the world; our task must be to encourage others to follow the lead that has been set by the best in industry. That was the purpose of the campaign that I launched with the CBI.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend remind the Opposition that the introduction of a minimum wage would harm industrial relations, rather than enhancing them? The sense of self-worth and the demonstration by employers of the value that they place on employees are best created by the existence of true differentials.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absoutely right. Not only would a national statutory minimum wage destroy countless jobs; one of the greatest problems that it would cause would be the maintaining of such differentials. Strife would inevitably arise as better-paid workers sought to maintain them. My hon. Friend has identified one of the most damaging consequences of the measures proposed by Labour.

Mr. Ron Brown: Should not all anti-trade union laws be scrapped if workers are to have a real right to defend themselves—or does that not matter nowadays?

Mr. Howard: It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman explain the reality behind the small print of Labour's proposals in such graphic terms.

Mr. Hayward: When my right hon. and learned Friend discusses industrial relations with the CBI, will he compare the position in the United Kingdom with that in France? France has recently experienced strikes in the rubbish collection industry, the ports, air traffic control and the railway industry—and they have taken place under a socialist Government. Does not that compare dramatically with the present position in this country?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend correctly identified the position in France—a position with which this country would be faced if Labour were ever returned to office. More strikes took place in the last year of Labour Government than have taken place in the past six years put together.

Employment Opportunities, Tameside

5. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State Employment what action he intends to take to increase employment opportunities in Tameside,

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Service and Manchester training and enterprise council deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes to help unemployed people in the creation of employment opportunities in Tameside, as elsewhere.

In the 12 months to December 1991, Employment Service jobcentres in Tameside placed 7,119 people in jobs, and in Manchester placed 48,904 people in jobs.

Mr. Pendry: Is the Minister aware that, in Tameside, unemployment has risen by a staggering 63 per cent. in the past 18 months? Although unemployment is high in other Greater Manchester boroughs, because of the benefit obtained from urban programme status, it is rising less fast in those boroughs. Will the Minister join me in urging the Secretary of State for the Environment to give Tameside similar status, so that it can offset the terrible waste of talent in the borough?

Mr. Jackson: I shall certainly draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment the hon. Gentleman's point about Tameside. To set unemployment in context, of course it has risen in Tameside, as elsewhere. It is striking, however, that Britain has a higher proportion of its population of working age in work than any other country in Europe, apart from Denmark. We should set that fact in the context of any rise in unemployment.

Mr. Dickens: Is my hon. Friend aware that development corporations in Tameside, which adjoin my constituency, have greatly benefited jobs in the area? Did not a Labour Government want to abolish them?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is well-informed about his area. It is important to note that jobs continue to be created. A total of 25 per cent. of those who sign on as unemployed find jobs within one month, 50 per cent. find jobs within three months and two thirds find jobs within six months. There is a continuing flow through the register and there are job opportunities for people who will take them.

Skill Training

6. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to encourage the development of community-based skill-training schemes.

Mr. Howard: The Government have given training and enterprise councils the responsibility and resources to plan and deliver training which is most appropriate to meet local needs.

Mr. Wareing: What the Secretary of State said will be news to Hexagon Community Ltd. in East Lancashire road in Liverpool, which has found that the TEC in our area has abolished allowances for protective clothing and in many other spheres, as well as cutting the unit cost paid per person so that the entire staff has taken a pay reduction in the past few months. Is not it about time that the Government showed that they have a real commitment to training by encouraging self-help enterprises such as that in my constituency? Is not it appalling that those people, who give so much of their time, should be facing restrictions while the Secretary of State hides behind the skirt of TECs which have been created as shock absorbers for this dreadful Government?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman must make up his mind whether he supports his party's policy on the training

and enterprise councils. We are assured constantly by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen that the Opposition support TECs, are enthusiastic about the idea and wish them to continue. Training and enterprise councils are responsible for dealing with matters in their area.

The hon. Gentleman talks about resources. We are spending two and a half times as much in real terms as the Labour party spent when it was responsible for these matters. The hon. Gentleman must know that this is not one of the two immediate spending priorities to which the shadow Chief Secretary has signed up. He should face up to reality—drop the pledge or own up to the tax.

Mr. Evennett: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Government have spent more on training than Labour did when it was in power, even taking account of inflation? Does he agree that we need no lectures on training from Opposition Front Benchers, because they have objected to employment training, the youth training scheme and every other training proposal that we have made?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. Before they start trying to lecture us on training, the Opposition—particularly the shadow spokesman on employment—would be well-advised to persuade the Transport and General Workers Union to drop its boycott of youth training, employment training and the training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Leighton: Are not training programmes such as youth training and employment training predicated on employer participation but, because of the recession, the employers have contracted out, causing a crisis? We therefore need community programmes, such as that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), which are more expensive. Will the Secretary of State undertake to give extra resources to those programmes so that the ET and YT guarantees can be implemented? They are not being implemented now.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept either of the assumptions on which the hon. Gentleman's question is predicated. It is incorrect to say that employers have contracted out. Every recent survey has shown that many more employers are maintaining or increasing their training than are reducing it. Over 90 per cent. of employers who responded to a recent survey said that they were providing as much, or more, off-the-job training as they were a year ago. So, the hon. Gentleman is being far too pessimistic about the employers' commitment to training.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, despite the Opposition's opposition to every scheme that the Government have introduced in the past 12 years, there has been a sevenfold increase in the number of people entering training schemes?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend draws attention to the substantial increase in the number of people now taking advantage of Government-sponsored training opportunities, but, of course, there has also been a tremendous increase in the training provided to people in work—an 85 per cent. increase between 1984 and 1990. We are making great strides in the provision of training—employer-financed training and Government-financed training—and it is about time that the Opposition recognised that progress instead of constantly carping and criticising.

Mr. Blair: As the recession is now much deeper and more pervasive than Ministers are prepared to admit and as we have the fastest rising unemployment in Europe, how can the Secretary of State justify cutting 110,000 places for training young people and the unemployed at the very time when the recession is hitting hardest?

Mr. Howard: It is absolutely no use the hon. Gentleman banging on about resources, given that he has failed to persuade the shadow Chief Secretary that that should be one of the Opposition's two immediate spending priorities. Drop the pledge or own up to the tax.

Catalytic Converters

7. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the numbers currently employed in the manufacture of catalytic converters for the automobile and transport industry.

Mr. Forth: There are no separate estimates available for the manufacture of catalytic converters.

Dr. Howells: The Minister will be aware that British firms such as Johnson Matthey are at the leading edge of this technology. Is he also aware that in scientific and engineering circles there is much concern that the Government's indolence and reticence in supporting long-term investment in research and development in the leading technology will result in our suffering badly in comparison with our major competitors?

Mr. Forth: That matter is not strictly for me, but is one for my colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry. However, the hon. Gentleman will find that this country's record in research and development—in the private and, indeed, in the public sector—will bear scrutiny and comparison with that of most, if not all, others. The very fact that we have in this country possibly the leading manufacturer of such a high technology product which is so essential to environmental and pollution control in the future surely bears testimony to that and sits ill with the fact that the hon. Gentleman has sought to raise the subject of our lack of technology and R and D while in the same breath mentioning a world-leading company.

Mr. Madel: If we can get more cars sold on the domestic market, we can get more catalytic converters made. Will my hon. Friend join me in urging my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to abolish the 10 per cent. car tax in the Budget?

Mr. Forth: I admire my hon. Friend's ingenuity in using this question to raise what is undoubtedly an important matter. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury are very much aware of my hon. Friend's point. I take this opportunity to remind them of it and I am sure that they will take it fully into account in their pre-Budget deliberations.

Unemployment, West Cumbria

8. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for the reduction of unemployment in west Cumbria.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Service and Cumbria training and enterprise council deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes to help employment prospects for unemployed people living in west Cumbria as elsewhere. A package of measures to help the area, announced by the Government in June 1991, includes the establishment of an action team to support local initiatives and a £15 million English Estates programme to provide new sites, factories and work space in Copeland and Furness.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I have an answer in a word of one syllable? Is the Minister satisfied that the resources in terms of the manpower and finance available to Cumbria TEC are sufficient to deal with the thousands of redundancies that are to be made at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield and also to deal with those now being announced by a number of companies in west Cumbria?

Mr. Jackson: I should like to oblige the hon. Gentleman with a short answer, but it is difficult to encapsulate these things. I was pleased to have the opportunity to discuss those matters with him in my office and I understand the seriousness of unemployment in his constituency. We keep the question of resources for the training and enterprise councils under review. Government support for employment creation in the hon. Gentleman's area does not come only through the TECs. A number of initiatives are coming forward, such as regional development assistance and the special measures which have been announced. All of them are important and I will continue to keep in touch with the hon. Gentleman about them.

Jobcentres

9. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobcentres there are.

Mr. Howard: At the end of November, the Employment Service had a total of 954 local offices offering full jobcentre services.

Mr. French: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the great improvement in the services, management and organisation of jobcentres. Is he aware that it is a great advantage to have the unemployment benefit office and the jobcentre under the same roof, as we have in Gloucester, and will he ensure that more offices are organised in that way?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is our intention to spread across the country the advantages of integrated jobcentres. Through the Employment Service, we are this year helping some 840,000 people with places on our programmes. We expect the number to approach 1 million next year.

Mr. McLeish: Is the Secretary of State aware that our jobcentres now face an increasing demand for their services? Is that any wonder when from the second quarter of 1990 to the second quarter of 1991 employment has grown by 300,000 in Italy, 200,000 in France, and 637,000 in Germany, while in the United Kingdom it has fallen by 706,000? Will the Secretary of State now own up to this unique recession which is causing so much damage and overworking so many of our jobcentres?

Mr. Howard: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was listening to the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), a few moments ago when he pointed out that we have a greater proportion of people in work than any European country except Denmark and more women at work than any other EC member state. There are some 2·5 million more jobs in this country than there were in 1983 and we have an unprecedented record of job creation. As we emerge from recession as a result of the Government's policies, we shall be in a position to create jobs again in the 1990s on the scale achieved in the 1980s.

Youth Training

10. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to initiate an immediate programme of youth training in Crewe and Nantwich.

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Lady calls for the Government to "initiate" an "immediate programme" of YT in Crewe and Nantwich. She will be interested to learn that in the past year the proportion of 16-year-olds in Crewe participating in full-time education and training has risen from 71 to 80 per cent. That seems pretty "immediate" to me.

Moreover, the South and East Cheshire training and enterprise council is currently spending £5·5 million on youth training—a sum infinitely larger than that spent in the area by the previous Labour Government, of which the hon. Lady was such a notable adornment.

Mrs. Dunwoody: In reply to a written question, the Minister told me yesterday that 55 per cent. of school leavers in the South and East Cheshire training and enterprise council area are going straight into youth training. He will also know that we have had a 47 per cent. rise in unemployment in my constituency in one year. Would he like to try to justify that to the young people who have no jobs and no hope of any being created under the present Government?

Mr. Jackson: Unemployment is a fact and we deplore it. The hon. Lady's question, however, concerns youth training and implies that no youth training is available in her constituency. Her reference to my earlier answer shows that there is extensive provision of youth training in her constituency, on a far larger scale than ever before, and that people in her constituency are taking advantage of it.

Mr. Rowe: Was it not a Front-Bench spokesman of the party of which the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) is a member who promised the 1990 Labour party conference that Labour would abolish youth training altogether?

Mr. Jackson: The Labour party's record on youth training—and, indeed, on the whole range of training initiatives which have have come from the Government in the past decade—is deplorable. Opposition Members,

especially those associated with trade unions which have been boycotting our training efforts, would do well to recognise that.

Mr. Fatchett: Is it not clear from the figures for Crewe, and from the naional figures which show that nearly 100,000 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds are still looking for training places, that the Government are failing our school leavers? What sort of future are the Government building for a generation of school leavers who will go from school to the dole queue?

Mr. Jackson: I do not accept the picture that the hon. Gentleman paints. Hundreds of thousands of young people are on YT, and doing increasingly well on YT in terms of qualifications and of jobs on emerging from it. We are monitoring the position on the YT guarantee, to which we are firmly committed, and we are making additional resources available as and where necesary. We have not had a request for additional resources for YT in South and East Cheshire; there does not seem to be pressure in that area. We are sticking by the YT guarantee—an important guarantee which never existed in the days of the Labour Government.

Part-time Work

11. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number and percentage of the United Kingdom work force currently in part-time work.

Mr. Howard: In June 1991, the latest date for which information is available, part-time employment in Great Britain was 6,491,000, or 25 per cent. of the work force in employment. Figures for part-time working in Northern Ireland are not available.

Mr. Battle: I am slightly surprised by the Minister's answer, because, as recently as 16 December, he said in a parliamentary answer that new earnings survey coverage of part-time workers was not comprehensive and, more importantly, that many part-time workers earnings below the income tax threshold were not covered. In view of the Government's admission that they do not know the facts about part-time work, why have they set their face against protection and safeguards for part-time workers? Or are the Government saying that, under economic policy, part-time women workers are expendable?

Mr. Howard: I have given the hon. Gentleman the figures which exist. He must recognise that no one will thank him for his vendetta against part-time work. Only 6 per cent. of those who engage in part-time work do so because they cannot get full-time jobs. We are interested in promoting part-time work and increasing the number of part-time jobs available, not diminishing it by imposing on such jobs the kind of restrictions that the Labour party is keen to see in place.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many women in Britain welcome part-time work because it fits in with caring for children and the family generally? We need no lessons from the Opposition who make rude comments about part-time jobs, saying that they are not real jobs. Many women think that they are real jobs and want more of them to be available.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. She understands the needs of her constituents. The Labour party would subject part-time workers to national insurance contributions and would burden employers to the extent that they could not afford to employ part-time workers in the way that they now do, which would dry up the supply of part-time work, to no one's advantage.

Mr. Janner: Cannot the Minister see that there is no reason in logic, probably no reason in law, and certainly no reason in common sense, why part-timers should not have the same protections as full-time workers? Bearing in mind the fact that the vast majority of part-timers in the United Kingdom are women, does not the lack of protection represent obvious indirect discrimination against women workers?

Mr. Howard: There is absolutely no question of discrimination. As a result of the Government's policies, there has been an unprecedented increase in part-time work, to the great advantage of those who benefit from it. The Labour party's policies would destroy those jobs.

Mr. Knapman: What would be the effect on the number of part-time jobs of introducing a national minimum wage?

Mr. Howard: As every independent survey has confirmed, there is no doubt that a national statutory minimum wage would destroy countless jobs. A large number of part-time jobs would doubtless be among those which would simply disappear if that disastrous policy were pursued.

Asbestos

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will issue guidelines on the handling of asbestos in factories and other places of work.

Mr. Forth: The Government have already published a comprehensive range of guidance on the handling of asbestos in factories and other places of work, in support of the legislation that we have introduced to reduce the risks from exposure to asbestos in the workplace. This guidance includes two approved codes of practice, nine Health and Safety Executive guidance notes on specific workplace-related matters and a number of free leaflets and priced booklets.

Mr. Dalyell: Do Ministers share the concern of Bill Spiers and his colleagues in the Scottish Trades Union Congress about a matter that I have brought to the attention of the Department—that some insurance companies delay the finalising of asbestosis cases until the victims have died? If so, will the Government act on Lord Davidson's report in the event that it suggests a change in the law?

Mr. Forth: My colleagues in the Scottish Office are well aware of the criticisms of the present law. Indeed, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, they referred the issue to the Scottish Law Commission in September 1989. The commission is expected to report soon and I am assured that its recommendations will be considered urgently by my colleagues in the Scottish Office. However, I will bring the hon. Gentleman's concern to Scottish Office Ministers

so that the matter may be given maximum attention and due regard may be paid to the point that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Health and Safety Executive has received all the resources for which it has asked in recent years to enable it to carry out its various functions?

Mr. Forth: I am delighted to be able to assure my hon. Friend that the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive, which each year make an estimate of the resources required to enable them to fulfil their statutory obligations, have received in full the amounts requested in recent years. Thus, they have been enabled to do a consistently excellent job in guaranteeing health and safety standards in the workplace. The standards in the United Kingdom are as good as those in many countries, and better than those in most.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Bearing in mind the fact that highly paid lawyers can secure massive libel settlements for their clients, can the Minister seriously justify the paltry payments which result from civil claims for compensation for negligence? In response to my hon. Friend's question, could he not simply have said that the Government accept that the disparity between English law and Scottish law is not tenable and that they will remedy it?

Mr. Forth: I think that I have given that assurance in so far as it is possible to do so at this stage. We have to bear it in mind that the Law Commission has not yet reported. If we are to take seriously the work done by a body such as the Law Commission, we must await the results of its deliberations and then act as quickly as possible. The hon. Gentleman will have to be patient. Perhaps he will have a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), whose expertise in this matter is, I suspect, second to none. The hon. Member for Linlithgow will probably be able to provide the assurance that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Training and Enterprise Councils

13. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress achieved by TECs in meeting their objectives.

Mr. Howard: Training and enterprise councils have made excellent progress. All 82 are now operational and they are developing a wide range of innovative approaches to meeting the objectives that I have agreed with them.

Mr. Nicholson: I am grateful for my right hon. and learned Friend's reply. He will be aware of the progress being made by the training and enterprise council in Somerset and, in particular, the important role that it is playing in helping to set up an effective chamber of commerce and industry to represent and assist business in the county. Will my right hon. and learned Friend give me a pledge that he will do all that he can to help the Somerset TEC to maintain the quality of its youth training?

Mr. Howard: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that pledge. The Somerset training and enterprise council is making excellent progress in improving the training being provided in the county and tailoring it to suit local circumstances. What is being achieved is what we expect to see when training is placed in the hands of local employer-led bodies, which are in the best possible position to ensure that the training is relevant to local circumstances.

Job Losses, Northumberland

14. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evidence he has of recent job losses in east and north-east Northumberland.

Mr. Jackson: In the three months to June 1991, the civilian work force in employment in the Northern region fell by 15,000. I am afraid that my Department does not have up-to-date figures for smaller areas within those standard regions.

Mr. Beith: Surely the Minister is aware of the 300 jobs that were lost at the Alcan aluminium smelter and the 200 jobs which have gone from Ellington colliery. In those circumstances, does he recognise how vital it is to get European funds, genuinely additional to money being spent over here, so as to bring additional opportunities to areas that have been so hard hit? Will the Minister and his colleagues join in the fighting which seems to be going on in the Government and get the matter sorted out so that European funds can go to those areas?

Mr. Jackson: I had a very useful and interesting meeting with the hon. Gentleman and some of his constituents to talk about unemployment in his constituency, so I know of it at first hand from him. I certainly take note of what the hon. Gentleman has had to say. He understands the problems of additionality. His remarks have certainly been heard and I will draw my colleagues' attention to them.

EC Social Policy

15. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with his EC counterparts on the implementation of the social action programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have frequent discussions, both at Councils of Ministers and individually with my EC counterparts, about measures brought forward under the Commission's social action programme. In those discussions, I emphasise that the United Kingdom expects to be able to support a majority of proposals under the action programme, while we shall continue to resist those which would damage jobs and competitiveness in this country.

Mr. Welsh: In talks with European colleagues, will the Secretary of State ensure that workers in this country are not left behind in terms of employment protection and rights? European competitors can afford to give greater rights and protection to women, the low-paid and part-time workers, so why should workers in this country be offered anything less?

Mr. Howard: Workers in this country will benefit from the greater flexibility with which British firms will be able to respond to the challenges that they will face in the 1990s, and we shall see more job opportunities created in this country as a result of the greater flexibility that will be available to us.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Prime Minister take some time today to examine his pledge not to turn his back on Lanarkshire? Will he give a clear indication of the earnestness of that pledge by agreeing to meet the shop stewards of Dalzell plant, who have indicated that they have a plan guaranteeing the effectiveness of their own plant, together with continued steel production in Scotland? Does he accept that he has an obligation to honour that pledge by examining every possible avenue to maintain steel production in Scotland, and in particular not to turn his back on a plan which has shown great effectiveness?

The Prime Minister: I made my position clear in Scotland some time ago. We certainly would not abandon the people of north Lanarkshire. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we shall be seeking agreement from the European Community to establish an enterprise zone such as those which, in other parts, have been very successful. He will also know that in the past year we have provided about £120 million extra assistance for north Lanarkshire through the Scottish Enterprise fund, East Kilbride development corporation, the iron and steel employees readaption benefit scheme, the Scottish Development Agency and much else. I am sure that either my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment or my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be happy to meet the shop stewards in Dalzell.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, at a time of great international instability, the whole country welcomes his decision as chairman of the United Nations Security Council to call a meeting of that council later this month? Does not the acceptance of his invitation by President Bush, President Yeltsin, President Mitterrand and other world leaders prove the importance of that meeting? Is it not an insult to world leaders that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) should describe that as grubbing around for a photo opportunity?

The Prime Minister: We have had a very favourable response from Heads of Government, all of whom share our view that the meeting offers a unique opportunity to reinforce the role of the United Nations as a peacemaker and peacekeeper, to look at the role that they can play in both disarmament and non-proliferation, and to reinforce the role that they can play in terms of improving good government and human rights records in a large number of countries. There has been unanimous acceptance by Heads of State and Government among Security Council members to attend. I hope and believe that it will be a useful and worthwhile occasion.

Q2. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bidwell: Is the Prime Minister aware that conflicting views about the future of the railways are coming from No. 10 Downing street and from the Secretary of State for Transport? It is said that the Prime Minister has a view. May the House hear it today? There is an old saying, "This is no way to run a railway"—I suggest that this is no way to run a Government either.

The Prime Minister: On a non-controversial note, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his 75th birthday today.

We are discussing within government the right way to take forward the privatisation of British Railways. Our aim is to ensure that passengers get a better deal as a result. We believe that the way to do that is to expose the railways to private sector disciplines. That is what we are discussing. In due course, when we have discussed the detail of how that will be brought about, we shall make a public statement.

Mr. Lawrence: Since raising the quality of life of the British people is one of the main aims of my right hon. Friend's Government, can we count on his support for my National Lottery Bill?

The Prime Minister: An important debate on my hon. and learned Friend's Bill is scheduled for this Friday. The Under Secretary of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd), will make the Government's position clear in that debate.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to confirm that it is still his view that, as he put it in his own words just a few weeks ago,

"tax cuts in the . . . Budget"

would be "unwise", would "recreate . . . problems" and would be "fools' gold"?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has been misled. What I said in the interview in Harari, from which he has quoted, was that a reduction in interest rates just to stimulate the economy would be fools' gold—as it would be. However, to help the right hon. Gentleman, I went on to add that if there was a prospect of tax reductions, we would take it and give people the opportunity to spend their money in their own interests.

Mr. Kinnock: Everyone will have the opportunity to check the words used in that interview and everyone will have the opportunity to ask why, if those words are so wrong, they have not been corrected before now. Does not the Prime Minister recall saying in precise terms that tax cuts in the Budget before the election—as he is precisely quoted as saying—would be "unwise", would "recreate . . . problems", would be "unfair", would "hurt" people and would be "economic tricks"—*[Interruption.]* Is it not clear—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: As the hopes of Conservative Members fade, so their voices grow louder.

Is it not clear that what was fools' gold in October is fools' gold in January and would be fools' gold in March?

The Prime Minister: As I said to the right hon. Gentleman a moment ago—clearly, he was not listening

—the quotation that he used refers to a reduction in interest rates, not to a reduction in taxation. The right hon. Gentleman can check the quote—perhaps he should have done so before using it inaccurately. When it is prudent to make tax reductions, we shall make them, because we believe that people are better able to look after their own interests with their own money than any Government, however benevolent, would be. It is the right hon. Gentleman's policy to increase taxation. He proposes the sharpest increases in taxes that we have had in peacetime since the war. That is expressly not the policy of this Government.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman heads the Government who have imposed the highest tax burden in history on British families. He is the head of the party of high taxation. Why has he not the courage to stand by the words that he gave to his interviewer just a few months ago?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should not repeat what he has twice been told is incorrect. If he is concerned about the level of taxation, he might perhaps explain to the country why he proposes to increase the rate of taxation if given the chance. He might also explain why his hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has suggested a luxury rate of value added tax, after all that the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), has said in recent weeks.

Mr. Mills: Does my right hon. Friend recall those heady days in the early 1980s when, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), we changed industrial relations law? That has led to fewer days lost due to industrial action in Britain than in many of our competitor countries in Europe and abroad. Has my right hon. Friend read the recent report? Has he any comments? Will he continue to change industrial relations legislation to take further the Conservative progress which has helped democracy within trade unions and reduced the number of days lost to strikes?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt that, as a result of the trade union reforms in the last decade, we have a far better record of industrial relations than our competitors elsewhere or than previously in Britain. When and where appropriate, we shall continue to make further improvements.

Q3. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fraser: Has the Prime Minister noted the remarks of the Minister for Public Transport about one class of service for business men and another, cheap and cheerful class of service, for typists? Despite the Minister's apology, does not that statement, accurately sum up the Government's policy on public services such as housing, education and health? The cheap and cheerful version of the service is hardly ever likely to be used by Cabinet Ministers or their families.

The Prime Minister: That is uncharacteristic, and I would not have expressed myself as my hon. Friend did. My hon. Friend has subsequently made it clear that he regrets expressing his views in that way. If every politician in government or opposition were forced to apologise for injudicious remarks, few of us would be doing anything else.

Q4. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brown: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that as a result of discussions between the American company Kimberley Clarke and the Department of Trade and Industry, it is likely that a factory employing 800 people is to be built in my constituency? Can my right hon. Friend give some indication of the DTI investment and the number of jobs to be created? Will he confirm that that is Conservative industrial policy working to the benefit of my constituency in particular and the country in general?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to hear of the proposed investment and job creation in my hon. Friend's constituency. The amount of grant offered is, of course, a confidential matter between the Department and the company. On the other specific questions that my hon. Friend asks, I will make inquiries and write to him. He is entirely right that inward investment is created by the right policies of deregulation and low taxation. The enormous amount of inward investment that we have seen in recent years would be lost if those policies were reversed.

Mr. Ashdown: Further to the Prime Minister's previous answer, does he not realise that, while he and his Chancellor argue about the Budget, and while his Cabinet is split on the matter, there is widespread public support for the view that at this time investment in the nation's future should come before cuts in the basic rates of tax? Is the Prime Minister saying that he disagrees with that view?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with the importance of investment. Where I might disagree with the right hon. Gentleman is that I do not believe that investment is increased by increasing taxes.

Q5. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Squire: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the prospect of a dictator or an irresponsible third-world country acquiring any of the 27,000 nuclear weapons previously controlled by the Soviet Union is literally a terrifying thought? Against that background, does he further agree that to maintain Britain's nuclear deterrent is as important and essential today as it ever has been?

The Prime Minister: I do agree with my hon. Friend on that point. The end of the Soviet empire creates a large number of opportunities, but also some dangers. We have to be prepared for both. The diminished threat to NATO gives us the opportunity to make prudent reductions in defence, but they must be prudent and it would at this stage be imprudent to lift our nuclear shield in any way.

Mr. Faulds: Why did the Prime Minister not have the courtesy to respond to a pre-Christmas appeal by Church leaders that he should make a statement—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Faulds *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is becoming disorderly.

Mr. Faulds *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has as much right to express his view as any other Member of the House.

Mr. Faulds: Hon. Members seem embarrassed by good works. Why did the Prime Minister not have the courtesy to respond to a pre-Christmas appeal by Church leaders for him to make a statement urging stores not to break the Sunday trading laws? Did he simply lack the moral courage?

The Prime Minister: I have indicated the Government's position on Sunday trading laws in the House on a number of occasions. I am interested to note the hon. Gentleman's concern on behalf of the Churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury did not mention it to me on new year's day when we had lunch together.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the three motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Ordered,

PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 13) Order 1991 (S.I. 1991, No. 2901) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 14) Order 1991 (S.I. 1991, No. 2902) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

RATE SUPPORT GRANT (SCOTLAND)

That the Rate Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Point of Order

3.33 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]*—if hon. Gentlemen will allow me to speak. Can I draw your attention to a matter of confusion on Thursday, 21 November? I was shown in *Hansard* as voting, in the debate on the European Community, against a labour amendment in Division 14. That was correct. I was not shown as voting for the Government motion in Division 15. Subsequently, before I raised this matter with the Clerks, this was corrected. I am now shown correctly in *Hansard* as having voted for the Government in Division 15.

This is most important, as I believe that the Government were completely right. I can only suspect that the speed of my progress through the Division Lobby, as I was the second Member out that night, may have caused confusion. That was due to my enthusiasm for the excellent achievements of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Maastricht. I could not move fast enough to support him. I congratulate the Clerks on having corrected this before I raised the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member has now put the record straight.

Health Benefits

3.34 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to extend exemption from prescription charges to, and to make further provision for, persons in receipt of certain categories of benefit; to exempt from prescription charges the chronically ill and those over 60; and to exempt those over 60 from certain dental and optical charges.

If passed by the House, the Bill will reform fairly and effectively the forgotten area of the health benefits system. The present system is unwieldy, unnecessarily complex, inconsistent and over-bureaucratic. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members please leave the Chamber quietly if they are not remaining for this ten-minute motion?

Mrs. Mahon: At present, health benefits are available to people who are eligible because they are exempt or who must claim on low-income grounds. The benefits are free prescriptions, optical and dental charges and help with fares to hospitals.

In its report "Health Warning", the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux highlighted deficiencies in the scheme in four respects. The first concerned simplicity. The rules are inconsistent because, for example, pensioners are automatically exempt from prescription charges but will qualify for help with other charges only if they have low incomes. Other people on incomes marginally above income support levels may get some help towards dental and optical charges but no help towards prescription charges.

The second deficiency concerned adequacy. The scheme aims to cover the cost of health charges so that the poorer sections of the community are not prevented from receiving health care by the cost. In practice, however, the scheme does not meet its objectives. Many thousands are deterred from claiming because of the complexity of the scheme, so many people go without vital treatment. There is also considerable evidence that even people entitled to, for instance, free glasses, must still contribute significant amounts to the cost, because the value of the benefit has not kept up with the cost of glasses.

The system has also failed on grounds of accessibility. NACAB's evidence shows that the scheme is about as accessible as Fort Knox. The relevant form is 20 pages long and contains more than 50 questions, and the 1 million people a year who labour to fill it in often fail to do so or are helped by relatives and friends; 100,000 go to the citizens advice bureaux for help. Even so, about 35 per cent. of those people—361,000—have their forms returned to them because they filled them in incorrectly. When I challenged the Secretary of State for Health to fill in the form, he not surprisingly refused. There is no comparison between this form and the one on which people claim for mortgage interest relief.

NACAB's fourth point is that the present scheme is deficient on grounds of equity. Anomalies cause confusion and anger among claimants. Often people entitled to free dental treatment find that they must contribute towards the cost of glasses, and the scheme cries out for reform. My Bill will effect just that. At a stroke, the need for 300 staff in the health benefit unit could end and they could be redeployed to improve other parts of the service.

[Mrs. Mahon]

This Bill proposes that health benefits be available free to all receiving means-tested benefits—for instance, the disabled working allowance benefit, due to begin in April 1992, could lead to claimants who take it up moving from income support to that benefit and thus losing the right to free prescriptions. That would cause considerable hardship.

My Bill proposes that people in receipt of this benefit and in receipt of poll tax benefit, invalidity benefit, long-term sickness benefit, the severe disablement allowance, and mobility and attendance allowances should be exempt from prescription charges. Moreover, anyone categorised by his GP as chronically sick should be covered, as the list of prescribed illnesses is outdated.

People requiring regular medication would also be exempt from prescription charges. That would cover people with cystic fibrosis, inflammatory bowel disease, asthma, multiple sclerosis, cancer and a host of other long-term illnesses.

My Bill also seeks to right the serious and indefensible wrong brought about by the abolition of free eye and dental tests; and free prescriptions would be available to all over the age of 60. The Minister for Health sought to defend the indefensible when she wrote in a recent letter to *The Guardian* about the abolition of the tests. Her letter brought forth a torrent of rebukes from people far more expert than she—and far more caring.

Mr. Ian Hunter, Secretary General of the Association of Optometrists, wrote in reply to the Minister's letter:

"To restart national health service eye examinations for the over 60s would now cost about £25 million but the cost for not doing so will be two or three times as much because eye disease will remain undetected until treatment is less effective and more expensive. The real social costs of blindness for some have also regrettably to be added."

I can only add that the abolition of free eye tests is the worst false economy imaginable, and could only be contemplated by such a short-sighted Government.

The present scheme's inadequacies are best highlighted by a constituent, Mr. Russell, who wrote to me on the advice of his local DSS office, which also thinks that the system is unfair. Mr. Russell lost out when he received a 6p rise which put him above the income support level. He lost entitlement to free prescriptions; he also had to pay £24 for dental treatment, and he can no longer claim his hospital fares unless they cost more than £8·50. He concluded his letter:

"The 6p rise I received means I am approximately £2·50 a week worse off. Surely this can't be right."

I agree with Mr. Russell.

Patients with mental illness are particularly vulnerable. My Bill would exempt many of them from prescription charges.

Charges have gone up 17 times under the Government. There has been a 600 per cent. increase, from 20p to £3·40, since 1979. They have created an intolerable burden on people on low incomes. Many people now go without the necessary treatment because they cannot afford prescriptions.

Even the Government have recognised the need for reform, although the review which they commissioned in 1990, which has yet to report, appears to have been an excuse for inaction. When it reports, it will address only the administration of the scheme and not the real solution, which would be to scrap the low income scheme and replace it with one based on exemptions.

The present scheme is bureaucratic, inconsistent and complex. We need in its place a scheme which is simple, fair and effective, one which people can understand and which delivers help for those who need it most. The scheme must be based on exemptions. My Bill would provide for that.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. John Battle, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Eddie Loyden, Mr. Bob Cryer, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mr. David Winnick and Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Health Benefits

Mrs. Alice Mahon accordingly presented a Bill to extend exemption from prescription charges, and to make further provision for, persons in receipt of certain categories of benefit; to exempt from prescription charges the chronically ill and those over 60; and to exempt those over 60 from certain dental and optical charges: And the same was read the First time: and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 6 March and to be printed. [Bill 50.]

Nuclear Defence

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the debate upon nuclear defence. I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and that in view of the number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate, I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock. If those who are fortunate enough to be called before make brief speeches, it may be possible to relax the limit.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. You will no doubt be aware of the amendment tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and others calling for the scrapping of Trident and the decommissioning of Polaris. May I draw to your attention the fact that 130 members of the parliamentary Labour party, if not more, are also members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and therefore that that amendment represents the majority view within the Labour party?

In those circumstances, Sir, would it not be more appropriate if you called the amendment tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Islington, North rather than that in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, who apparently represents a minority view in his own party?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that the selection of amendments is a matter for the Chair, and that I never give reasons for my decisions on such matters.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No doubt it will be possible to make these telling points in the debate.

Mr. Roger King: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a relevant point. As you have announced, this is a debate on nuclear arms and this country's defence policy. I am surprised that rumours are circulating that the Opposition spokesman who is to reply to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is the shadow Foreign Secretary. Are we not entitled to a reply from a leading Opposition defence spokesman if this is to be a fair and proper debate? Could this position have arisen because the Opposition defence spokesman is not a member of the Shadow Cabinet and the issue of defence is so unimportant in the eyes of the Opposition that they have had to press-gang somebody else as a front man?

Mr. Speaker: It is no rumour—the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will open from the Front Bench—but the Opposition spokesman on defence will wind up.

3.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): I beg to move,

That this House supports unequivocally the concept of nuclear deterrence and the retention of a credible United Kingdom nuclear deterrent, while other countries have, or seek to acquire, nuclear weapons; notes the great dangers apparent in the increase in the number of countries gaining, or seeking to gain, access to nuclear weapons; understands that the country's nuclear deterrent remains essential for the defence of the United Kingdom and NATO; recognises the vital contribution to world peace which the United Kingdom's nuclear forces have made, and will continue to make, through deterrence; and supports NATO's policy of also maintaining an up-to-date, sub-strategic nuclear capability based in Europe.

I notice that the words "nuclear defence" are absent from the amendment of the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock).

I welcome the opportunity to debate in the House today the crucial issue of defence, particularly nuclear defence. it gives me an opportunity to report to the House on what, since we last met, have been the developments in the territory which represents the largest nuclear arsenal in the world and in which an extremely disturbing and alarming sequence of events is currently taking place, of which the House should take note.

When we debated related issues in November, the Soviet Union existed—now it does not. There was then a central control over the nuclear arsenal and assurances by President Gorbachev, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, who had returned to government, and Marshal Shaposhnikov. We were also given what I suppose must be the shortest lived assurance of all time by General Lobov when he visited this country. When asked who was in charge of nuclear weapons, he said that he was, and two days later he was sacked. All those personalities and figures have gone.

I am sure that Opposition Members can occasionally show a sense of humour on the subject—I reflected how they must have felt as we watched the amazing pictures of the flag being lowered over the Kremlin. All those who had sung for so many years, "We'll keep the red flag flying here," could no longer stomach it being flown over the Kremlin.

Since then, in place of the USSR and President Gorbachev, there is the fragile creature of the Commonwealth of Independent States. While I am sure that all hon. Members wish it well and hope that it will be possible for a new relationship to develop, we must recognise that, as I speak to the House, there are continuing disputes between the republics over both nuclear weapons and their custody, and the conventional forces.

The House may know that one of the recent developments identified are changes in the communication patterns—the fact that some communications have been cut between existing headquarters and units whose allegiances have moved between central control and the republics. There have also been disputes about the strategic nature of the air force. We hope that the disputes over the Black sea fleet can be satisfactorily resolved.

I do not know how many hon. Members know that there was a public meeting in the Crimea attended by a substantial number of members of the Soviet fleet at one of the most acute moments of that dispute, at which a motion was overwhelmingly passed that the commanding admiral should be decleared president of an independent Crimea. We can see some of the tensions that affect the situation and the way in which they relate to military forces. Wholesale changes are occurring in the former Soviet Union's defence policy. We believe that, for the first time since records were kept in 1960, there is not a single combatant Soviet warship in either the Mediterranean or the Indian ocean. That is a measure of the withdrawal that is under way.

Although it is difficult to obtain accurate information about the Soviet Union's industrial situation and defence industries, we believe also that four out of five tank

[Mr. Tom King]

factories have been closed, and that Russia is proposing to halt all production of tanks, armoured personnel carriers, small arms, and aircraft.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it not have been more appropriate if today's debate had been initiated by the Foreign Secretary, and had dealt with what steps could be taken—particularly by the west—to help the former Soviet Union to avoid anarchy and a return to dictatorship? Today's debate—as every right hon. and hon. Member and all the media know—is held because the Government are on the skids, terrified of holding a general election, and trying to deflect public attention from domestic issues.

Mr. King: That intervention did not do the hon. Gentleman justice, and he will excuse me if I do not deign to reply to it.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Is it not a fact that —contrary to the view of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)—with the majority of Members of Parliament in the Ukraine determined to go their own way, the House should address this issue, which is of crucial national importance?

Mr. King: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) accepts that I am trying to set out as fairly as I can, on the basis of the best intelligence available to me, the current situation in the former Soviet Union. We make no apology for debating defence, but every time we do so, someone on the Opposition Benches says, "Talk about something else." We happen to believe that defence is of critical importance to our country.

At a time when the largest nuclear power that the world has seen is in the process of potential disintegration, we believe that we have a duty to tell the country where we stand. We as a Government do not shirk that responsibility, and any party with aspirations to government should not do so either.

Perhaps the most worrying feature is not the withdrawal from operational activity of the Soviet fleet, which might have been caused by fuel shortages or uncertainties about control at home, but that which we indentify as happening within the armed forces. *[Interruption.]* That situation may be a laughing matter to some, but its seriousness is of gravity to others.

There now appears to be virtually a total collapse in conscription. One might expect the strength of the Soviet conscript army to number between 650,000 and 750,000. The latest figures that I have make us doubt whether more than 20 per cent. of that figure have come forward this year. There is arguably a shortfall of half a million conscripts entering what were the Soviet armed forces.

In a sense, that is hardly surprising. There are uncertainties as to whether those personnel will get paid and fed, and whether there will be any housing for them.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Sounds like the British housing shortage.

Mr. King: The right hon. Gentleman approaches the subject with his usual lack of seriousness, and looks for any opportunity to make a snide remark, in the way that he did in respect of the meeting between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Yeltsin and President Bush. The right hon. Gentleman described that critically important meeting between world leaders as a glorified photo opportunity, which shows that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) fails to rise to such occasions with the seriousness that is needed.

Many of us had suspicions about the awfulness of the Soviet conscript system, and as discipline now breaks down and further information becomes available, the appalling problems that were already evident of trying to control a conscript system that attempted to meld as many as 30 different nationalities in one uniform armed force are becoming very clear.

We know of the contempt of the officer groups for their conscripts, and the arrogant, arbitrary and bureaucratic way in which they were treated. We know of the lack of control that that treatment reflected, which led, in turn, to the death of a number of officers. Hon. Members may know of the army's appalling record in that regard, and of the attacks that were made. We also know that there is no regular non-commissioned officer corps in the Soviet army system, and we are aware of the ill-discipline and criminality that have developed. Marshal Yazov, when he was Minister of Defence, estimated that up to 30 per cent. of conscripts entering the army either had criminal records or were known to the police for various reasons.

We know of the existence of gangs—of ethnic groups, for instance—and of the bullying and torture that have taken place. Some 4,000 conscripts die every year, of whom more than 1,000 may be suicides. A serious breakdown in discipline and morale has now been aggravated. The latest figures that I have received suggest that some 400,000 people are homeless, living either in tents or in the corners of barrack rooms. That problem is likely to worsen. The supply of food has broken down in some instances, and units are having to barter fuel supplies for food.

Because of the effects of inflation on the armed forces, a regimental commander may now earn half as much as a city bus driver. A sense of defeat and despair is affecting the forces. In recent years, they have been expelled from Afghanistan and East Germany; now, they face virtual expulsion from what they had thought was their country, in the shape of the Baltic states. The sense of alienation and desperation that exists not only in the officer corps, but throughout the armed forces, represents a very serious development. Although the current changes present no external threat at present, they pose a major threat within what was the Soviet Union, along with the risk that that represents.

Sir Patrick Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The Secretary of State's description of a breakdown in social organisation must move some of us to wonder about its effect on morale within the unified structure of the armed services, especially that of the strategic containment forces, which are trying to exercise some control over nuclear weapons.

Can the right hon. Gentleman offer any assessment of the effectiveness of the command and control of those containment forces, given his conversation with General Lobov and the successor whom we know to have been appointed, and his meetings with Marshal Shaposhnikov? How effective is that crucial central command of nuclear weapons?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for correctly identifying the reasons why I thought it important to set some of the background for the House. We are talking about the condition of the armed forces. As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, different elements exist within those forces: that applies particularly to the elite forces, which have the particular responsibility of guarding nuclear weapons. While we may seek assurances, at the highest level, of the determination to ensure the most careful security in regard to such weapons, that security will ultimately be only as good as the commitment, morale and dependability of the people concerned.

That is the seriousness of the present position. I am talking about the morale not of some small, insignificant, backward country, but of a country that, through its obsession with armaments and defence expenditure, has made itself a major military super-power—a super-power that is now fast disintegrating, along with control. In such circumstances, a breakdown in morale is very serious.

I have not given the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy) a clear answer, for the simple reason that I have been given assurances—I have mentioned the assurance that I received from General Lobov—which have been good for about 24 hours. That underlines the difficulty we face.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is it not clear from what the Secretary of State has been saying that the Soviet Union's possession of nuclear weapons was no guarantee of its security? That security has now broken down.

Is it not also clear that the army that has followed that disintegration is in no position to threaten this country, and, moreover, that the British Government and other western Governments for a long time did all they could to bring about the present situation? Part of western strategy was the encouragement of nationalism, and even of Islam —as was high defence expenditure in the Soviet Union.

Will the Secretary of State look again at Churchill's memorandum to the Cabinet, issued in 1918? Churchill warned the Cabinet then that the division of the Ukraine from Russia would pose a very serious danger. That memorandum is included in "The World Crisis: The Aftermath", and the right hon. Gentleman would do well to study it before he addresses us on the basis of his present approach.

Mr. King: I should take up too much of the House's time if I answered all those points.

I want to talk about the grave situation that we face and what we, together with NATO, our allies and the west, can best do to help meet it.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: I have given way many times. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will hope to catch Mr. Speaker's eye and have an opportunity to make his speech.

Currently, there is a dangerously explosive mix of catastrophically low morale and a feeling of alienation.

Right hon. and hon. Members have said that we must welcome the changes in the sense of the end of the cold war and, we hope, the end of confrontation and the opportunities that will arise. However, because of the risks that remain, I wish to put soberly to the House the reasons for our belief in the continuing importance of nuclear defence.

We estimate that there are about 27,000 nuclear warheads within the Soviet Union and, of those, there are some 13,000 strategic nuclear weapons in the four republics—Russia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Byelorussia. If they stayed as they were, it is significant that each of the republics would have more strategic nuclear weapons than China, and three, excluding Byelorussia, would have more than the United Kingdom.

The republics assure us that they will proceed with and honour the strategic arms reduction talks. If they continue with that and with the further reductions proposed by Mr. Gorbachev, they would halve their nuclear arsenal over the next 10 years. We estimate that 10 years is the minimum time that it would take to remove that number of nuclear weapons in a stable society with a well-organised system. At the end of that time—there are many qualifications to what I have said—the republics would still have 20 times more warheads than we have now. Within the territory which was the Soviet Union and which, if the plans go ahead, may be contained within what is now Russia, there will, for at least the next 20 years, be a substantial nuclear arsenal of strategic weapons. We must address that.

In addition to the strategic weapons, there is also the risk of tactical nuclear weapons, whether they be torpedoes, air-launched missiles or nuclear artillery shells. My best estimate shows that they are located on 100 sites in 13 different republics. Considerable effort has been made to withdraw them to within Russia. That is the objective, and it is hoped that it will be achieved by the middle of July. Some of those weapons are under the control of some of the elements to which I referred earlier, whose morale, must, at the very least, be described as extremely dubious.

We are concerned not just about the vast nuclear arsenal but, as I said in an earlier debate in the House, the technology and nuclear scientists. It has been suggested that there are some 3,000 nuclear scientists who could make a significant contribution in other countries that may be seeking to develop their weapons. My information is that at least one group of those nuclear scientists was not paid in December and that control of and responsibility for them appears to have broken down. We also have evidence that some countries are undoubtedly actively trying to enlist the services of some of those people, so the risk of proliferation has never been greater.

As some hon. Members may know, my colleague—or my friend—the United States Defence Secretary said yesterday that the United States estimates that nine third-world countries are likely to have nuclear weapons in 10 years. The news this morning of further developments in Iraq and the further evidence of the steps that some people have taken to pursue a covert programme is warning enough that some countries—some of them rich —are able to develop a substantial industrial programme.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. King: No, I am conscious of the time.

I deal now with what I believe our response should be. I welcome the new contacts that are developing, and I also welcome—as does the whole House—the meeting of what is called the North Atlantic Co-operation Council, at which, before Christmas, the Foreign Ministers of the former Warsaw pact countries met those from NATO

[Mr. King]

countries. I very much welcome the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in inviting President Yeltsin, who, as the House will know, will be coming to London at the end of the month on his way to New York, where the leaders of the permanent members of the Security Council will meet.

We also welcome the fact that the START negotiations and agreements have been confirmed. We welcome the proposal to consolidate the tactical weapons in the 13 republics in Russia and the agreement that that should be achieved in July this year. We have made clear our willingness to help in the handling of nuclear weapons and to give any assistance we can, perhaps by providing extra facilities for their dismantling and disarming in Russia. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will visit Kazakhstan on Sunday, from where he will go to Kiev and to Moscow. His visit to Kazakhstan is especially important, because that republic has expressed a different view about what it will do about nuclear weapons.

Such developments are important, but beyond them it is clear that the lessons that we must have learned from Iraq are the difficulties experienced by the International Atomic Energy Agency and those experienced in the enforcement and observation of the non-proliferation treaty. We and our allies in the agency are giving high priority to the work of strengthening the safeguards. With our European Community partners and other like-minded states, we have made and will make specific proposals.

An especially important matter is that of special inspections. Particular importance is to be placed on them, and I am sure that the House will accept that their importance is clear from what happened in Iraq. Anyone who has been watching developments in Iraq will know of the problem of undeclared sites, and will know how few of the sites on which we have found material for weapons of mass destruction were originally declared. The problem of undeclared sites is fundamental, and limits the effectiveness of the present safeguard system.

We believe in the strictest supplier controls, and we are keen to promote them. We welcome the reactivation in 1991 of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the supportive work to draw up a regime to control nuclear dual use items. Of course, the skill in exploiting what were dual use items has been a key in the Iraqi programme. We also intend to introduce the full-scope safeguards for nuclear supply. The lessons of Iraq bring home clearly that area of work, and we will pursue it actively—

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. King: —as we shall also pursue discussions in the United Nations. I referred to the meeting that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has called during our presidency of the Security Council to give the opportunity to start to discuss the ways in which the United Nations can be more active in that area.

The House will know of the welcome early visit to this country yesterday by the new Secretary-General of the United Nations and of his meetings with the Prime Minister, with the Leader of the Opposition and with the Foreign Secretary.

We face uncertainty and great danger at present. We need to take every step possible to try to ensure that, both in the security of the weapons that are in the Soviet Union and in the risks of proliferation, we act as effectively as possible and as closely together as possible with our allies and with all those who share our concerns.

Mr. Douglas *rose*—

Mr. King: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way.

There can be no guarantee that we shall succeed. I have set out for the House the time frame we face, and I have explained why we believe that, as we face a period of real danger and uncertainty in the nuclear area, we must ensure that our own nuclear defences are sound.

I will set out clearly where we stand. We face the risk of a major strategic arsenal, and we cannot be sure under whose control that arsenal may fall. I have talked about the prospects for the next 10 years and about the number of weapons that would still be left—perhaps for 20 years. To be blunt, we do not have a single idea about who may be in control in 10 years' time. We do not even have a good idea or any confidence about who may be in control 10 weeks from now.

Against that background, it is important for the House to restate its commitment to the need for a strategic deterrent. If we have a strategic deterrent, it must be credible. That means that it must at all times be available and at all times able to preserve its effectiveness. The House knows—there is no point in arguing—that we need four Trident submarines. There is no point in saying that we shall have half a deterrent or three quarters of a deterrent, or that we may say a bit of money if we do not have the last quarter. The professional advice to me, which I accept and which has been accepted by successive Governments, is for our deterrent to be credible and effective. The minimum need is for four Trident submarines.

As has been recognised in the NATO strategic concept and by all our NATO allies, we also need to have a sub-strategic capability to ensure the flexibility of our nuclear response and to ensure its credibility. That is the NATO policy, which has been endorsed only recently—the new policy in the new situation—and that is the policy by which we stand.

In dealing with the existing time scales—the years for which we have to provide—we cannot turn our deterrent on and off like a tap. One either believes in, supports, maintains, equips and trains to ensure the operation of our sub-strategic deterrent for year after year, or one does not invest in it at all. That is our policy.

Mr. Kaufman: As the right hon. Gentleman has spoken about the importance of the availability and credibility of the nuclear deterrent, will he tell the House in what circumstances the Government would use nuclear weapons?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that point. We reserve the option of nuclear use if circumstances are sufficiently dire to warrant it. We will not give the precise details of those circumstances.

Mr. Kaufman *rose*—

Mr. King: I will not give way.

What one does not do is stand up and say:

"There are no circumstances in which I would order or permit the firing of a nuclear weapon".

The House knows that I am quoting the words of the Leader of the Opposition of 1983. In May 1989, the right hon. Gentleman tried to crawl back from those words and correct himself, but the damage had been done. Lest any hon. Member does not believe that the damage was done, I remind the House that 50 Labour Members did: they signed a letter that appeared in *The Guardian* dated 5 May 1989. A number of them are sitting on the Back Benches now; I recognise their faces.

The letter said:

"We believe it is impossible for any Labour Prime Minister to convince the British public there are any circumstances in which a Labour Prime Minister would press the nuclear button."

They were right. The credibility of the Leader of the Opposition has gone. He said that there were no circumstances in which he would take such action, and both the people and his own party believed him.

Mr. Kaufman: In response to my earlier question, the Secretary of State said that it would be wrong for him to state the circumstances in which the Government might use nuclear weapons. He therefore concurs with the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who said:

"It would undermine our strategy of deterrence to spell out in advance the precise way in which nuclear weapons would or might be used in any given circumstances."—[*Official Report* 7 June 1989; Vol. 154, c. *160.*]

Those are extremely sensible words, which the present Prime Minister would do well to learn, given that he asked the Opposition in what circumstances we would use nuclear weapons.

Mr. King: The right hon. Gentleman and I will return to the problems of credibility faced by the Leader of the Opposition on nuclear defence.

We have made our position on nuclear defence absolutely clear. We believe that we need a four-boat Trident fleet, and that our nuclear deterrent should continue in operation. We believe in the need for a sub-strategic capability and have determined to support Nato in its policy on sub-strategic nuclear weapons. Our position is absolutely clear. Only to those unwilling to listen is it not clear.

We think that we have a duty to tell the country what our position is now that the situation has changed—at the end of the cold war and at a time when there is no longer a Soviet Union, but when a huge nuclear arsenal is lying there and could fall into the wrong hands. Is it so outrageous—so embarrassing—to ask the Opposition to tell us, just for a moment, what their policy is?

In their amendment, the Liberal Democrats support the Government's policy on the Trident submarine. They are not so good when it comes to supporting NATO policy on the sub-strategic deterrent, but then they have the rather engaging additional policy of cutting defence expenditure by 50 per cent. over the next 10 years, which means that they could not afford it anyway, so we can see where they stand on that.

Why will the Labour party simply not answer the question? Why does Labour publish policy papers on every subject under the sun but nothing on nuclear deterrence? I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition asking, "How can we avoid the coming election being about personalities and not policies, when you have no policies?" It is significant that I received no reply. I do not often resort to quoting Mr. Martin Jacques, the former editor of *Marxism Today*, but he made an interesting comment with which I think many would agree:

"The Labour Party has virtually abstained from the post cold war debate on defence. Paralysed by the memory of the 1983 and 1987 elections, its only concern is to reassure. Labour"—

listen to this—

"does not want a defence debate: the very mention of defence sends it running for cover."

Nothing that I have seen today contradicts that.

Why is the Labour party paralysed? It is paralysed because it is split from top to bottom. Let us look at today's Order Paper. Nowhere does the official Opposition's amendment make any reference to nuclear defence. But what about the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)? Obviously he is quite confident, because he knows where the bulk of Opposition Members stand—behind him.

Only two years ago, 50 members of the Labour party —among them the hon. Member for Islington, North, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Member for Newham North-West (Mr. Banks)— wrote to the Guardian as follows:

"We, members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, reaffirm our support for Labour Party defence policy as set out in composite 56, carried at last year's Annual Conference of the Labour party, namely 'to unconditionally remove all nuclear weapons and nuclear bases from British soil and waters in the first Parliament of the next Labour Government.'"

That is where Opposition Members stand.

What about the Leader of the Opposition? Only three years ago, he wrote to *Sanity*, the magazine of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to congratulate the organisation on 30 years of effort to secure a nuclear-free Europe. He stressed the need to make and win the argument for non-nuclear defence.

But the Leader of the Opposition is not the only Labour Member who adopts that position. I need only draw attention to several Front-Bench Members—the hon. Members for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), for Livingston (Mr. Cook), for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and for Barking (Ms. Richardson). It has been estimated that 16 of the 22 members of the present shadow Cabinet have an anti-nuclear background.

I have some sympathy for the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), who has to take a lot of flak. It is disgraceful that defence is not represented in the Labour shadow Cabinet. People may have different political views, but it is scandalous that defence is not represented. For the hon. Member for Clackmannan, it must be really galling that the person who beat him for the last place in the shadow Cabinet is the hon. Member for Barking, who, I understand, has shadow Cabinet responsibility for women. It is interesting that the hon. Lady is also a vice-president of CND.

When we raise the question of the CND background of Labour Members, we are told that it is a McCarthyite thing to do. Why should it be regarded as McCarthyite? The hon. Member for Islington, North does not think that it is McCarthyite; he is proud of it. He does not think that membership of CND is a matter for shame. He is proud to say what he believes, and we respect him for standing up for his beliefs.

Mr. Benn *rose*——

Mr. King: I cannot give way to the right hon. Gentleman, but I must say that he too stands up for his opinions.

Mr. Benn *rose——*

Mr. King: I apologise for being unable to give way to the right hon. Gentleman. I have done so once already.

The shameful thing is not that there are Opposition Members who are in CND and are prepared to stand up for what they believe in, but that there are people who pretend that they are no longer members or who have let their membership lapse. They are the people we despise. Anyone who wants to know what the parliamentary Labour party thinks about nuclear defence should note the identity of those who are officers of the newly elected Back-Bench committee. How many people know who is the chairman of the Labour parliamentary defence committee?

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *rose——*

Mr. King: On cue, the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) identifies himself.

Who are the hon. Gentleman's noble colleagues as vice-chairmen? They are two well-known multilateralists —the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). If ever one could hear the voice of the Labour party, and if one wanted to know what Labour Back-Bench Members think, they have spelt it out very clearly indeed.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am grateful that, at last, the Secretary of State has given way. It is all very interesting stuff that he is giving. Will he explain to the people of this country why it is necessary to spend £23 billion on purchasing a Trident submarine system that has a fire power equal to 3,800 Hiroshima bombs, when there is no discernible enemy whatsoever, yet the world is split apart by poverty in the south and militarism in the north? Will the right hon. Gentleman address the real needs of the people of this country and the rest of the world, and instead opt for nuclear disarmament and arms conversion rather than the madness of the militarism that he is talking about?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Member, because he might not have caught your eye, Mr. Speaker, and then we would have been denied the real voice of the Labour party. I wonder how to respond to the hon. Gentleman. I understand his sincerity. I happen to believe that, while a massive number of nuclear weapons could be targeted on this country, it would be madness to deny ourselves a minimum nuclear deterrent. However, I suppose that what really must get to the hon Gentleman is that people who he thought supported his point of view but who have now deserted him would actually claim to support my position. I do not believe that they do so, but that is the pretence that they are carrying out at this moment.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. King: If my hon. Friend will excuse me, I shall not, as I am conscious of the time that we have taken.

As with nuclear, so with conventional. Three successive Labour party conferences have voted for overwhelming reductions in defence expenditure. Whether it is £6 billion a year, other hon. Members who supposedly support our defence expenditure claim that it is much more. At successive conferences, the Leader of the Opposition and his right hon. Friends have been conclusively and substantially beaten by a coalition led by Mr. Bruce Kent and the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. They have tried to repudiate that. They have tried to say, "No, that won't happen. We don't have to pay attention to these conference resolutions." Unfortunately, they forgot that repudiation and that resolution when they printed "Looking to the Future".

Last year, we looked forward to huge negotiated cuts in conventional armaments. The effective collapse of the Warsaw pact and such international agreements can make possible reductions in United Kingdom defence spending far beyond anything envisaged at last year's Labour party conference. The hon. Member for Clackmannan went further and said:

"The scope for defence cuts will likely be that much greater."

Of course, the secret came out in that leaked memorandum from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), in which he said:

"Defence cuts could arguably be the North sea oil of the 1990s."

We got the message. As the House may know, North sea oil has been worth £100 billion. Over the next 10 years, defence expenditure might be £240 billion. We see the hidden agenda. Indeed there are plans, not just on the Labour Back Benches and not just in the reaches of a Labour party conference, but on the Opposition Front Bench and in the inner workings of any ambitions of a future Labour Government for a massive reduction.

I doubt whether we shall get any straight answers. The right hon. Member for Gorton will try to insult and smear any comments that we make. No doubt he will tell us that Labour's policy is already clearly spelt out in "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change". It has been reaffirmed in "Looking to the Future", and it has been reaffirmed in "Opportunity Britain". That is the inspired policy that called for the simultaneous dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw pact, and they really subscribe to that. We have made it quite clear that, when we tackle the very real challenges of the Soviet Union, we shall do what needs to be done.

If one challenges the Labour party on defence expenditure, its members say, "We shall do what needs to be done when we get into office." Their slogan is, "Trust us," but to do so would be to give a blank cheque to all those who have been wrong on every count in the past two elections and who would have destroyed our defences. They expect the British people to buy unseen a defence policy of which they know nothing. This is the end of the road for consumers—*[Interruption.]*

The purpose of today's debate is to ask two direct and straight questions of the right hon. Member for Gorton. As we sit here, we have a nuclear deterrent which is maintained by our service men. What we and the country need to know from the Opposition is whether they now believe in the importance of keeping a strategic nuclear deterrent while other countries have nuclear weapons targeted on us. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the fourth Trident boat is built to guarantee the effective operation of that strategic deterrent? In addition, and separately, do the Opposition support NATO's policy of sub-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe and kept up to date?

The time for fudging and evasion is over. The time for telling the country where the Opposition stand on nuclear defence is here. The country is entitled to straight answers to those questions. We shall listen with interest to see whether we shall now get them at last.

4.31 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"calls on Her Majesty's Government, taking into account the perils, problems and uncertainties of the world situation following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and while providing an effective defence for the United Kingdom based on the necessary level of forces provided with the appropriate equipment and weaponry, to formulate a policy based on arms control and reduction negotiations involving the eight nuclear powers, a strengthened and extended nuclear non-proliferation treaty backed by sanctions, a comprehensive test-ban treaty, and a new round of conventional forces negotiations involving the participation of the post-Soviet republics to promote an internationally structured aid programme for the post-Communist countries of central and eastern Europe under the auspices of the G7 countries and to implement a diversification programme within the United Kingdom to assist the defence industries to maintain employment and continue their contribution to the national economy."

Since the House adjourned for the Christmas recess, unprecedented events have taken place in the world. The Soviet Union has been dissolved. Mikhail Gorbachev has resigned as Soviet president. The Commonwealth of Independent States has been born. Three additional nuclear powers have arisen, two of which have larger arsenals than the United Kingdom. A permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has disappeared, with a completely new sovereign state seeking to take its place. A world power balance which lasted for 46 years has ended. A super-power has vanished. Alarming uncertainties have arisen. The danger of nuclear proliferation through the seepage of weapons and of scientists is immensely disturbing.

In those extraordinary circumstances, the Labour party took the view that a narrow debate on nuclear defence did not meet the scale of the problems and perils facing the international community, especially since the House debated nuclear defence only six weeks ago, when the Secretary of State made largely the same speech, with the same poor cracks and the same old quotations that he has given us today.

The Labour party therefore proposed to the Government that the scope of the debate should be widened and that the Foreign Secretary should participate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has appropriately proposed. But the Government refused that proposal because they are wedded to staging a stunt debate to serve their petty party agenda and to distract attention from the "John Major economic slump—made in Downing street" that is driving the Tory party to electoral defeat. The Tory party believed that the Foreign Secretary's obligations to Parliament could be fulfilled by a shoddy little interview in the *Sunday Express*——

Mr. Sayeed *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way in a little while, but I should like to proceed for a moment. The hon. Gentleman generally seeks to intervene in my speeches and I give way to him from time to time.

The Labour party has therefore tabled an amendment to the Government's motion so as to give the House the opportunity for a sensible and serious debate on the international situation. How wise we were has been proved by the trivial and inadequate speech that we have just heard from the Secretary of State for Defence, a speech which sank under its own lack of weight.

A year ago, the world was dominated by two nuclear super-powers which, after more than 40 years of confrontation, had learnt to work together and had brought a new stability to our planet. Now there is one nuclear super-power, which paradoxically has to cope with profound world instability. The end of the cold war celebrated in Paris in November 1990 brought peace but uncertainty. The end of the USSR has opened a Pandora's box. The conflict in Georgia could be just a foretaste of what might follow.

The west bears its own heavy responsibility for what has taken place. At the G7 summit six months ago, Mikhail Gorbachev was treated like a mendicant. Seeking aid for his country, he was sent home empty-handed and humiliated. The Tory Government in Britain could have altered the balance of three to four in the G7 and could have helped to provide meaningful aid for Gorbachev. In their narrow view of world affairs, they chose not to do so. The August coup followed, and the regime of Mikhail Gorbachev was in ruins. Mikhail Gorbachev was the greatest peacetime leader in international affairs this century. The Prime Minister paid a mawkish tribute to him when he resigned last month but did not lift a finger to help him when he might have been saved.

The question now for the international community is not what can be done to restore the old stability—that is not possible—but how to create a new and lasting stability. With the United States still dominant, but economically weak and ready to accept others sharing its hegemony, there is an unprecedented opportunity for the United Kingdom to give a lead not as a super-power but as a catalyst. Britain can count in the world. There is an agenda waiting to be implemented and Britain can help to formulate that agenda.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): It would be unwise to try to rewrite history so quickly. The reality of the G7 meeting was that President Gorbachev could not satisfy the leaders that he could use the aid properly and that it would go to the right quarters. Those assurances were sought but not given, and the lack of those assurances was well understood by Yeltsin and other people in the Soviet Union at that time. The failure of President Gorbachev to apply his reforms ultimately led to the crisis.

Mr. Kaufman: That failure was not recognised in the way that the hon. Gentleman implies by Chancellor Kohl or President Mitterand who, with the Italian Government, wished to provide substantial aid for the Soviet Union at the G7 summit. If the United Kingdom had been with Germany, Italy and France, there would have been a majority at the G7 summit for structured aid to the Soviet Union. That is the scale of the Prime Minister's shortcomings at the G7 summit.

Britain can count in the world. First, we must try to contain the nuclear instability that has arisen and prevent it from leading to a nuclear free-for-all. The START negotiating process between Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev, which was continued by President Bush,

[Mr. Kaufman]

resulted in the agreement to reduce American and Soviet strategic nuclear weapons by a third. It is essential that the successor republics to the Soviet Union fulfil that agreement. But there will be no further START process involving the two super-powers. That process is over because there are no longer two super-powers.

All the eight nuclear powers should now become involved in the next phase of the START process. That means negotiations involving the United States, the four former Soviet nuclear powers, France, China and the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom should take the lead in urging the convening of such talks, aimed at reducing the stockpiles of all the eight and with the hope of reducing them to low and unthreatening levels. Elimination of all eight stockpiles is the obvious and sensible goal, although when that will be possible it is far too soon to say.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No, I will not give way. I want to proceed a little. When I have dealt with this passage, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Beside that sensible and reasonable objective, this Tory Government look particularly puny and petty as they brandish their nuclear weapons like some macho symbol. They are the Government who have stood in the way of all progress on nuclear disarmament by negotiation the Government who insisted that the Lance missile system should be modernised even when its owner, the United States, accepted that Lance modernisation made no sense. They are the Government who alone opposed negotiations on short-range nuclear weapons when the rest of NATO saw that such negotiations were necessary.

Two years ago, the Secretary of State for Defence sat on the Government Front Bench nodding like an obedient poodle when his Prime Minister said this:

"Removal of the imbalance in conventional forces would not obviate the continuing need for short-range missiles. Short-range nuclear weapons must be available to commanders in the field at all stages."

That is what the Prime Minister said; that is what the Secretary of State for Defence expounded. Yet exactly three months ago, the Secretary of State told the House:

"we will entirely give up the short-range nuclear capability of the Lance system . . . the 50th Missile Regiment Royal Artillery will disband. Similarly, we shall give up our nuclear artillery capability." [*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 58.]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): Things have changed.

Mr. Kaufman: Of course things have changed. That is the point. The whole point of defence policy is that the Government stick there in the mud not acknowledging that the world situation has changed.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West) *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman—not in any circumstances.

The Secretary of State for Defence likes to accuse the Opposition of advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament. Yet six weeks ago the Secretary of State for Defence announced to the House unilateral British measures to divest this country of nuclear capability, and boasted of it as an achievement.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford) *rose*——

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) *rose*——

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme) *rose*——

Mr. Ian Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: As far as I can gather, Mr. Deputy Speaker, every one of the hon. Gentlemen who seek to intervene on me will not be a Member of the House within six months.

Mr. Taylor: The right hon. Gentleman knows as little about my constituency as he does about defence policy.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman may not know much about his constituency either. However, since I believe that there is no place like home, I will give way to the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill).

Mr. Churchill: Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that this country would not have a nuclear deterrent today had a Labour Government been elected in either 1983 or 1987?

Mr. Kaufman: According to the Government's own calculations, we do not have a nuclear deterrent. The Government say that the minimum necessary deterrent for this country is four Tridents, and the number of Polaris warheads is far fewer than four Trident warheads, so I am not too sure of the status of the deterrent at the moment.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Mr. Kaufman: After first of all advocating Lance missiles and opposing the negotiations on short-range nuclear weapons, the Secretary of State for Defence, after two years, has boasted of getting rid of the Lance missile and of unilaterally getting rid of short-range nuclear weapons. This is the right hon. Gentleman who had the nerve to say in the debate on 22 November:

"It is also important that it should be understood that this country adopts a consistent and relevant approach to nuclear matters.—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 544.]

The right hon. Gentleman said that in the House six months ago. He has stood on his head in nuclear matters, turned a public somersault, yet he has the nerve to give the Opposition lectures on consistency.

The Government not only change their mind on what they regard as basic nuclear defence issues—they do not even understand what to do with the nuclear weapons that they possess or seek to retain. They are led by a Prime Minister so completely illiterate on defence matters that on 11 July last year he challenged the Labour party to state in what circumstances it would use nuclear weapons, when the Secretary of State for Defence today rightly refused to do so and when his Prime Minister also refused to do so on the basis that it would undermine the strategy of deterrence.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding) *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: The Government cannot be relied upon to take the lead in international nuclear arms control discussions, but the Labour Government soon to be elected will certainly take that lead.

A great danger arises from the multiplication of ownership of both strategic and short-range nuclear weapons: the danger of proliferation. There is a real peril that weapons will find their way from former Soviet republics to less responsible and more reckless ownership. There is a danger that nuclear scientists, ill paid and uncertain about their future, might be bought up by other countries, taking with them perhaps materials and certainly their know-how. Dick Cheney, United States Defense Secretary, yesterday gave a sombre warning about that possibility.

That is a prospect never before experienced or expected, and we must do all that we can to prevent it from happening. That is why the nuclear non-proliferation treaty must be extended. All the successor Soviet republics, especially those already in possession of nuclear weapons, must be persuaded to sign the non-proliferation treaty. The treaty must be strengthened, with more intrusive inspection. Any country refusing to sign it must not be permitted to buy any nuclear materials even for professedly peaceful purposes.

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. The whole process should be backed up by sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. It is highly encouraging that China has decided to adhere to the non-proliferation treaty. That gives all five permanent members of the Security Council a common interest in ensuring that the non-proliferation treaty really works.

Mr. Salmond: Would this proposal not carry more weight and have more moral force in terms of reducing escalation and stopping proliferation if the Conservative and Labour parties were not both engaged in a unilateral escalation—by a factor of eight—of the British strategic strike force? What possible contribution can that make to non-escalation and non-proliferation?

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman is unacquainted with what we have said about this matter, which is that we would not agree to more warheads on Trident than there are on Polaris. That is the position of the Labour party.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is a new one.

Mr. Kaufman: The Minister of State is wrong. It is not new—we announced it two and a half years ago, so the hon. Gentleman may as well catch up now.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is very reassuring to hear what the right hon. Gentleman said about the fourth Trident boat in answer to my hon. Friend the member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill). Will he, however, clarify the uncertainties that his hon. Friends have introduced on the subject by confirming that the Labour party intends to order a fourth boat but will ensure that it carries only the same number of warheads as the Polaris boats?

Mr. Kaufman: We shall have to wait for the Government to order the fourth boat first. The Government put it out to tender six months ago, and so far they have not placed an order. Indeed, the press expected the Secretary of State to surprise us all by announcing that order today. The Government cannot make up their mind about an order, yet they ask us to say whether we would cancel it.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrown and Furness) *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: No, no, the Trident programme does not belong to the hon. Gentleman. He has only a few weeks left in the House, during which he would do well to press the Government to provide work for the Barrow shipyard beyond any Trident programme. I have spoken to the work force there and I know that they are desperately worried about the work programme for Barrow even beyond a fourth Trident submarine.

Mr. Franks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No.

Mr. Franks: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that I am right in thinking that it is a convention of this House that, when an hon. Member refers to another hon. Member, he must then give way to him, should the latter wish to intervene.

Mr. Kaufman: As I said, the hon. Gentleman has an obligation to his constituents beyond seeking a formula that can get him through to the next general election.

Mr. Franks: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you give us a ruling on what I said?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Franks: It is the one that I raised a few moments ago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand the point of order, but I was hoping that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) would respond to it.

Mr. Kaufman: I do not respond to points of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I will respond to your response to a point of order. I therefore give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Franks: I would usually say that I was grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, but he gave way with such a lack of dignity that he does not deserve my gratitude.

The question that I put to the right hon. Gentleman —he can save his hyperbole for the general election—is one that I put twice in writing to the Leader of the Opposition, who refused to answer it. I put the question on behalf of constituents from the shipyard who came to see me at my advice bureau, and I ask the right hon. Gentleman to reply to it now. Will the Labour party build the fourth Trident submarine—yes or no?

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman had better ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to build the fourth Trident. He put it out to tender in July and he has not yet placed the order. There are arguments within the defence community about it.

I can, however, tell the hon. Gentleman what his right hon. Friend cannot tell him: with or without a fourth Trident, a Labour Government will provide the Barrow shipyard with work equivalent to the fourth Trident. We said that too, in May 1989, when we published our policy document on this matter. It is not new, and if the Minister

[Mr. Kaufman]

of State for Defence Procurement had paid serious attention to these matters he would have known this nearly three years ago.

Mr. Tom King: The right hon. Gentleman has given a categorical pledge to the work force at Barrow, who are deeply involved in defence expenditure and whose jobs depend on it. Will he give the same assurance to the workers at Yarrow and at Swan Hunter?

Mr. Kaufman: We gave our assurance to the workers at Barrow in May 1989. If the right hon. Gentleman had studied our policy document he would have known that long ago. It is about time he announced whether he will place the order for the fourth Trident before the general election.

On 22 November, the Secretary of State for Defence was not very clear about this. He said:

"subject to a successful analysis, we shall proceed with the project".—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 542.]

That is not unequivocal. Today the right hon. Gentleman could have told the House that he was placing the order for the fourth Trident. Perhaps he will now do so in an intervention.

Mr. King: As the right hon. Gentleman correctly said, the project went out to tender in July. The tenders have been received and are now being evaluated, and we intend to proceed. We are talking about substantial sums of public money. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) has said, we have already given the authority to proceed with long-lead items. We are already building the fourth Trident submarine at this moment, and authority has been granted in line with previous practice. We are dealing with a monopoly suppplier—a nuclear submarine cannot go out to competitive tender and we have a heavy responsibility to ensure that the contract is fully evaluated, but we intend to proceed. Will the right hon. Gentleman proceed?

Mr. Kaufman: And that from a right hon. Member whose hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) asked me for a yes or no answer.

We have heard much recently from this Tory Government about the need to prevent nuclear proliferation and to stop Saddam Hussein obtaining nuclear weapons for Iraq. The Foreign Secretary told the *Sunday Express* this week in a statement that revealed the Tory old Adam beneath that bland image that, with a Labour Government, Saddam

"might think it might be worth taking a risk or two".

We will not accept that kind of slander from a Government and Foreign Secretary who connived at the export from Britain of nuclear weapons materials to Iraq in violation of their own arms embargo. We will not take this sort of slander from a Government and Foreign Secretary who allowed Iraq to obtain from this country components for a supergun that could have fired nuclear warheads. We will not take it from a Government and Foreign Secretary who, in violation of their own arms embargo, permitted the export to Iraq—right up to the day of the invasion of Kuwait—of the following products, as listed in the Department of Trade and Industry memorandum to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

I quote only part of the list of what the Government have admitted they allowed to be exported to Iraq in violation of their own arms embargo:

"38 mm signal cartridges; air defence simulator; armoured vehicle spares; armoured vehicle; artillery fire control; artillery body arm; explosives; fast assault craft; guns sound ranging equipment; helicopter engines; hostile fire indicator; laser range finder; long range surveillance; mortar locating radar; naval spares; night vision equipment; night vision goggles; night vision training; pistols; rifles; shotguns; portable explosive detectors; radar systems and equipment; secure phone spares; secure telephone systems; short-burst crypto; small aircraft; speech encryption units; speech scramblers; tank helmets; under water training aids".

How many of those were used against British forces when we were fighting in the Gulf a year ago? Yet these are the people who have the nerve to say that a Labour Government might encourage Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we sat here listening to the Secretary of State for Defence trying to preach to the Labour party? Now that my right hon. Friend has read out that list, it is clear that the Government cannot be trusted.

Mr. Kaufman: My hon. Friend puts the point with his usual moderation.

The Government, against the advice explicitly given by the Opposition Front Bench, went on granting increasing trade credits to Iraq right up to the invasion of Kuwait. So I say to the Government, "Spare us your sanctimony and your hypocrisy—it is too much to stomach."

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on placing that list on the record. While we are on the subject of selling arms to dictators, is my right hon. Friend aware that last September the Secretary of State was touring Indonesia, one of the bloodiest regimes in the world? On 19 September he had a meeting with the Indonesian dictator, General Suharto; the subject under discussion was the sale of more arms to Indonesia. The massacre in East Timor—only a small part of what has gone on in Indonesia—occurred two months later. What right have those people to lecture us?

Mr. Kaufman: When it comes to these matters, there is about the Government a duplicity which makes one wonder how they have the nerve to bring such a motion before the House. They lack the credentials to take an initiative which will strengthen the non-proliferation treaty. The Labour Government, soon to be elected, certainly will take that lead.

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way to my hon. Friend. After that I must proceed, because I do not want to take as much time as the Secretary of State took.

Mr. Winnick: I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on placing on record what the Tory Government have done in regard to exports to Iraq. When I had an Adjournment debate in April 1990, some months before the criminal invasion of Kuwait, I argued that trade credits should be discontinued. The Minister who replied—the present Secretary of State for Health—argued that, if Britain did not export to Iraq, other countries would. So the Tory Government knew full well what was happening.

Mr. Kaufman: I know that my hon. Friend argued that trade credits should be stopped. We did so too from the

Front Bench, in particular after the supergun was found and after the case of the nuclear triggers. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told us that we were going over the top in making that request.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose*——

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: I hope that my hon. Friends will forgive me for not giving way; I have said that I do not want to take any more interventions because of the lack of time.

There is another way in which nuclear proliferation can be prevented. Any country which becomes able to manufacture nuclear weapons needs to test them, so a comprehensive text ban treaty would be of great value. Any disadvantage to powers already in possession of nuclear capability would be more than counter-balanced by the advantage derived from preventing new nuclear powers being created. Such a treaty would need to be backed by international sanctions through the Security Council.

Last September, Mikhail Gorbachev imposed a moratorium on Soviet nuclear testing. That should be the first step to a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, but the Government show no interest whatever in such a move. The Labour Government, soon to be elected, will take the lead on that as well.

While the prevention of nuclear proliferation is the greatest prize, further moves in conventional arms control and negotiated disarmament are essential. Some countries are already making cuts. The Germans have just announced cuts. President Bush is expected to propose cuts and a peace dividend for the United States in his state of the union message later this month. While other Governments, even including the Tory Government, are committed to making cuts, negotiation is the best way of achieving cuts because negotiated agreements open the way to verification.

If the former Soviet republics become involved in new talks on conventional forces in Europe, it may help to allay their mistrust of each other if they observe each other to be part of an arms cutting process. The Tory Government have shown no interest in a renewed CFE process. The Labour Government, soon to be elected, will seek to give a lead in bringing about such negotiations.

The former communist countries, ex-Soviet republics and others, continue to face grave economic problems which threaten their stability and in consequence threaten world stability as well. We believe that the G7 countries, in co-operation with the European Community, should take the initiative in working out a structure plan to assist those countries to rebuild their economies. Such a plan would include financial aid and credits, technological help and assistance in making convertible currencies possible.

The Labour party called for such a new Marshall plan two years ago. We have since been joined in advocating such a scheme, with that name, by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe—only last month—and by Lech Walesa, the President of Poland. The moment we proposed it, that wiseacre the Foreign Secretary scoffed at it. I understand that last week the Chancellor of the Exchequer included the cost of a new Marshall plan in the mythical total from which he derived his estimate of taxation under a Labour Government.

Until discussions take place about such a plan, it is not known how many countries would participate, how much finance would be involved and what the time scale would be. Therefore, it is impossible for any rational person to cost it. That the Chancellor of the Exchequer has seen fit to do so lets us into the secret of how he arrives at his own economic forecasts, which even he has now admitted are wrong.

If our proposal for such a plan had been followed up when we first made it two years ago, real progress could have been made and it would have been possible to avoid the demeaning scenes of Russians scrambling for food belatedly supplied halfway through the winter. The Tory Government show no interest whatever in such long-term planning so the Labour Government, soon to be elected, will give a lead.

The impact of the end of the cold war is being felt not only among our former adversaries; it is hitting hard at home as well. Tory defence cuts, together with technological change in the defence industries, have cost an estimated 74,000 jobs in Britain in the past 18 months. The Defence Manufacturers Association has warned that, as the decade proceeds, 123,000 more defence jobs will be lost. The country cannot afford that additional unemployment, that casting away of scarce and expensive skills, that destruction of a whole sector of our economy. The Tory Government have shown little or no interest in that grave problem. When the defence manufacturers recently sought a meeting with the Prime Minister, they got no response.

It is known that the dialogue between defence manufacturers and the Ministry of Defence is inadequate. How can it be otherwise when the latest White Paper on defence states:

> "It is not for the Government to seek to influence such decisions."

Those who work in our defence industries have the right to hope for a more reliable future from a country that relies on their contribution to its defence. The Tory Government show no interest in that problem. The Labour Government, soon to be elected—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"] Yes, the Labour party that will be elected as soon as the Conservatives have the nerve to call a general election—why do they run away from it if they are so confident?

We shall set up a defence diversification agency that will work with industry and unions to provide information, advice and retraining to ensure that the country is not deprived of vital skills and talents. We have good reason to know that the leaders of the defence industry will be ready to co-operate with us and with the work of such an agency.

While the Labour party takes a positive approach to the problems that beset us, the Tory Government are bereft of ideas. Nostalgic for the cold war, they can only mouth the slogans of that war, as the Government motion and the Secretary of State and his colleagues do. I resent their untruthful re-writing of the Labour party's commitment to the nation's defence.

The Labour Governments of 1945-1951, 1964-1970 and 1974-1979 were as diligent in providing for this nation's defence as any other Government that there have ever been. I know how the Secretary of State may respond: he may say that the 1945 Government were different from the Labour party facing him today. Of course, he is right—the 1945 Labour Government were the one that the Tories said in the 1945 election campaign would bring the Gestapo to Britain.

[Mr. Kaufman]

Whenever the Tories know that they are facing electoral defeat, they dive head first into the political sewer—*[Interruption.]* I think that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), is having a seizure. The 1945 Gestapo scare has its equivalent in the 1972 scare that Saddam Hussein might take a risk or two. The Tory bogeymen may change, but the Tory lack of principle remains the same.

The Opposition resent even more the Conservative's arrogant assumption that Britain's defence is the property of the Tory party. Labour voters are among the work forces that produce the planes and ships of our forces. Labour voters were among the men who last week were used by the Prime Minister as a background for a photo opportunity at a tank factory. Labour voters were among the men and women who risked their lives, and the men who sacrificed their lives, in the Falklands and the Gulf. Labour voters are among the men who patrol the dangerous—*[Interruption.]* Labour voters opposed David Irving and all that he stood for—they opposed the Nazism of David Irving.

Labour voters are among the men who patrol the dangerous places in Northern Ireland—risking and sacrificing their lives. When an IRA sniper aims his rifle at a British soldier, he does not pause to check which way he votes in a general election. It is about time that the Tory party, which stages phoney defence debate after phoney defence debate, accepted that patriotism knows no party. We are sick and tired of the Tories claiming that only their supporters are patriots—we are not having that, and they had better stop making the claim.

The Falklands and Gulf wars were not won on the playing fields of Eton, but in the comprehensive schools and colleges of Manchester, Strathclyde, Gwent, Clwyd, Lincolnshire and Somerset. The nation's defence is the concern of all hon. Members and all our people. In a very few months, a Labour Government will be entrusted with the defence of our country and, as it always has in the past, the Labour party will keep faith.

5.15 pm

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I suppose it was inevitable that such a debate would involve an element of overheating. I do not want to blame any hon. Member for using a touch of hyperbole. I do not think that anyone doubts that most people who vote Labour are patriots, and that is not the point that Conservative Members seek to make. We are talking not about the millions of people who support the Labour party for whatever reason and who are nevertheless thoroughly good patriotic British citizens, but about Members of Parliament who are sent here under false pretences and who, using the public platform that this place provides them, do nothing but talk down our defence and all the efforts made by those very people to whom the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred, thus damaging and undermining the credibility of our defence. To the right hon. Member for Gorton, I say:

"By their fruits ye shall know them",

not by their fine words.

Now that we face an election, the Opposition offer to bail out some defence companies. "We shall take £8 billion off the defence budget," they say, "but no one will get hurt." Their constituents will be guaranteed to keep their defence jobs or be given different jobs as swords are turned into ploughshares. The Opposition's schemes are unquantified—how much money will they need? We do not know, as they do not tell us.

The serious point underlying my comments has been made at length and stands repeating. With the world changing at the speed that it is, we must keep reassessing commitments and what we are planning to do to discover whether our plans still make sense. I believe that nuclear deterrence makes more sense today than ever before.

Some hon. Members have remained consistent and signed the 50-signature Labour motion, stating their utter abhorrence of and opposition to all forms of nuclear weapons. At least their position is consistent. I think that it is wrong, but I understand it and can respect it. It is those who have changed—wriggled and squirmed from position to position with nothing more than political opportunism in mind—whom one cannot respect.

During the past four years, I have usually followed the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), who seems deeply uncomfortable as he delivers speeches that make Labour Back-Bench Members almost retch because they know that the words that he issues on behalf of the Labour party are not those of the true Labour party. One has a certain sympathy for him.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State concentrated most of his fire on the Labour party as the only credible alternative Government, but the Liberal Democrats are not very different. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) does not have to worry about those behind him, because there are none. He stands alone in debate after debate constantly trying to correct some of the worst excesses uttered by and voted on by his party's members at conferences. We need to turn an electoral spotlight on the Liberal Democrats' defence policy.

I think that the most significant meeting that is likely to take place this year is the one to take place shortly between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, Mr. Yeltsin and President Bush. It will be the first occasion on which a leader of most of the former Soviet Union, having control of a large part of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, will be attending a meeting at which it will be in his own vital interest to ensure that nuclear weapons are kept under control. That has not been the case before. It is arguable that, at the start of the Gorbachev negotiations, he saw the way that things might go and wanted to devise a way of controlling his own nuclear arsenal—but I am not sure that history will bear that out.

As for today, it must be so important for President Yeltsin to make certain that he can reach with the west some accommodation in respect of sensible nuclear reduction, arms control and inspection and verification —so that, with the break-up of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States and other republics, he does not face a great danger to himself, and to his own security and stability, in having an uncontrolled nuclear arsenal loose on what was formerly Soviet territory. For the right hon. Member for Gorton to scorn that meeting as an electoral photo opportunity is to demean the whole cause for which those three men will be trying to work together.

The problem with debates about nuclear deterrence over the past 40 years is that no one could say who was

right and who was wrong. One body of opinion held that deterrents kept the peace, while another argued that the possession of nuclear weapons posed the threat of war. No one knew the answers, because it was only in a negative sense that one could prove that deterrence was working.

When we reached the end of the cold war—which began with our determination not to let the old Soviet Union get away with introducing a new generation of intermediate nuclear forces into the European theatre and our deployment of cruise, which was a brave political decision made in the teeth of opposition by all the Opposition parties—we were given the answer on whether or not deterrence worked. We were told so not by anyone here but by President Gorbachev himself.

When the INF treaty was concluded and we were able to wipe from the slate a whole range of nuclear weapons for the first time in history, someone asked Gorbachev whether he would have given up his intermediate weapons if we had not deployed cruise. He answered, "Of course not. You do not give up something for nothing." We forced him to do that, and events forced him to do so as well. It was acknowledged that, by negotiating from a position of strength on both sides, one can lower the threshold and reduce strategic, intermediate and sub-strategic weapons. We know that, without them, one has no cards to lay on the table and one can do nothing.

Mr. Corbyn: Can the hon. Gentleman therefore explain why he and his party support the adoption of the Trident submarine system—which represents a massive proliferation of nuclear firepower—in a world that he claims is becoming more peaceful?

Mr. Mates: I do not agree that that does represent proliferation, or that it is a new deployment. It is clear that Polaris is out of date and that, in four or five years' time, it will not be an effective deterrent. Does one replace it or abandon it? The hon. Gentleman and I take a comprehensively different view of those two ends of the argument, but Trident is the minimum deterrent that we can maintain in the present circumstances, and will see strategic deterrence through into the next century. There is no other way that that can be done.

The fact that Trident has a longer range and the capability for carrying more warheads is a function of the development of nuclear technology over the years. One cannot disinvent that technology or build a more primitive weapon—except at prohibitive cost, and there would be no effectiveness at the end of it. Although Trident may be slightly more than is needed or desirable, one must have it if one is to proceed with a deterrent at all. That argument has been rehearsed many times, so I will not repeat it.

Far from knocking my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for preparing for what could be one of the most important and significant meetings ever on the future of nuclear deterrence, right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House ought to wish him well and hope that he can persuade Mr. Yeltsin—as I am sure President Bush will try to do—that it is in everyone's interest to get negotiations going again. First, we must introduce a regime of inspection and verification, which will do much to allay the anxieties that Mr. Yeltsin and his helpers must themselves feel about the nuclear weapons that exist in the old republics.

Mr. Benn *rose*——

Mr. Mates: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Benn: I thought that the hon. Gentleman had finished.

Mr. Mates: Hope springs eternal! I can tell the right hon. gentleman without fear of contradiction that I will be briefer than he will.

As we near the time of a general election, it is as important as it was in the past two or three general elections to make the British public aware of what it is that the various competing parties are offering in defence terms. That is an easy job for us, because we have done so successfully for the past 14 years, with public confidence. We have had difficulties, and are having some now over defence reductions that had to be made as a consequence of changes in the world scene over the past year or two.

There has been a debate in the Conservative party as to whether those reductions have at the margin gone a little too far, or not far enough, and whether the balance is right. Those are perfectly legitimate concerns, and my party continues to debate them openly—but no one doubts our intentions.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence covered comprehensively what Labour is offering, so I will consider instead what is on offer from the Liberal Democrats. While the spotlight has been on the row between the haves and the have-nots in Labour—between those who want to destroy our nuclear defences and those who want to retain some credibility for electoral purposes—the Liberal Democrats have sat in the shadows saying very little, and hoping that what little they do say is not getting too wide an audience.

Some of the remarks made by the Liberal Democrats' leader do not stand up to too much examination. He has the useful asset of being a former Royal Marines captain, and so is thought to be sound on defence. Again,

"By their fruits ye shall know them."

I believe that I can say without any fear of going too far that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) once showed that he sympathised with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, having shared a platform with the Leader of the Opposition at a great rally against the deployment of cruise and Trident.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Is the hon. Gentleman reading from a pamphlet?

Mr. Mates: No, I just have a note of some of the comments made by the right hon. Member for Yeovil that I will share with the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East.

I suppose that one cannot blame the leader of the Liberal Democrats for appearing in the communist *Morning Star* alongside the then chairman of CND—the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock)—and Labour's parliamentary CND chairman, when he was reported as describing the Trident programme as

"a monstrous folly which we should divest ourselves of as soon as possible."

That did not go down very well with the voters in 1983, so like Labour—but more slowly and less perceptibly—the Liberals decided to shift their position. A brave speech was made by the party's leader at that time, the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who said that his party must not keep its unilateralist policies

[Mr. Mates]

"because I believe they are politically disastrous. The electorate has demonstrated time and time again that, rightly, in my view, they will not vote for any party which dodges its basic responsibility for the security of our country."

However, as that same news item reported, the right hon. Gentleman's standing ovation could not match the ecstatic applause for the right hon. Member for Yeovil, who was the architect of the policy demanding the abandonment of cruise missiles, and was tipped then eventually to replace the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale.

If that is the way in which the good captain of the Royal Marines parades his service, patriotism and commitment to defence, it is a very strange way of doing so. What the Liberal Democrats have in their locker is even better than what Labour has to offer. Labour will slash £8 billion from our defence budget, although it has not told us how that will be done or who will be affected, or what time scale will be involved. The Liberal Democrats have gone one better: they intend to halve the defence budget and, moreover, they have given us a time scale. They say that they will have completed the process by the end of the century.

That means a cut of about £12 billion over eight years —a cut of £1·5 billion each year—and it provides us with a yardstick of sorts. Perhaps the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East intends to speak in the debate, and will tell us what the effect of such a cut would be; or perhaps he will hide behind the saving remarks of the right hon. Member for Yeovil, who observed that it was not a policy but an aspiration.

If the people are to decide to whose care to entrust our defence over the next four or five years, they—and we—need not aspirations, but a policy. If the policy of the Liberal Democrats is indeed to halve the defence budget in eight short years, I need not tell the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East that the effect on our forces —on manpower, equipment, morale and, perhaps above all, defence industries throughout the country—would be catastrophic.

If the hon. and learned Gentleman knows a way in which he could achieve his aim without causing such a result, I suggest that he write it down on one side of a sheet of foolscap and send it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I believe, however, that if a sound method of achieving that aim existed my right hon. Friend would have discovered it: he is, after all, under some pressure himself to cut the defence budget in the present difficult times.

Of course, our friends the Liberal Democrats constantly seek to be all things to all men. As recently as the occasion of the last Scottish by-election, they were saying that we had gone too far with our defence cuts. We have announced a cut from 160,000 men to about 116,000; the so-called Liberal Democrats' White Paper mentions a figure of 73,000. That, of course, does not include the Gordon Highlanders, because there was a by-election in their recruiting area.

How cynical can people get when we are trying to hold a reasoned debate? Ultimately, a judgment will be made about the policy around which the right hon. Member for Gorton skirted for 40 tedious minutes as he tried to challenge us about what we would do. By their fruits ye shall know them. We have looked after the country's defence faithfully and well for the past 12 years and, God willing, we shall do so for the next 12 years.

5.32 pm

Sir Patrick Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Few could have foreseen that the end of the cold war would bring the world not more security, but a great deal less. As the Secretary of State told us at the beginning of the debate, the end of the Soviet Union threatens to bring anarchy and an outburst of tribal passions—"a Yugoslavia with nukes", as James Baker has put it. Given that fearful prospect, we must ber thankful for the loose association of 11 former Soviet republics that is now called the Commonwealth of Independent States, or CIS; but the years of Soviet power have so inoculated each republic against centralisation that co-ordination will be a struggle.

Earlier this month, at Minsk, the 11 leaders failed, for example, to agree to keep a joint conventional military force. Tricky decisions lie ahead about how to split up the 4 million-strong ex-Soviet force. Last week's Ukraine claims to the full Black sea fleet is a case in point.

Last Friday, here in London—as the Secretary of State is only too well aware—Mr. Richard Cheney, the right hon. Gentleman's opposite number in Washington, said that the United States was watching the dispute over the Black sea fleet very carefully, because

"a dispute over military assets could slop over and affect the nuclear industry".

The west is now resigned to having to deal with four nuclear powers on the territory of the old Soviet Union. It is clearly not possible to ask Mr. Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, to destroy his strategic arsenal when he has nuclear-armed China as a neighbour. The other three nuclear republics—the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan—are thought unlikely to disarm completely, because they are fearful of giving Mr. Yeltsin a monopoly of nuclear weapons.

The greatest confusion, however, surrounds the fate of central Asia, which contains five Muslim republics, of 60 million people. If they opt to break for Moscow's control, that will clearly have a profound effect on the middle east and China. Turkey, Iran and Pakistan are all interested in stamping their mark on them. Saudi Arabia has already established financial links with Kazakhstan, and there are disturbing reports of secret visits by delegations from Libya, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia to Dushanbe, the capital of Muslim Tajikistgan. All are reported to be interested in buying enriched uranium from the republic, which has deposits of the ore and houses the former Soviet Union's first uraniun enriching plant. Does that portend an Islam bomb?

The major concern of the West is to ensure that nuclear weapons are kept safe from the turmoil that threatens to engulf the area of the old Soviet Union. As we have already been reminded in today's debate, only last month General Vladimir Lobov, then chief of general staff, pronounced during a visit to London that—as he had personally assured me in Madrid in October—he was entirely satisfied with the nuclear safeguards covering the arsenal of 27,000 warheads. Within 24 hours of his return home, however, General Lobov was sacked and replaced by General Viktor Samsonov. That added to uncertainty in the west about who was really in command of the nuclear weapons.

How can there be effective central control of the systems when there is no longer a real political centre? That is not to say that Armageddon can be instigated by a group bent on mischief simply through the pressing of a button; as the Secretary of State knows, it does not work like that. The chain of control is too complex and too sophisticated. Unfortunately, the more sophisticated safety measures are found only on the more modern weapons. More disturbing are recent reports that Russia and the republics will run out of money: the Secretary of State has already given us an instance of that. Soon, there may no longer be any cash to pay the armed forces, or to buy food imports.

The military-industrial complex, which may account for as much as half of the Soviet economy, is already starting to fall apart. Before Christmas, the head of Soviet military counter-intelligence, Major-General Yuri Bulygin, warned that safety standards were falling because of instability in the demoralised armed forces. While long-range strategic weapons may be secure, that is not necessarily true of shorter-range tactical weapons. Many of those are old, and may not even be as well safeguarded as the more potent strategic weapons.

The repatriation of nuclear systems—strategic and tactical—to, say, the territory of the Russian federation could be both difficult and dangerous. There would be a problem of storage, as existing facilities are overloaded. Even destroying them on the spot would be very expensive, and would probably require western help.

The best technical measures to control nuclear weapons cannot withstand the complete breakdown of social organisation. Instead of just having many hungry people, the Commonwealth of Independent States may soon have many well-armed but hungry people who may be tempted to sell their weapons and skills. As a result of such a black-market brain drain, a growing number of countries in the third world may acquire weapons of mass destruction. Thus, at a stroke, the collapse of the Soviet Union will have unravelled all the work of the non-proliferation treaties. Critically, at a time when smaller nations, from Iraq to Pakistan, have circumvented the cartel to the very edge of nuclear capability, a host of potential nuclear mini-powers has appeared on our horizon.

What can be done? First, as with the Germans, there must be more active involvement in eastern Europe and the CIS—prodding here and hand-holding there. Secondly, in exchange for western aid, technology, and expertise, there must be a binding agreement on the political control of nuclear weapons within the CIS. Thirdly, safety procedures, including physical measures as well as codes, must be strengthened in order to reduce the risk of unauthorised use of nuclear weapons.

Fourthly, last month's NATO meeting in Brussels with representatives from several of the new republics must be repeated on a regular basis, and the emphasis on deterrence must be replaced increasingly by concern with disarmament, restructuring and co-operative arms control measures.

Fifthly, signatories of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty have a chance to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency when its board of governors meets in February. Sixthly, there are two favourable domestic factors—the only constant factors—in the chaos that was once the Soviet Union. The first is the red army and the second is the character of the peoples that made up the Soviet Union, especially the Russians.

The military was always the least corrupt and morally compromised of the pillars of the Soviet state, and the officer corps remains, even now, fundamentally honest and less cynical than any other section of society. Therefore, I believe that we should intensify the dialogue that began between the Soviet army and its western counterparts during the Gorbachev years.

Incidentally, that was preceded by a dialogue involving NATO parliamentarians—notably, the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Mr. George), the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and his colleagues on the Select Committee. They all entered into dialogue even before our professional colleagues did so in Brussels and at other command centres. They had discussions with senior political and military Russians and with senior political and military figures throughout the Warsaw pact while it was still in being. Such dialogue forged real friendships at a high level, and I believe that they are much valued throughout what used to be the Warsaw pact as well as the Soviet Union. I hope that such friendships will be maintained and, where possible, intensified.

The other factor is the character of the peoples of the old Soviet Union. Their capacity for endurance is remarkable. Without it, they would not have survived the war years—they could not have overcome the German onslaught—much less the trials of the past 70 years. Now, their ability to endure what western Europeans might find unendurable may be the salvation of Russia.

It is likely that the west will have to rethink its entire defence strategy, giving increased emphasis to anti-missile defence. In the new environment, can we be sure that the Trident system—however essential its deterrent value—will continue to head our strategic priorities?

5.44 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy). As he pointed out, in company with other right hon. and hon. Members, he has played a notable part in forging relationships with the eastern European countries—former members of the Warsaw pact—and leading members of the now disbanded Soviet Union. Such work, although at a low level compared with that done by Ministers, has played a useful part in building confidence between what were, at that time, two opposing blocks. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there is a continuing role at that level, and I believe that his suggestions should be given close and detailed attention by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

During his speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rightly drew attention to the proliferation of nuclear weapons and hinted at other means of destruction which are also a cause of growing concern. He also said—I support his view—that for the foreseeable future we shall need a strong nuclear defence. It is a necessary and vital part of our defence structure and the defence structure of the western world.

I understand that that is also the official policy of those on the Opposition Front Bench. To be fair, their

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

conversion lacks the fervour normally associated with converts, possibly because their conviction is muted by the memory of many of them—both on the Front and Back Benches—that they have devoted the best part of their adult lives to unilateral disarmament. That is why we continue what some people say is a wrangle.

It is important that, in debates such as this, we should test the sincerity and devotion of what is often professed from the Opposition Front Bench, especially by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), that there is no difference between the two Front Benches. There is a difference and, although we regret it, we believe that it will continue. Today, as often before, little has been said from the Back Benches that restores my conviction that, if there were to be a Labour Government, they would have the guts to go ahead with the policies that we know are right for this nation.

My purpose is not to dwell on the integrity of the Opposition and their defence policy. I have a high regard for the talents of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). He speaks with knowledge and a great conviction as a member of the North Atlantic Assembly. However, I could not agree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) that there is a Janus aspect—it is appropriate that the debate should take place in January—to the Liberal Democrat approach. They look both ways.

It is not credible to say that they are committed to a fourth Trident boat and that they support that aspect of nuclear policy, while muttering loudly and clearly to the wider public that their aspiration is to cut defence by 50 per cent. in the next decade. When politicians talk that way, some people believe them. I hope that, in due course, the views of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East will prevail, because it is not in the interests of our nation or Parliament that we should be divided on this point.

My purpose is to look at the international aspects of nuclear weapons and follow some of the points made by the hon. Member for Attercliffe. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State drew our attention to those nations that are seeking to develop nuclear weapons, he underlined the fact that the passing of the cold war still leaves us facing a greater variety of potential threats to our security and that, in some ways, that creates a far more volatile and dangerous situation than we have faced before.

Whether or not it is more dangerous and volatile—I believe that it is—I am sure of one thing: that we got into the habit of knowing how to second-guess the Russians. We began to learn how to out-bluff them and how to face them down. We began to develop confidence and a unity developed between the United States and the western European nations. That was one of the great achievements of statesmanship in the post-war world.

What worries me is that, in facing a new situation in which we are not sure where the next threat is coming from, we shall not have the mechanism in place to deal effectively with the problems. Therefore, the ruthlessness of Saddam Hussein, the unpredictability and exotic behaviour of some of today's leaders and the instability of so many countries pose new and more threats of a different type from those which we have faced and with which we became used to dealing after world war two.

The most dangerous aspect is that the ambitions of so many of today's world leaders are fuelled by nationalist aspirations and sometimes by religious fervour, which supports the belief that the possession of chemical and even biological weapons will further their economic and political aims. That is sheer lunacy.

Nearly half a century has elapsed since the end of world war two, when it seemed to Britain that our very existence depended on developing weapons which would ensure our survival. Who would doubt that our judgment on that occasion was right? We had the knowledge, which was confirmed after the war, that our main enemy—Nazi Germany—was developing nuclear weapons and was soon to be followed by the Soviet Union, which did the same.

Mr. Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir G. Johnson Smith: I shall give way, but not for long. I do not want to disrupt the debate, because I want to allow other hon. Members to speak.

Mr. Flynn: How will the hon. Gentleman dissuade the countries from what he rightly describes as their lunacy by adopting the posture urged on us today, which would involve our not reducing arms but increasing them?

Sir G. Johnson Smith: I had set up my argument to deal with that very problem, and I respect the hon. Gentleman for asking the question. I see a reduction in our nuclear weapons and in our reliance on them, which is why, for example, the Government have announced that we shall withdraw the use of nuclear artillery, and that no surface ships will be equipped with nuclear weapons. There is in train a massive reduction in nuclear weapons, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred and in which we are already playing our part.

However, as the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) said, we face the daunting task of persuading the nations that were not threatened as we were that it is not in their interests or in those of world peace to initiate nuclear programmes just as—as I said earlier—the existing nuclear powers have begun to contain and reduce their nuclear arsenals, which will lead to their virtual elimination together with that of other weapons of mass destruction such as chemical weapons. I refer, of course, to the agreement on chemical weapons made between the United States and the Soviet Union.

It is regrettable that, at this time in the evolution of the relationship between the democracies and the former communist powers of eastern Europe, the situation has been complicated by the emerging capability of some countries outside Europe to develop or to buy at cut prices delivery systems using other forms of mass destruction. The nations which are behind their regional rivals in developing a nuclear capability can—as we know—acquire a chemical capability as an equivalent deterrent which is cheaper and easier to make.

That is why I believe that chemical weapons delivered by ballistic missiles are such an attractive proposition to nations in the middle east which are concerned about Israel's nuclear ability. Therefore, the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and missile technologies is closely

linked. That poses a major challenge to our efforts to stop these forms of proliferation. If we are to succeed, we must deal with all the problems simultaneously.

The verification and other control procedures are inadequate. We know that, but we also know that they pose enormous technical and financial problems. No one should underestimate them, but we must—and I believe we can—do better. The common denominator of all the systems is the delivery system—the ballistic missile.

The belated discovery of the Iraqi nuclear weapons programme has shown that the International Atomic Energy Agency non-proliferation safeguards are not up to the job. Therefore, I hope that, when the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is reviewed—as it shortly will be—the Government will urge that ballistic missiles be brought under the control of the NPT formula and that they will back the nuclear non-proliferation treaty with increased powers of surveillance.

As we know, export controls and diplomacy can delay missile projects, but they need to be reinforced. That is why some nations drop a few not very well disguised hints that they are within reach of developing a nuclear capability, but never openly admit that they have already become nuclear powers. They know that, if they were to do so, they would be in breach of the NPT and would be subject to enormous financial and economic pressures. Many hon. Members—including the hon. Member for Attercliffe—referred to that issue. Any decisions taken on this front to tighten the nuclear non-proliferation treaty must have the force of economic trade pressures behind them.

The trouble with schemes designed to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is that it is difficult for the haves to persuade the have-nots. It is fundamental to the success of arms control that the haves are seen to be negotiating reductions in good faith. The recent agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union—not only those involving nuclear and chemical weapons—are good examples of what I have in mind, but we shall need to move beyond such bilateral agreements.

To succeed in reducing proliferation as well as cutting the level of nuclear and chemical weapons will require from all the nations a degree of international co-operation and intrusion into their defence, industrial and research establishments which some will certainly not find it easy to accept. Nor will they find it easy to accept the cost not only of inspection but of the safe disposal of chemicals and of nuclear materials.

The destruction of Soviet chemical weapons was due to begin at the end of 1992 under the terms of the American-Soviet agreement. However, the Soviet Union has not yet begun—it cannot start. It has no place to put the material to be destroyed and, if it does find a special site, as we hope it will, it will cost about 3 billion roubles. That is the estimate of one of the committees of the North Atlantic Assembly.

It is also estimated that the building of the facilities to destroy that category of weapons alone will be 10 times as expensive as the creation of the weapons themselves. The verification of the United States/Soviet nuclear agreement, if it is carried out effectively in the first year as promised, will be about $1 billion. Clearly, the costs will have to be shared between nations if a system of international verification is to succeed. That is why I welcome the assurance by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that it is the Government's intention to help with those costs.

We know that the European Community, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, NATO and the other bodies can play a part in monitoring the trade of weapons of mass destruction and in making agreements, but if there is to be a widespread system of verification which will have the confidence of all the nations with their widely differing cultures and political traditions, our country must press hard to put such matters increasingly within the ambit of the United Nations, of a United Nations agency working to internationally agreed procedures. That point was well and truly recognised by our Prime Minister who got the United Nations to increase its role last year when he put forward the idea of a register of conventional arms sales. We should take the initiative a stage further; that is the only way in which to ensure that the haves and have-nots work together in good faith. That is beginning to happen in Europe.

The former Warsaw pact countries do not fear the NATO alliance: they even want to join it. The republics in the new commonwealth which was the Soviet Union are heirs to the arms and inspections agreements that have already been negotiated. All those are the first steps, and they are important. They have done a great deal to bridge the gap that once divided us, and what is being done in Europe can be done globally.

6 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Notwithstanding the latter part of the remarks by the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), I will begin by paying him a compliment. He may recall that, approximately 18 months ago, on an occasion similar to this, he said to the House that the pace of change until then had seemed breathtaking, but that it was nothing compared with the even swifter pace of change which was likely in the future. If he had told the House then that, within 18 months, the Soviet Union would be no more, none of us would have thought that that was a credible proposition. He has certainly been proved right, because the speed of change has accelerated far more than anyone could have expected.

The hon. Member for East Hampshire could have used a better source of information than the recently published Conservative party pamphlet, which I have had the opportunity to read. It is a rather tawdry little missive. I hope that, in future, he will find authorities for his propositions which carry a little more dignity. As he has heard me say many times before in the House, the proper approach to the changing nature of our defence requirement is to have a full-scale defence review and to follow that with an analysis of what our obligations are and are likely to be. That will determine the military resources necessary to meet those obligations, which in turn will determine what financial resources are necessary to meet the military resources. That is also the view of my colleagues in the House of Commons.

The 50 per cent. figure is an objective. However, I must make it clear—I hope that the hon. Member for East Hampshire will accept this—that it is entirely subordinate to the requirement to provide for the United Kingdom a

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

defence policy that recognises the changing nature of the defence obligations to which we are likely to be subject in future.

I may have difficulty sitting here with no one behind me. I recall that, in the days when the hon. Member for East Hampshire ploughed a lonely furrow against the poll tax and when young men used to be sent in to ambush him at every opportunity, he made a point of making his speeches from the precise position in which he is sitting at the moment, to ensure that his back was no more exposed than his front.

I feel a sense of disappointment that there is nothing in the motion about how we might limit nuclear proliferation. I understand that it is wrong to be too literal about the terms of the motion on an occasion such as this, but I feel a sense of disappointment that there is nothing about how we might limit nuclear proliferation; nothing about how to continue the process of multilateral nuclear disarmament—the process begun in the INF treaty and carried on by the signing of the START treaty in July between the United States and the Soviet Union—nothing about the contribution that the test ban treaty might make to discouraging the spread of nuclear weapons; nothing about how to persuade the emerging republics of the Soviet Union that their security need not depend on the possession of strategic nuclear weapons; and nothing about how we may inhibit the spread of nuclear weapons technology or the sale of tactical weapons out of the deepening disarray which now grips what was once the Soviet military machine. As the debate has demonstrated, those are matters on which there is substantial consensus in the House. It is a pity that the terms of the motion were not drawn to attract that consensus.

We cannot sensibly debate the issues raised by the motion without some discussion of the nature of nuclear deterrence. There is no intrinsic merit in nuclear weapons. Their utility is the perception they raise in the minds of a potential adversary. We all know that nuclear deterrence fails as a strategy if the weapons that lie behind it ever have to be used. Nuclear deterrence depends for its success on uncertainty, not about the availability of the weapons, but about their use.

To try to define more precisely the circumstances in which one would use nuclear weapons is extremely unwise. Here I part company from the approach of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who seemed to be anxious to try to establish the circumstances in which a Secretary of State for Defence might feel compelled to use nuclear weapons.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): The very opposite.

Mr. Campbell: I was present for that part of the debate. If my understanding is wrong, I have no doubt that I will be better informed after reading *Hansard*.

What is clear beyond question is that it is wrong to say in which circumstances one would use nuclear weapons. Apart from anything else, that is almost certainly an invitation to an adversary to press on to the point at which nuclear weapons might be used.

Similarly, to announce a policy of no first use seems to be wholly contradictory to the theory of deterrence. Such a declaration, even if made in good faith, is worthless. It is unenforceable and can easily be abandoned without notice. It embraces not deterrence, but retaliation. It accepts by implication that deterrence may fail. It may provoke an adversary to test the sincerity of a declaration of no first use.

Theories of deterrence within NATO have been the subject of considerable change. First there was mutual assured destruction—I always thought that it was aptly referred to by the acronym MAD—which was replaced by flexible response. That theory was displaced by the idea that nuclear weapons should only be weapons of last resort, and that in turn has been replaced by the theory of minimum deterrence. As the nature and the scale of the threat have changed, so has the doctrine.

It would be morally indefensible to continue to deploy nuclear weapons if there was no justification for doing so. Nothing would be more reprehensible than to indulge in an intellectual scramble to create some ex post facto justification for weapons that it had already been decided to keep. The deployment of nuclear weapons can be justified only if it is appropriate to the risk. Minimum deterrence means minimum in relation to the nature and scale of the weapons to be deployed. It cannot mean minimum in relation to the availability of the deterrent. A deterrent that is not constant may induce in an adversary a willingness to take risks in the hope that it is either inoperable or unavailable. In that real sense, a deterrent that is not constant may prove destructively destabilising.

If we are to have a strategic nuclear deterrent which is constant in the terms in which I have sought to define the word, we require a four-boat submarine fleet to bring it about. Before the topic for today's debate was announced, I had arranged to visit Barrow-in-Furness and Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. so that I could be better informed about the circumstances of that company.

Apart from the impression of extraordinary realism on the part of the confederation of trade unions and of the management, whom I met, the clear impression that I took away from the meeting was that, although people were clearly concerned about the provision of employment and about the continuation of the company, they did not see surface vessels, for example, as a substitute for the fourth submarine. They believed that, without the fourth submarine, which would have consequences for their business, they would be precluded from becoming involved in surface vessels.

The right hon. Member for Gorton appeared to suggest that, if there was no fourth submarine, it would be the policy of an incoming Labour Government—if that were the flavour of the month in which the election was held—to provide work for VSEL. My impression—the right hon. Member for Gorton can check this if he likes—is that those responsible for the conduct of the management of VSEL are more than doubtful about the company's ability to survive without the submarine.

Mr. Douglas: I may have been completely wrong, but I thought that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was going a little further than the hon. and learned Gentleman is suggesting, by guaranteeing employment for the work force—more than 11,000 people, if I am right. Perhaps when the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) sums up, he will alter one letter—change "B" to "Y"—and we will get the same guarantee for Yarrow.

Mr. Campbell: That missile was aimed not so much at me as at those on the Labour Front Bench. I think that I will keep my head down and leave those concerned to have the necessary exchanges in due course. I would merely reinforce my point that the clear indication that I took away from my meetings in Barrow-in-Furness yesterday was that, without the fourth submarine, the survivability of VSEL is very much in question. Both management and unions told me, without any question of its being confidential, that, if the number of employees ever falls below 5,000, the question of the yard's continuation will become a matter of acute importance.

Mr. Franks: The hon. and learned Gentleman was here an hour or so ago, and no doubt heard the exchange between the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and myself. So far as I am aware, the right hon. Gentleman has not visited Barrow during my eight and a half years as an hon. Member or ever—unless he has come in the middle of the night.

I wonder whether, during the hon. and learned Gentleman's visit yesterday, representatives of management took him into the Devonshire dock ship hall. If so, no doubt he was taken to the ninth floor and could look down and see what was being built. Can you confirm—[HON. MEMBERS: "He."] Can the hon. and learned Member confirm that, as the Secretary of State said earlier, the fourth Trident submarine is currently under construction and is roughly one quarter built already?

Mr. Campbell: I understand that to be the case, although I have to say that I was not invited to view the submarine under construction because security clearance had not been obtained sufficiently far in advance. I may have a somewhat sinister appearance, and for that reason may not be regarded as someone to be trusted, although, as a member of the North Atlantic Assembly, I was invited to inspect one of the French nuclear submarines. Clearly, the French authorities trust me more than the Ministry of Defence does.

The agreements at Maastricht have confirmed two things—first, the continuing primacy of NATO for the foreseeable future; secondly the acceptance by the countries of the European Community of an organic growth in the nature of the defence relationships between them.

NATO is likely to remain a nuclear alliance for the foreseeable future. The British contribution to NATO's nuclear armaments is not, nor need it be, designed to meet all the eventualities that NATO might face. Neither in NATO nor in the Community are we the only country that possesses nuclear weapons. If NATO's doctrine is truly one of minimum deterrence, surely it is not necessary for the United Kingdom to contribute at every level. That is why I see no reason to increase the number of warheads on the Trident system, if deployed, beyond those of the Polaris system which it is said to replace—I shall come back to the question of replacement in a moment.

If Polaris currently provides an effective contribution to minimum nuclear deterrence within NATO, why is it necessary to increase the number of warheads available with Trident by what may be a factor of three? In some respects, it is misplaced to call Trident a replacement. The range of Polaris missiles is 4,600 km, whereas the range of Trident missiles is 9,700 km. Trident missiles are generally regarded as more accurate.

Moreover, Polaris warheads are not independently targetable, whereas the warheads on Trident missiles are. That means that, if one adopts the approach that I have urged on the House and on the Secretary of State in the past—that we should deploy no more warheads on the Trident system than are available on the Polaris system—it would be able to hit 192 targets instead of 64.

The Government's answer to the proposition that we should not deploy any more warheads than are available on Polaris is that, because of the increasing sophistication of defensive systems, we need the enhanced capability that Trident possesses. But those defensive systems are to be found around Moscow, and the question that we must ask ourselves—even taking the Government's position as the correct one—is whether the United Kingdom, as a member of NATO, requires a strategic system with which, acting alone and independently, it can penetrate the defence system round Moscow.

To put the question another way, do we foresee circumstances in which the United Kingdom, acting independently, would want to fire strategic nuclear weapons at Moscow? I cannot conceive that the answer to either of those questions can be in the affirmative. In my judgment, the United Kingdom's contribution to NATO's doctrine of minimum deterrence can be met if we limit the number of warheads on the Trident system to be deployed.

I am also of the view that NATO's philosophy of minimum deterrence can be met without the United Kingdom having recourse to a tactical air-to-surface missile at a cost now put at around £3 billion. I understand that a decision on that has yet to be made. If what Ministers say is to be accepted, such a decision may be made towards the end of the century. There may be a NATO case for a tactical air-to-surface missile, although I think that a number of questions require answers.

First, in the absence of the doctrine of flexible response, is a tactical air-to-surface missile required? Secondly, being deployed on aircraft, is not TASM vulnerable to pre-emptive strike? Thirdly, did not the Gulf war show that the power of conventional weapons is so great that any so-called benefit from TASM can be more than outweighed by the use of conventional means? I can see no merit in the case for the United Kingdom deploying TASM. In the end, that case must depend on the proposition that all the NATO strategic and tactical nuclear weapons will be an insufficient deterrent without the addition of a united Kingdom tactical weapon. I beg leave to doubt the validity of that proposition.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): May I seek to clarify the hon. and learned Gentleman's thinking? I have heard him argue the case against TASM. Will he tell the House whether, in addition to what he said against TASM, he is saying that a sub-strategic weapon of any kind is unnecessary from the point of view of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Campbell: From the point of view of the United Kingdom, yes. I argue that the United Kingdom is a member of NATO, an alliance that is likely to be a nuclear alliance for the foreseeable future, and that there is no justification for the United Kingdom endeavouring to provide that alliance with nuclear weapons at every level. That seems a well-founded proposition.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I should like to make some progress if I may. I have given way once or twice, and I know that other hon. Members want to speak before the witching hour of seven o'clock.

It is clear that the end of what came to be called the east-west confrontation has given rise to a whole range of new threats. It is clear from what has been said today that several hon. Members recognise that fact. Those threats are based on the nuclear proliferation that has been caused by the break-up of the Soviet Union and by the access to nuclear technology that several other countries have been able to achieve.

Following the successful containment of the Soviet empire, it seems to me that our efforts must be directed towards non-proliferation. In that respect, I agree with what the right hon. Member for Gorton said, in a particularly powerful and appropriate passage of his speech. The one thing we know is that we cannot afford a rash of new nuclear states. In the short term, it may not be possible to prevent some of the former Soviet republics from obtaining a nuclear capability, but surely it is essential to persuade them to subscribe, and to continue to subscribe, to a strategic-weapons centralised command-and-control system. We should be encouraging them to destroy both strategic and tactical weapons, and should be giving them the means to do so.

The scale of the problem with which we are dealing may be reflected in two figures. First, some estimate that there are 14,000 tactical nuclear weapons in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Secondly, it is estimated that there are 5,000 scientists—people previously in the employment of the Soviet Union—with experience in plutonium separation and uranium enrichment. One recalls that, after the second world war, the United States was careful to ensure that Dr. von Braun was transported to the United States—not because of any inherent qualities of personality but because he was the leading exponent of rocket technology. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Douglas: It was not Ron Brown.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The names may sound similar, but I fear that comparisons are not easy to draw.

Under the somewhat frenetic stimulus of the impending general election, our own domestic concerns may seem increasingly urgent, but this debate may justify the conclusion that our safety is more likely to be assured by vigorous pursuit of the goals of non-proliferation and arms reduction in the international arena.

6.23 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Having listened to the exposé of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), I cannot say that I have a crystal-clear understanding of Liberal Democrat defence policy. However, the hon. and learned Gentleman raised some very interesting points. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) unkindly said that Liberal policy was two-faced. Having heard the hon. and learned Gentleman, I think that it would be quite an achievement for the Liberal Democrats to have just two faces. There is some work to be done before Liberal policy reaches that stage.

I fully concede that, in the past, one of the problems in debating nuclear deterrence has been that the issues are so fiendishly complex that it is very difficult to state them at all. It is a relief that, on this occasion and in these times, one issue stands out with stark clarity. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave an assessment of the dangers in the world today, and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), who is extremely well versed in these matters, made a very informative speech. My right hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman made the point that there could not be a worse time to contemplate weakening our nuclear defences or our commitment to them. It is crystal clear that, because of the terrifying vista of proliferation, now is the time to keep our nuclear defences and to ensure that they are totally effective. If our policies were not to succeed, we could be on the verge of a quantum leap in nuclear proliferation.

The number of nations with nuclear or ballistic missile capacity and the ability to gain access to plutonium warheads or enriched nuclear warheads could be about to double or treble. This is what, 20 or 30 years ago, defence and policy experts saw as a nightmare. The stark scene was set with great calmness and clarity by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and by other hon. Members. It is one for which we have to plan with the utmost care.

Reference has fairly been made to another obvious point: that there must be some evolution of the nuclear doctrine of the west. Although there has not been final confirmation, it looks as though the context has changed totally. We are facing entirely new conditions and new threats. As the hon. Member for Attercliffe said in what was almost an aside, it may well be that, given the fact that threats could come from all sorts of areas and in all sorts of ways that we cannot yet quantify, the need will be not for major cuts in our defence spending but for expenditure in that voraciously expensive area of defence—effective anti-missile systems. In the world into which we are moving, people will rightly want to feel that their nations are absolutely secure against totally unpredictable and wild acts of international banditry. It is into anti-missile defences that we shall have to put many more resources.

Whether or not that is the right way forward, however, it seems to me that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) missed a point again and again. It is a point that his hon. Friends missed in the early 1980s. I refer to the fact that all improvements and other changes in the nuclear climate—all effective means of heading off the horror of proliferation, such as the achievements, jointly with the former Soviet empire, in winding down nuclear defences—are the result of operating from a position of strength. All the successful moves have resulted from negotiation from a position of strength. If that is not understood—and I fear that Labour Front Bench Members still do not understand it—those who see things differently would condemn this nation and the rest of the western alliance to ineffectiveness in dealing with the terrors and horrors of the spread of nuclear weapons.

The new dangers and challenges have been mentioned by almost all hon. Members who have spoken, so I shall not refer to them in detail. There has crept up on us the prospect that Iraq, probably Iran and perhaps even Algeria—countries which were dismissed as being incapable of producing ballistic missiles or nuclear warheads—have a very advanced capability. In addition, the break-up of the Soviet Union raises the prospect of proliferation and of the export of warheads, equipment and personnel. That is something of which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reminded us. In that area, therefore, our mission is to do everything possible, by

means of our own policies and strategies and those of our NATO and other western allies, to discourage proliferation and, where possible, to encourage denuclearisation.

A number of the states which have succeeded the Soviet Union have said that they want to be non-nuclear. However, I am not hopeful on that front, and I think that the same can be said of the hon. Member for Attercliffe. The independent states may say that non-nuclear status is their intention, but Kazakhstan, for instance, is in what amounts to a nuclear neighbourhood of central Asia. It is surrounded by countries—Pakistan, India, China and Russia—with nuclear weapons openly developed or with the prospect of achieving nuclear weapons. It could be a very long time before the understandable aspiration of those new democracies, or semi-democracies, to be non-nuclear powers is realised. That is one challenge, anyway.

The next challenge—in a way, it is the biggest and the most immediate—is to help to locate, control and destroy thousands of nuclear weapons, as required not only by START but by the September Bush-Gorbachev proposals for non-strategic weapons and by the aspirations of those countries. Hon. Members are right to remind the House that those weapons are not just the new ones that are easily coded and described, and for which procedures are laid down, but old nuclear weapons as well.

We do not even know the number. We talk about 27,000 or 30,000 strategic and non-strategic weapons being around somewhere in the established Soviet system. It makes us warm to feel that Marshal Shaposhnikov and his colleagues have a location not only for the strategic weapons being controlled through their authorising and enabling codes—incidentally, we do not know whether they are authorising or enabling—but for all non-strategic weapons, both the warheads and the launchers, which I understand tend to be kept by different branches of the former Soviet armed forces.

On top of that, we do not really know—and we do not know whether the former Soviet command in control of communications systems knows—where all the older weapons are. We know by comparison that, since 1945, the United States has manufactured some 60,000 to 65,000 nuclear weapons, of which it has about 18,000 to 20,000 outstanding. Over the years, it has had a programme of, first, maintenance and control and, secondly, destroying, degrading, deactivating and dismantling nuclear weapons. Has that gone on in the successor states? Has it gone on in the Soviet Union? We have no idea. Until we establish that point, the danger of some of those warheads going for a walk and ending up in utterly irresponsible hands is very acute.

We are now entering—I detect almost a lack of urgency even in policy-making circles—a terrifying transition period in these matters. What existed before in the united Soviet Union was not just a few generals and a few little bags with code numbers. It was a huge complex of nuclear fabrication—the making of rich uranium, of course, and plutonium, and the component parts, the gigantic culture of science behind all that, and the vast knowledge and organisation required to maintain all those weapons under the control of the custody cadres—the custody troops, as opposed to the launch troops.

I refer also to the huge organisation and bureaucracy required for the transport and movement of those equipments and weapons, which at one time covered not just the Soviet Union but the whole of eastern Europe. It is possible, although I agree that it is anecdotal, that some tactical warheads are still in areas of eastern Europe and have not finally left. Above all, there is the vast complexity of the control system at all levels, both for the strategic weapons which are in the four major republics and for the tactical weapons which we now know are spread over many more republics.

That is what existed before. It is too optimistic to assume that that system still exists. If it existed before, it depended upon central political authority. We know for a fact that central political authority does not exist. There was the Minsk agreement that the three signing-up members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and perhaps Kazakhstan, would carry on with the stategic nuclear control system in the hands of the military, Marshal Shaposhnikov, and the four political heads of the four states.

We have no guarantees at all of the huge complex system which has to lie behind an effectively maintained system of control over a vast arsenal of nuclear weapons, some new, some old, some well maintained, some deteriorating, some under close guard near Moscow, and some perhaps lost away under guard or perhaps not under adequate guard in faraway places. We have no guarantee that the politico-technical system required to contol all that exists any more. In fact, it is almost certain that it does not exist.

That leads me to the view that, when thinking about maintaining and being committed to nuclear deterrence —there was never a more important time to do that—we should also combine it with the most accelerated and intense efforts to work with our other NATO allies, including the Americans, in coming to grips with the problem in the successor states. Mr. Bartholomew, the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Defense, has gone with a team to Kiev, Alma Ata and other places. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will travel in that direction at the weekend. The American Senate has had some very good debates on the subject. After talking earlier about a $2 billion sum that it wanted to devote to resources for coming to grips with the control of that splintered and dispersed vast arsenal, it voted an initial $400 million, which is still a vast resource.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will confirm that the Americans have invited their NATO allies to begin to form a coalition force—an international task force—this time, not for getting Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait but for bringing together all the nuclear expertise of NATO to ensure that the crumbling system of nuclear command and control in the former Soviet Union is replaced extremely quickly by effective systems which can maintain control of the system before real irresponsibility and real danger creep in.

What is needed over and above strengthening the territorial defence of this nation—as I suggested in my remarks about improved anti-missile defence, perhaps we should do more in that direction—is, of course, that the successor republics carry through their commitment to stick to the START provisions. It looks as though they have done that. They need also to carry through their commitment to stick to the principles outlined at the Bush-Gorbachev meeting in September 1991, which in theory was far-sighted in its undertakings and its verbal side as it pointed to a huge mutual destruction of non-strategic weapons.

[Mr. David Howell]

We do not know whether any capacity exists to carry that out. We shall not know, until we ourselves assist in the forming of task forces, whether forces are equipped and have the resources to move all those weapons to deactivation and dismantling sites. We do not know whether the political resources exist, even if politicians are found in Alma Ata, Kiev and Moscow to agree to the fulfilment of START and the Bush-Gorbachev deal, and whether their political power extends to actually achieving all that at present.

There is a problem about sending vast teams of people to remote cities. They sit in hotels and discover that they cannot find anybody in charge of programmes. However, I do not think that that should deter us for one moment. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to chair a Security Council meeting at the end of the month to try to focus on those matters, on how the new successor states fit into the international order, on how Russia takes its place as a member of the Security Council, and on what that will do to relationships with the other successor state countries. That is very good, but I urge my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and our right hon. Friends to accept that the issue is by far the greatest and most dangerous issue facing the world at this moment.

The urgency is immense, and the task forces should now be mobilised. I know that the cry "public expenditure" goes up, but heaven knows, the prize is very great. If we fail to prevent proliferation and ensure that safe systems are in place, defence expenditure further down the line would dwarf anything that we might have to spend to get the task forces moving. We must also ensure that all successor states sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. As we know from the Iraq experience, that treaty is not good enough. The International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, which may be a worthy organisation, failed in the Iraq case. It did not spot what was going on. Clearly, the whole treaty needs beefing up very fast indeed. That, too, should be done not in a few months, not when we have considered all the factors, but now—at this moment—before the equipment begins to fall into other hands, as it will.

As has been said, if some of the Muslim states in the transcaucasian republics find such equipment on their soil, their incentive to hand it over to Moscow is low whereas their incentive to hand it over to their Muslim brothers in other areas is high. We must remember that irresistible incentives are being offered to some of the scientific teams, experts and individuals who could earn hard currency, be given housing facilities and exchange their present misery —their shortages of food, freezing conditions, inadequate heating and low salaries in devalued roubles—for the sort of salaries being offered in Baghdad, Tehran and Peking. The incentives are irresistible, and they will not be resisted. Those people will be—may already be—on the move.

The House, the Government and the policy makers of the west must consider either how to keep such people in Moscow where the former Soviet—now the Russian—academy of sciences is considering that question, or whether to bring them into western universities and academies, as happened with some of the leading German rocket scientists after the second world war. We must consider how to do that and how to do it quickly because time is passing and the splintering effects that I have described are happening now.

My message to my right hon. Friends is that they are right to think in terms of total commitment to a strong nuclear defence at this time. All those who want to tinker with it or to suggest that we have half a deal or, say, three submarines should think again at what is a time of potential proliferation on a terrifying scale. Another message to my right hon. Friends and to policy makers in the west is that we need to move not only fast and thoroughly, but on what might be an expensive scale if we are not to leave the next 10 or 20 years with a terrifying legacy of proliferation of nuclear weapons that may be cheap, can still be delivered by ballistic missiles, but can nevertheless still inflict the most hideous damage on all our peoples, including this island.

I repeat that this issue is the major concern of our time. Playing games with our own deterrent is a form of global irresponsibility. As the right hon. Member for Gorton said, defence is the property of the nation. Having heard his speech this afternoon, I must confess to being glad that it is not the property of the Labour party—and never will be.

6.41 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): When the election comes, I shall present myself to the people of Chesterfield as a candidate who is committed to the ending of nuclear weapons and bases in Britain. I shall do that because that is what I put to the electors in 1987 and 1984. I know that this is not a debate about individual records, but I resigned from my Front Bench in 1958—34 years ago—because I could not support a policy of using nuclear weapons. That is my position. When people ask, I shall also make clear to them the fact that there is a wide measure of agreement —if not total agreement—across the House about what should be done.

At the end of the cold war, it is necessary for those of us who take the view that I take to restate our position, given contemporary circumstances. One of the things that has happened in the past 12 months is that British, American and other forces have killed 200,000 Iraqis and have almost certainly caused the deaths of 150,000 children under five in Iraq. That was done with modern conventional forces, using more weapons and dropping more bombs than were dropped in the whole of the Vietnam war. Despite that, the Government still stress the importance of nuclear weapons. I opposed the Gulf war, and nothing that I have heard today has convinced me that it would have been better if we had had more powerful weapons.

When I listend to the Secretary of State's arguments, I became even more convinced of the rightness of what I have been saying. The Soviet Union had nuclear weapons on a huge scale, but they did not protect the Soviet Union. It collapsed. Indeed, it collapsed partly because it had wasted so much money on nuclear weapons but I shall return to that point in a moment. Nuclear weapons do not guarantee the integrity of a state against either internal or external enemies.

If it is really true that some nuclear weapons are now in the hands of hungry, riotous and underpaid soldiers and are being serviced by nuclear scientists who are not receiving any money, what effect can a British deterrent

have? Those people probably do not have sufficient communications to know of the existence of such a deterrent.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport) *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I am outside the constraints of the 10-minute rule, but should like to develop my points first.

I put it to the Secretary of State that it was the policy of the west to bankrupt the Soviet Union. Ken Coates, who is a Member of the European Parliament and a friend of mine, has just returned from a mission to the Soviet Union. I asked him for his best estimate of the amount of gross national product that the Russians spent on defence. He said that it was between 30 and 70 per cent. I do not know the exact figure and I have no doubt that the Ministry of Defence has a better figure than that, but the fact is that the Soviet Union was bankrupted by its military expenditure. That, more than anything else, probably explains why changes have occurred in the Soviet Union.

I hope that no one thinks that what has happened in the Soviet Union happened because people in Moscow went around whispering to each other, "The British Government are ordering Trident: we had better abandon communism." That had nothing to do with what happened. The Soviet people wanted freedom. What happened had nothing to do with the threat from the west.

I must say something else so that it is put on the record before it passes into history. The western intelligence agents used Islam to undermine communism. There is all the evidence in the world to show that Khomeini was brought to power because it was thought that the fundamentalists in Iran would help to encourage rebellion in the Soviet Union. Nationalism was also encouraged.

We are also told that it is wicked for Russian scientists to leave the Soviet Union to get more money elsewhere. I thought that that was what market forces are all about. The Conservative party says that one cannot interfere with market forces, but if a Russian scientist goes to Tehran to work on nuclear matters, Conservative Members say that that must be stopped—if necessary by having more Trident missiles. What nonsense the whole businesss is. Turning to arms sales, are we not the world's second largest arms exporter? But if the Russians cannot get enough food and sell a few weapons to buy food, Conservative Members say that that must be stopped.

I fear that at the end of this period we shall see a repetition of the Gulf war—against Libya and Cuba and, possibly, the toppling of Castro and Gaddafi—because the Soviet Union's weakness has led the Americans to believe that they can run the world. That is what the new world order is about.

I should now like briefly to rehearse some of the arguments against nuclear weapons because people listening to the debate or reading the *Hansard* of it should know——

Mr. Viggers: The whole House respects the integrity of the right hon. Gentleman, who is a signatory to the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). How many of his hon. Friends does the right hon. Gentleman think will put before their electors the clear policy that he intends to put before the voters of Chesterfield? How many Labour Members and Labour candidates does the right hon. Gentleman think would support the amendment that has been tabled by his hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North? Does the right hon. Gentleman regard himself—I say this in a friendly manner—as something of a political dodo?

Mr. Benn: My position is unilateralist and always has been. The hon. Gentleman has asked a very silly question because a substantial number of people in this country share my view—far more than might be suggested by the number of their parliamentary representatives.

Let us start with the argument that the cold war was ended by the nuclear deterrent and that we did not have a war because of that deterrent. It was not until I went to Hiroshima that I learned that, far from the bomb being dropped there to bring the Japanese to the peace table, they had offered to surrender weeks before. The bomb was dropped on Hiroshima to tell the Russians that we had such a weapon. That all came out at the war crimes tribunals in Japan.

As those who know anything about me will know, I have never had any sympathy with the Soviet system and its lack of democracy, but I never believed that the Russians were threatening to invade western Europe. Like, I am sure, most people in this country, I never believed that. Does anyone honestly think that the Russians, with all their domestic problems, planned to take over West Germany, Italy and France and come to London to "deal with Ken Livingstone" or go to Northern Ireland to "deal with Ian Paisley"? Does anyone honestly think that that was their strategy? That threat was the most convenient political instrument ever used in domestic politics because those who criticised the Conservative Government were regarded as agents of the KGB.

Indeed, when the Secretary of State for Defence talks about the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, he ought to know. His Department ordered the bugging of CND and treated its members, who were honest, decent people, as though they were enemies of the state. Cathy Massiter resigned from MI5 because she would not go along with its KGB tactics. So of course the Secretary of State knows a lot about CND. He probably knows a lot about what we say to each other on our telephones today. I hope that he does, because my telephone is the only remaining link that I have with the British establishment. So I speak clearly and I hope that those who are listening understand what I am saying.

The second argument against nuclear weapons is that we cannot afford them. I am one of probably only two or three remaining Members of Parliament who heard Aneurin Bevan make his resignation speech from the place where the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) now sits. He made it in 1951 when the big defence budget was introduced. It is worth reading what Nye said. He said that we could not afford it. When we look back at the reasons why the British economy has been weak in the past 40 years, one of the main ones is that we have wasted too much money on weapons of war that are not necessary.

I think that I am right in saying that six out of 10 scientists in Britain still work on defence or in defence-related industries. Let us consider the country which now has the most powerful nuclear arsenal in the world—America. Bush has to go to Japan to plead with the Japanese to buy a few more gas guzzlers from Detroit. Why is Japan so rich? Because it has not wasted all that money on nuclear and other weapons. Neither have the Germans. We would not let them do so at the beginning. But the shops are full of Japanese cameras, videos, cars

[Mr. Benn]

and Japanese this and that. All that we can offer to sell is a few missiles to a sheikh. That is our major export drive as a major arms supplier. We cannot afford those weapons. That is a powerful reason for not having them.

The third argument against nuclear weapons is that they do not deter anyone. Has anyone re-examined the deterrent argument? Argentina attacked a nuclear state —Britain—when it went into the Falklands. Did nuclear weapons deter Galtieri? Not on your life. He knew that we could not use them against him. Saddam Hussein defied an ultimatum from two nuclear states—the United States and Britain. Did nuclear weapons deter him? Not on your life. He dropped some Scuds on another nuclear state—Israel. Did nuclear weapons deter him? Not on your life. The whole deterrent argument is a fraud.

I watched the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), the spokesman for the Liberal party dancing on a minefield with the skill of a ballet dancer. He was really saying that, unless a country says that is will use nuclear weapons first, it is not worth having them.

Mr. Menzies Campbell *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Benn: The hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head, but I will read *Hansard.*

I now come to another point, and perhaps I may put on another hat. I was the Minister responsible for Aldermaston from 1966 to 1970. Like most people, I have had a chequered career. We do not have our own nuclear weapons. Since the Vulcan and the early bombs, we have depended on the Americans. Aldermaston may not even be able—I do not claim inside knowledge; if I had it, I would not speak in this way—to refurbish the weapons that the Americans give us. We do not have a nuclear deterrent and if we did we could not use it without the American worldwide satellite network which provides communication.

The Labour party was never unilateralist in Parliament. I challenge anyone to find one motion tabled in the House of Commons in which the Labour Front Bench advocated unilateralism. It simply talked about it at conference and then came back and did nothing about it. But can anyone imagine a more absurd democratic fiasco than that there should be election after election in which we discuss whether we should, or should not, have what we do not have anyway?

I tell the House solemnly one thing that the Americans would do. If Boris Yeltsin said, "I will take my nuclear weapons away from the Ukraine if you will take them away from Britain," the Americans would be wise to do so, because the Ukraine is more of a threat than Britain. The Americans could take our weapons away simply by cutting off the supply.

My last point is dear to my heart. Simply having nuclear weapons destroys democracy. When a country has them, Ministers—of all parties—lie. No Minister has ever told the truth about any central question of nuclear policy. We heard that today. We were told that the Government could not say when they would use nuclear weapons. If we ask whether they exist in any one location, the Government say that they cannot confirm or deny it. Every party has done the same. I am not making a party point. Mr. Attlee built the atom bomb without telling Parliament. When Aneurin Bevan made that speech, he may have known—although I doubt it—that atomic bombs were being built. But Parliament did not know.

I think that there were some nuclear weapons on HMS Sheffield when it went down in the Falklands, but that has never been admitted. Then there was Chevaline and all the rest of it. To lie about nuclear weapons in the interests of defending one's country undermines what one is defending.

If the world continues spending money on weapons, the problems will worsen. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said, the real problem of the world is poverty. The dangerous thing about hungry soldiers with nuclear weapons in Russia is that they are hungry. The dangerous thing about the third world is that it does not have enough to eat. If nuclear weapons would give a country a little more territory or something else, it might well be tempted by them. I do not believe that the world would be a safer place if we had more nuclear weapons.

Of course, any leader of a third-world country who reads the speech of the Secretary of State for Defence will be able to use it in his own assembly to say, "If the British say that, it must be right for Iran, Libya and everywhere else." The Secretary of State made the most powerful case for nuclear proliferation. We are proliferating with Trident. It represents a major addition to our armoury.

Britain is a small country, but we have such pretensions —we speak as though we were a super-power. We are a tiny country, and the idea that our deterrent will somehow determine whether Kazakhstan will agree to inspection is misleading. If one continues misleading people, in the end it will catch up with one. That is what Russia learned. It is time that we came to terms with the fact that we are a small island off the west coast of Europe. We depend on a new association across the whole of Europe. I have introduced a Bill to create a commonwealth of Europe including the whole lot. That is a better way of dealing with the problem of Russia. We should bring them into a pan-European association rather than building up our own weapons, which is what the Liberal party has policies for. We must seek political solutions to problems which we are still told are best dealt with by military means.

There is a great deal of poverty in the world. In the west we are heading for a slump. I do not think that it is a recession. I refer to the whole of the west—I am not merely joining in the swiping at the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We must recognise that in a slump people swing to the right, not to the left. I am old enough to remember the pre-war Europe, with Pilsudski in Poland, Field Marshal Mannerheim, King Zog, King Michael, King Carol, Hitler, Mussolini, Salazar and Franco. That was a world which had weapons and had a slump. Unless we put our money into recovery, meeting human need and giving people hope again, and unless we build political structures to deal with those problems, the problems will get worse. People will blame the Germans or others when in fact our economic system is deteriorating. Someone once said that we had the best defended dole queues in the world. That was an old joke in the Labour movement. It is even more true now.

We must find political answers. Obviously, I shall oppose the Government tonight, but neither can I support the Labour amendment, as I have told the Opposition Chief Whip. Without spelling it out, the amendment incorporates the maintenance of the nuclear deterrent, so

I cannot support it. I say that in all conscience, and I hope that conscience still has a tiny place in British politics. But it is not just conscience. The arguments against the policy are strong, and millions of people in Britain and throughout the world share that view.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches operates from 7 o'clock.

6.58 pm

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) must be commended, for two reasons. First, he has woken up the debate, which was getting into a sombre mood. Secondly, he has brought us back to the central point of the debate. If, one day in the future, the Labour party won a general election, would the views that we have just heard expressed have majority support on the Labour Benches or not? I know my answer to that question.

At the start of this debate, there was some suggestion that it was inappropriate, that the House was pursuing the wrong hare. Those of us who have sat through the debate so far will have realised that it is a highly relevant debate. We have had some excellent speeches and I believe that the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was most important.

People outside the House, as well as those inside it, are extremely concerned about the proliferation of nuclear weapons within what was the Soviet Union. It is the central issue in terms of British foreign policy, and I am delighted at the way in which the Government have been handling it. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will chair a meeting of the Security Council and I am delighted that the Government recognise the great role that the United Nations must play if we are to avoid further proliferation. We have a new Secretary-General in New York, Dr. Boutros Ghali, and I believe that he well understands the need during his five-year term of office to turn into reality President Bush's phrase about the new world order, and what better way of doing that than by making genuine progress in checking nuclear proliferation?

In October, I was in Moscow at the human rights conference with the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and we had a discussion there with the Ukrainian delegation to the conference. To start with, members of that delegation said that they expected that it would be the Ukrainian Government's policy to have no nuclear weapons. Then, of course, as the discussion proceeded, they admitted that they would not give up their nuclear weapons without striking a very good bargain with Russia in return. I think that matters have moved on even during the intervening few weeks.

I have always been a strong supporter of Britain's having an independent nuclear deterrent. Unlike the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, I believe that we have just that. Since the war, eight different Governments have looked into this question—obviously, Governments of different persuasions—and have come to the conclusion that it is in the national interest to have such a deterrent. Taking that a little further, it means that several hundred Cabinet members must have heard the arguments for and against, and reached that consensus.

There are two main reasons for having an independent nuclear deterrent. First, I believe strongly that one western European NATO country should be in possession of such a weapons system. We know perfectly well that, while France has a force de frappe, that country has distanced itself from NATO planning over the years and continues to do so.

Just after I came to the House of Commons I was taken on a tour to see the French nuclear deterrent. We visited one of its nuclear submarines. I shall never forget seeing a fish bowl in the wardroom mess; several hundred metres below the surface, the officers relaxing over dinner could watch fish swimming around in the tank. We were also shown the command and control centre and funny things sticking out of silos. I have no doubt that the French have a good system, but it must be an integral part of NATO; that is the important point.

Secondly, I support the argument which was well to the fore during the time of the east-west confrontation, that there should be two different centres of decision making. I happen to believe that the United States will withdraw from Europe to a large extent over the next decade, unwelcome though that may be to us, if not to the French. That is why I believe that it is particularly important to emphasise the need for two different centres of decision making.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was Secretary of State for Defence, I detected signs that in certain circumstances the British Government would be prepared to throw Britain's nuclear deterrent into the disarmament pot. It was never really spelled out exactly what those circumstances would be. I believe, without there having been any major statement from the Government Front Bench, that we have now given up that policy, and that we are right to do so.

In recent years, there has been a dangerous proliferation of nuclear weapons involving Israel and Iraq, and we read that Pakistan may also be in that league. It would be fatal at this time of great uncertainty for Britain to decide either that we did not need a nuclear deterrent or that in some way we could get by with a half-hearted job —three boats instead of four, for example. I could equally argue the case for five boats, so that we could have two permanently on patrol. I should hate to stand up in a public place and argue the case for three.

Equally, I should hate to stand up in a public place and argue the case for a nuclear deterrent that did not deter. How much the Russians and others have improved their defences in recent years seems to have been forgotten. If the deterrent is to work, it must to be able to get through such defences.

I feel sure that our allies welcome Britain's nuclear deterrent. They formally stated their position in the 1974 Ottawa declaration. Rather more recently, on 11 March 1982, President Reagan, speaking of the help that the United States had given Britain over Trident and its components, said:

> "The United States' readiness to provide these systems is a demonstration of the great importance which the US Government attach to the maintenance by the UK of an independent nuclear deterrent."

Some years ago President Reagan talked in terms of a world free of nuclear weapons. I seem to remember that President Gorbachev echoed the same cry. I thought that that was a fatal mistake. Imagine a world free of nuclear weapons, when we all know perfectly well that one cannot

[Mr. Cyril D. Townsend]

disinvent nuclear weapons. There is an old story—I have no idea whether it is true—about a professor at Princeton university asking his students to see if, over a few weeks, they could invent a nuclear weapon from the records available to the public in the United States. After a few weeks, the exercise had to be aborted because they were proving all too successful.

A world in which there were no nuclear weapons, in which one evil country could set about inventing and producing nuclear weapons, strikes me as an extraordinarily unpleasant world in which to have to live.

Finally, I wish to counter the suggestion which I have been reading in articles published during the Christmas recess that somehow the world today is more dangerous than it was a few years ago. I, like other speakers, have emphasised just how alarmed we are about nuclear proliferation, but I ask hon. Members to cast their minds back to the Khrushchev era, when the Soviet Union was hellbent on expansion in north Africa and southern Africa and was prepared to use force to gain its way, when the Warsaw pact was still in existence, when there were vast conventional armies waiting to be deployed by the Kremlin. Surely we can all see that times were far more dangerous then.

I happened to be serving in the Berlin garrison at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. I did not doubt the possibility that the Soviet Union might retaliate in Germany, over Berlin, rather than nearer the United States. I was in the House in January 1990 when Francis Pym, then Secretary of State for Defence, addressed the House on the subject of nuclear weapons. He said:

"For good or ill, we live in a world where nuclear weapons exist. We seek increasingly to control them in various ways, but we cannot disinvent them.

I should dearly like . . . to see the world kept in peace and freedom by a security system which has less need to possess such awful instruments in reserve, or better still, no need. To desire a new system is one thing; to make it real, effective and dependable is quite another . . . The Government are not prepared to dispense with, or weaken, the structure which shelters us now."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1980; Vol. 977, c. 672-3.]

Those words are just as appropriate in 1992 as they were in January 1980.

7.10 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I want to explore a perspective which so far has been missing from the debate, although the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) touched on it when he mentioned the importance of the European Community; unfortunately, he then veered away from that point.

A succession of speakers have discussed how best to defend and secure our vital national interests; how our national defence planning will be affected by changes in the east; how much we as a nation can afford to spend on defence; and how we can contribute to the progress of arms reduction and non-proliferation in the world. All these questions start from too narrow a premise, and all could be more sensibly discussed, and need to be discussed, from the perspective of our part in the European Community.

If, as the Government say, we are engaged in a fundamental review looking forward 20 or 30 years, we need to recognise that the biggest adjustment with which this House will have to cope over that period will be the move away from a purely national concept of our security interests to one based on a more European, and more precisely a more Community, perspective. That idea represents a striking omission from tonight's debate and from previous debates on these issues, which have focused too narrowly on national interests that are rapidly becoming out of date.

The shape of Britain's world in 20 or 30 years' time was drawn in Maastricht. What was agreed there was not a treaty of collaboration or of closer co-operation; it was not even a treaty of friendship or an alliance; it was nothing less than a treaty of political union, a fact which has yet to penetrate the public consciousness. It was not taken up even in the most aware journalistic comment after the agreement, but in the remainder of this year it will become the salient, all-absorbing fact demanding our attention.

Two historic forms of agreement on defence were entered into at Maastricht. Gone is the old separation between foreign policy and defence. Gone too is the theological distinction between political and other aspects of security. At the heart of political union is a commitment to develop a common defence policy leading in time to a common defence. The text is absolutely clear on that score—it is one area that the Government did not opt out of. The commitment in the treaty is unmistakable, and the Government must begin to base all their long-term thinking and planning on the perspective of the Community, even in defence.

Two aspects of the Maastricht agreement relate particularly to this debate. One is that the European Commission is to be involved in this process from the outset. The treaty requires that the Commission be consulted and kept informed on defence matters. That is important, because it represents a move away from the separate pillar approach advocated by the British Government. The Commission already has a foot in the door, and over time that will lead, no doubt, to it taking on a co-ordinating and servicing role in defence.

The second point of the treaty to which I draw attention is that the chosen vehicle for defence co-operation, the Western European Union, is, contrary to what the Government repeatedly say, de facto an integral part of European union. Theoretically it may be true, as the Foreign Secretary continually says, that WEU is a separate institution based on a wholly separate treaty, but it has no independent life. The members of WEU are a sub-set of the members of the European Council, so anything decided by the European Council is automatically agreed to by the Western European Union——

Mr. Douglas: The two bodies are not the same.

Mr. Macdonald: As I said, the members of the WEU are a sub-set of the European Council; some members of the Council are not members of WEU. The distinction that some try to draw between WEU and other institutions of political union in the Community is nothing more than a formality. I suspect that, after 1997, even that distinction will disappear.

These developments are irresistible. We cannot have political union without defence union, and we cannot have monetary union without political union. That is not just a matter of theory; it is a matter of supreme practical importance for British nuclear defence. By the end of this decade, it will be inconceivable that British strategic

nuclear weapons—or French, for that matter—should be used or even threatened or deployed separately from and against the wishes of the Community. We must face that fact. There will be no space in the Community of the future for an ultimate defence of separate and divergent national interests.

As always, other European Governments are exploring these emerging realities. President Mitterrand talked over the weekend of placing the French nuclear deterrent at the disposal of Europe. Jacques Delors, possibly the next President of France, has gone even further and spoken of a Community deterrent collectively owned and controlled. We need to think urgently about these ideas. Unless we do, we will find the agenda set in this area, as in social and economic policy, by others.

The British and French Governments should be talking about establishing co-operation in nuclear matters on a more formal basis. They should be discussing combined patrolling and targeting. They should be implementing immediately the recommendation in the first report of the Defence Select Committee to establish permanent liaison officers at French bases. Above all, they should co-ordinate their work on procurement policy.

Doe we really need an aggregate of nine or 10 strategic submarines in Europe? Would not fewer than half that number be enough to service our collective needs? That would release public funds for other more productive purposes aned contribute positively on a European scale to the process of arms reduction in which Russia and America are already engaged.

Far from being the birth of a bloated nuclear super-power, the emergence of a collective European defence identity can contribute directly and powerfully to the process of arms control and non-proliferation. Consolidation, above all, is the very opposite of proliferation, and consolidation is exactly what the Government advocate in the ruins of the Soviet empire. We rightly fear the emergence of four strategic nuclear powers where one existed before in the Soviet Union.

We urge a collective defence identity upon them in the form of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Is it not hypocritical, therefore, for us to resist that logic in western Europe. A European defence community can and should mean fewer weapons in fewer hands. That is what we should be talking about instead of the arcane and absurd debate about four versus three submarines.

7.19 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Any Government are responsible for the defence of the realm to avoid attack, to avoid occupation and, perhaps more important these days, to avoid political blackmail. We live in a dangerous world caused not so much now by the eastern and western blocks as by the break-up of the Soviet Union, which may lead to great problems. The question is, do we lower our guard?

My father served in three wars—the Boer war, the great war and the last war. He gave me just one piece of advice: "Do not lower your guard—all three wars were terrible and two of them could have been avoided if we had not lowered our guard." I have always supported that view.

We face uncertainty in the east and in the Arab countries. We do not know where proliferation of nuclear weapons will take place. It may happen in south America —one does not know. We hear that North Korea is possibly only a year away from having a nuclear weapon. Knowledge about nuclear weapons may be sold, stolen or provided by western Governments to some of those countries. Iraq was a good example.

The Government have maintained a nuclear deterrent all the time they have been in office, in spite of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The women were at Greenham Common, just down the road from me, for months and months, but they made not a ha'p'orth of difference. It was an abortive and ineffective campaign. They did not stop the arrival of cruise missiles, nor did they stop the training or the tests, although they sat there month after month.

Then we had crazy Labour councils with nuclear-free zones. I lived in a nuclear-free zone just across the river in Lambeth.

Mr. Tony Banks: And you did not get blown up.

Sir Anthony Durant: No thanks to the council. I used to sleep easy in my bed because I thought that the Russians would not drop anything on me in Lambeth, although they might in Westminster. We have already heard from the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that he doubted whether Mr. Gorbachev would have taken any notice of nuclear-free zones. It was a crazy policy, which cost a lot of money.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield made a good point when he said that his party had always been against nuclear weapons at conferences but not on the Front Bench in the House. We have seen that many times. In September 1985, *Tribune* relaunched a statement headed "Democratic Socialism", which said that the search for peace was a determination to disengage immediately from the nuclear arms race. It also said that a Britain not aligned to any major power was best placed to advance those policies.

Who signed that statement? It is a surprising list of people, including the hon. Members for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and, above all, for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who was described by *Tribune* as one of those instrumental in winning the Labour party to a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. That was in *Tribune* on 6 September 1985.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Why does the hon. Gentleman not write his own speeches?

Sir Anthony Durant: I only wanted to give a helpful view. At least half the Labour Members do not believe what their Front Bench is saying. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) signed that document, too, so there is no confidence there.

We must have all four Trident submarines. On 28 December, *The Times* agreed with that view and was critical of the stance of the Labour party. The wife of the Leader of the Opposition was a leading member of CND and went to Greenham Common. The Leader of the Opposition was also a member of CND—he was not very active, but I understand that he paid the subscription until recently.

There is no credibility when Opposition Members say that they are in favour of retaining the nuclear deterrent and Trident. Their record is bad. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and some of his Back-Bench colleagues are honourable and have always stuck to their view. Like the hon. Member for Chesterfield, they

[Sir Anthony Durant]

have promoted their view. I do not agree with everything that the right hon. Gentleman says, but at least his position is honourable.

What would happen if Labour were elected next time? Who would call the tune—the Labour conference, the Tribune group, or the extreme left? I do not believe that it would be those on the Front Bench, but rather those who sit on the Back Benches.

7.26 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): In examining the problems of nuclear defence, I take as my starting point NATO, which has kept the peace in Europe for the past 40 years. It is a tried and trusted organisation. Therefore, British nuclear defence policy should be firmly in line with the nuclear policy of NATO. The Rome declaration of 7 and 8 November last year set out NATO's strategic concept. That made it clear that, to prevent war and to protect peace, the alliance should retain a mix of nuclear and conventional forces in Europe.

The communiqué also stated the central point which is coming out of the debate—that conventional forces alone cannot prevent war. Nuclear weapons are unique in rendering the risks of aggression incalculable and unacceptable. No other weapons can sow such seeds of doubt in the mind of an aggressor. That is what gives them such great deterrent power.

The NATO concept also made it clear that there must be flexibility and survivability of nuclear weapons to ensure that they remain effective and credible. There is no point in clinging to nuclear weapon systems which are outdated or ineffective. That is common sense. However, it means that, if we maintain a nuclear deterrent, it must from time to time be modernised and brought up to date.

The NATO concept also called for adequate sub-strategic forces based in Europe to provide an essential link with the strategic nuclear forces and to reinforce the transatlantic relationship. The welcome removal of the intermediate nuclear forces and the negotiating away of the short-range and tactical battlefield nuclear forces means that the sub-strategic systems that NATO has will consist solely of dual-capable aircraft.

We have to accept that manned aircraft will be increasingly vulnerable to improving air defences. The experience in the Gulf war does not invalidate that view. Iraqi air defences crumbled under the sheer weight of a non-stop onslaught. That unequal scenario is unlikely to be repeated in any more balanced conflict. The early stages of the Gulf war underlined the effectiveness of straightforward Iraqi conventional anti-aircraft fire and the importance of stand-off weapons which could be launched from aircraft well beyond the reach of anti-aircraft systems.

Therefore, I believe that it is absolutely vital that NATO develops and deploys an effective tactical air-to-surface missile with a nuclear capability. If it does not, I believe that NATO's sub-strategic systems will steadily lose both effectiveness and credibility. Against the background of growing nuclear proliferation, that would be a matter of great concern.

Even without the events in the Soviet Union, which have been mentioned so frequently in today's debate, there are obvious risks in increasing the number of nations with not just the ability to develop nuclear weapons, but the technology involved in ballistic missiles so that they can develop the delivery systems related to nuclear weapons. That is a dangerous enough prospect, but the disintegration of the former Soviet Union adds to the risks.

Most of us accept that it should be possible to maintain effective controls and safeguards over the former Soviet Union strategic nuclear weapons, but there are large numbers of sub-strategic sytems, including short-range weapons, tactical weapons, battlefield systems and nuclear artillery. No one seems to know how many systems there are, but estimates that I have seen put the figure at about 14,000. Those are systems about which we should be most seriously concerned because they could easily find their way into dangerous hands. As other hon. Members have said, the obvious risks of former Soviet scientists selling their expertise to willing buyers is a chilling prospect.

Therefore, I believe that the British policy should rest clearly on the completion of the Trident programme. I have heard the arguments that it is possible to co-ordinate the pattern of patrols and refits to ensure that one boat can be kept on station with only a three-submarine fleet. However, that gives us no margin for the unexpected, and Murphy's law should have taught us that the unexpected is always likely to happen. We are well aware of the problems with the nuclear propulsion systems in Polaris submarines, and similar problems can occur in the Trident system. A four-boat Trident fleet would provide assurance against unforseen emergencies. There is no point in having a deterrent unless it is clearly seen to work. The comparatively small saving gained by cancelling a fourth submarine would be a false economy because it would seriously undermine the credibility of Britain's nuclear deterrent.

Is Trident enough? It is a flexible system, based on four submarines that each carry 16 missiles which each have eight warheads, giving a total potential of 512 warheads. As other hon. Members have said, particularly the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), the missile does not have to be operated at that level. It is a flexible system which can be used at much lower levels of fire power if circumstances allow.

The number of missiles in each submarine can be reduced, as can the number of warheads on each missile. Therefore, it can be used to provide a minimum strategic deterrent at whatever level is needed. I strongly agree with the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East when he questions our slavish adherence to the concept of the Moscow criteria. Why should we take the best protected Russian city and say that our ability to deliver a nuclear deterrent must be geared to the ability to strike Moscow? I believe that Trident could be operated effectively at a much lower level of fire power.

We must also ask whether Trident, by itself, is enough to meet the nuclear deterrence that Britain needs. However flexible Trident is, it clearly cannot provide a sub-strategic nuclear deterrent in the United Kingdom. At present, that sub-strategic system is carried by manned aircraft with WE177 free-fall nuclear bombs. We all know that it is an aging system that will have to be replaced, if not by the turn of this century, certainly early in the next one. Here I part company with the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East——

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Not for the first time.

Mr. Cartwright: Or, I guess, for the last time.

In my view there is a powerful case for Britain to deploy a tactical air-to-surface missile. I have already referred to the problems of improving the aircraft defences with which manned aircraft will have to deal. TASM is a flexible system which can be used against a wide variety of targets including airports, ports, barracks, troop concentrations, industrial facilities or even ships. There is no way that Trident can be used in such a scenario.

TASM has the ability to respond swiftly, almost anywhere in the world and the flexibility to be retargetted during an aircraft's flight. It can deliver small numbers of nuclear warheads against widely spaced targets. It enables the aircraft to be used in conventional or nuclear roles. Trident cannot play such a flexible sub-strategic role.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding argued at a lecture last year that Britain needed options in the nuclear basket in addition to Trident. He saw Trident—as most of us do—as a last-ditch weapon to be used only against a threat of total destruction. TASM provides the ability to deal with risks that fall well short of that doomsday scenario but which are likely to occur in an unstable world.

I do not believe that any of us needs to read newspapers or watch television to know that the world remains a dangerous and uncertain place. The clear and obvious threat under which we have lived for the past 40 years may have gone, but it has been replaced by a series of new threats. They may be less clear, but they are no less dangerous in a world in which there is likely to be an increasing number of nuclear-capable nations.

This is no time for vagueness, uncertainty or dubious double talk. We must make it absolutely crystal clear that, while other nations maintain nuclear weapons that can threaten this country and its people, we must maintain an effective nuclear capability of our own. I believe that most people in this country regard that as simple, prudent common sense.

7.37 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): My sense of commitment to defence started early, as I am just old enough to remember the time when this country was under missile attack in the last war, with V1s and V2s flying over. That led me to believe that we must always remain strong enough to defend ourselves fully.

I formed my political views during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s—a time of considerable danger and threat from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact countries. Wherever we looked, in whichever category—helicopters, artillery with nuclear capacity, tactical nuclear weapons or aircraft—the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact had that superiority of about two and a half or three to one which analysts of defence and offence have always felt to be sufficient to enable an attack to succeed.

That was a time of danger. People could not work out why the Warsaw pact countries needed such massive forces. Why did the Warsaw pact forces need such a huge submarine superiority? It could not possibly be merely to defend their communication lines, because those were internal land lines. Therefore, the only conclusion for a cautious person to reach was that the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact forces were poised for offence.

I suppose that, with hindsight, it is possible to say that the military-industrial complex within the Warsaw pact Soviet Union countries led to that massive military expansion, but any wise observer in those days had to recognise that the western countries and NATO faced a threat. However, that was the time of the flowering of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the "Ban the Bomb" marches, the campaigns for one-sided unilateral disarmament. CND campaigned actively and swam against the tide of facts and public opinion. Fortunately, public opinion had much more sense than CND both now and then, and the unilateral disarmament policies of the Labour and Liberal parties played a significant part in their electoral failures of 1983 and 1987.

There is now a completely new position, especially in terms of nuclear weapons. The resolution of the United Kingdom and the United States in particular led to the western powers deploying cruise and Pershing missiles. In turn, that led to the intermediate nuclear forces treaty and proved a significant factor in encouraging the Soviet Union to agree to it. Ultimately, it resulted in the removal of intermediate nuclear weapons from Europe. That seemed a big step at the time, but it was nothing compared with the massive steps taken since—the abolition of the Warsaw pact and dissolution of the Soviet Union. Suddenly, the Ukraine, of all places, has become the world's third largest holder of strategic nuclear warheads after the United States and Russia. The six Islamic republics within the old Soviet Union have nuclear weapons, and they are all in economic and political turmoil, with no certainty of steady military control.

Several estimates have been made tonight of the number of scientists and military specialists within the old Soviet Union who are now available because their skills are no longer required or they are not being fully paid. Those estimates were low. The authoritative defence magazine *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported last week that there were 1·7 million skilled weapons technologists in the former Soviet Union, of whom 30,000 were specialists in developing nuclear weapons.

Whatever the number, there are fears of a brain drain of scientists recruited by regional powers within the old Soviet Union or by other middle European powers. We know that Iran, helped by Pakistan and China, is recruiting individuals from the old Soviet Union, and that Algeria is building nuclear plants with Chinese help. One can add to that the probable nuclear bombing capacity of Israel, South Africa, China, India, and Pakistan. Other countries are close to possessing nuclear bombs, with North Korea, Libya and Algeria on the nuclear threshold. All that is deeply worrying.

The world has changed, but the principles on which we should base our approach to nuclear weapons remain the same. Nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented; it is a fact that they exist. As one of the original nuclear powers, we must maintain a minimum appropriate nuclear capacity as a deterrent—and, despite the remarks of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), as a stable democracy with a high worldwide standing, we must participate in the future dialogue on controls and limits on proliferation.

The way ahead must be to strengthen international controls. The International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna is well respected, but it is acknowledged that its powers are severely limited. The 1970 non-proliferation treaty was signed by 142 nations, but it is widely thought that five of them subsequently developed a nuclear bomb capacity. With Iran and Iraq both signatories, and many other powers within the IAEA seeking to build up a

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

nuclear capacity, no reliance can be placed on present powers. The need for wider powers of inspection and verification is demonstrated by the fact that the IAEA took some six to eight months to discover the extent of Iraq's nuclear bombs.

I respect very much the way in which my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have been working to set a list of arms exports and to develop a dialogue in respect of non-proliferation. The Government's position is clear. They will maintain a minimum nuclear deterrent, and negotiate to prevent further proliferation and to reduce arms stocks.

Labour's position is transparently clear. We know that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) wants to be Prime Minister. The Opposition do not like us making a political point out of defence. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) gets very angry, saying that Labour voters are just as patriotic as Conservative voters and have fought with the same bravery and courage. That is absolutely true. Of course Labour supporters in the armed forces are as loyal and brave as those who support the Conservative party. I may add, however, that it appears that many Labour supporters in the constituency that I represent vote Conservative.

The point at issue is not the loyalty and bravery of Labour supporters but the leadership of the Labour party, and the leadership that Labour would provide if it ever formed a Government. It is a question of whether service men and women can have confidence in political leaders who have manifestly sacrificed their principles in pursuit of power and who in their heart of hearts lack conviction on the need to maintain Britain's nuclear deterrents.

Labour's present posture owes nothing to conviction and everything to expediency. Long may my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and his colleagues maintain their responsibility for defence.

7.44 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): One might assume that, in taking up a whole day of parliamentary business this close to a general election, the Government genuinely wanted a national debate about the usefulness or uselessness of nuclear weapons as a means of protecting our people and our country at a time of massive and rapid political change. The majority of right hon. and hon. Members might have done so—at least until they clapped eyes on the Government motion, whose nine lines reveal the Government's abject failure even to begin to understand the massive changes sweeping the world.

Those nine lines manifest the cold war mentality into which the Government are hopelessly and helplessly locked. They could well have been drafted in 1979 for all the notice that the motion takes of recent world events. All the cold war claptrap is to be found there. It asks the House to support

"unequivocally the concept of nuclear deterrence and the retention of a credible United Kingdom nuclear deterrent, while other countries have, or seek to acquire, nuclear weapons".

Against whom are those nuclear weapons to be directed? All the theories that surround the concept of nuclear deterrence—mutually assured destruction, flexible response, nuclear wars, and first use of nuclear weapons—have a common denominator: the perceived threat from a known enemy capable of launching a nuclear attack on the United Kingdom and its allies.

That enemy was once perceived to be the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, but the Soviet Union no longer exists, and the Warsaw pact is no more. Who are we now threatening with nuclear assured destruction? Against whom are we to make a flexible response and to fight a limited nuclear war? On which territories are Trident's new missiles targeted?

We heard tonight that the perceived threat now is the new Soviet republics—perhaps the four that the Secretary of State for Defence said possess between them 13,000 nuclear warheads. However, the Secretary of State said that those same republics are experiencing a complete collapse of morale in their armed forces and are unable to pay their nuclear scientists—who are being poached not by other nuclear powers but by third-world countries.

It is now generally acknowledged that those republics are so broken that they cannot hope even to feed their own people in the immediate future—yet we are asked to believe that those same broken-backed economies can credibly maintain a huge strategic nuclear stockpile and target it efficiently and effectively on the United Kingdom and thousands of other targets in the west.

If the Secretary of State for Defence recognises the need for a credible nuclear deterrent in Trident, he must also acknowledge that the perceived threat to this country's security must be credible. In truth, the nuclear threat posed by the post-Soviet republics cannot and will not be taken seriously by anyone outside the ranks of the Government supporters.

We are asked to accept as credible also a Government policy that offers those republics food aid, technical know-how, a seat at the summit, friendship with the Prime Minister at least until the next general election, and western investment—while also threatening those same republics with annihilation. No one can say with any sincerity that that represents a credible defence and foreign policy.

However, the real trouble with the Government's defence policy is not its lack of credibility. After all, a Government who lack credibility in all their other policies cannot be expected to offer a credible defence policy.

The real trouble is the danger posed by the Government's policy to world peace in general, and to the country's security needs in particular. The Secretary of State himself described what he called a very grave and dangerous world situation. He said that the risk of nuclear proliferation had never been greater; he spoke of non-nuclear countries actively enlisting nuclear scientists from the former Soviet Union; he referred to at least nine third-world countries that were likely to acquire nuclear weapons in the near future, and said that that must be stopped at all costs.

Those are fine words—but what is to be done about the facts? What the Government obviously will not do is act on those words. We do not deter other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons by refusing to abandon such weapons ourselves. The fact is that, if nuclear weapons are essential for our defence in an uncertain and dangerous world, they must also be essential for the defence of every other sovereign nation that has the ability and the capacity to build them.

We cannot expect other countries not to acquire nuclear weapons while we are refusing to abandon them in exactly the same world circumstances—sometimes, indeed, in much less threatening circumstances. What credibility can the Foreign Secretary possess when he goes to the Ukraine and tries to persuade it to abandon nuclear weapons? The Ukraine sits next door to Russia; it has no conventional forces of its own, and it is threatened far more by Russia than are the people of this country. If Conservative Members cannot appreciate that, in such circumstances, the Foreign Secretary can have no credibility whatever, limited intelligence must be preventing them from doing so.

The real problem with the enforcement of the non-proliferation treaty is not so much the lack of special inspections, or the lax controls on nuclear supplies, as the blatant hypocrisy and inconsistency displayed by permanent Security Council members such as the United Kingdom, which are demanding one set of rules for themselves and a completely different set for every other country in the world. That is a recipe for proliferation, not for non-proliferation—a recipe that will lead the world into catastrophe if we allow the Government to get away with it.

Although the Foreign Secretary has not taken part in today's debate, he made a contribution earlier this week, via the press. He suggested that any weakening of our support for nuclear weapons would send the wrong message to the likes of Colonel Gadaffi. Where has the Foreign Secretary been for the past 40 years of so-called nuclear deterrence? Where is the evidence that the existence of nuclear weapons has had any effect in deterring those who have launched military adventures around the world, terrorist outrages and wars that have wasted millions of lives?

Why did a period of nuclear deterrence not prevent the wars in south-east Asia? Why is the middle east not now a beacon of security and stability? Why did the events in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cambodia and East Timor all occur? Why was Pol Pot not deterred? Why was Galtieri not deterred from invading the Falklands? Why was Saddam Hussein not deterred from invading Kuwait? Why do wars continue to rage, and millions continue to die, in an age of so-called nuclear deterrence?

The answer is, because the Foreign Secretary and the Government simply do not know what they are talking about. Nuclear weapons have never prevented wars, and they never will. The Government's policy is completely bankrupt.

The argument is especially relevant to Britain's so-called independent deterrent. Trident is designed to have four submarines, each with a potential to hit its targets with the equivalent of 1,000 Hiroshimas. Some may think that that represents something of an overkill, if we are really trying to deal credibly with the threats posed by Colonel Gadaffi and those in other third-world states.

The truth is that Trident was designed to get through the Soviet anti-ballistic missile defences, and still inflict unacceptable damage on Soviet cities. It exists for that purpose; it has no other credible purpose. The end of the Soviet Union has rendered it completely redundant. It is a waste of money, effort and talent in this country; and, if we ever make the mistake of thinking that we can use it, it will represent potentially an even greater waste of human life across the globe. If a peace dividend is to be obtained anywhere in our defence budget, surely it must be obtained through the scrapping of Trident.

The Government's motion is not only incompetent, inconsistent and irrelevant to Britain's real security needs; it is positively harmful. It threatens world peace, and, by undermining the concept of nuclear non-proliferation in the world today, it threatens Britain's genuine security needs. That is possibly the greatest threat that faces the world at present. The motion should be opposed, and, along with several of my hon. Friends, I shall oppose it in the Lobby.

7.54 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): We have heard a great deal tonight about the potentially awesome consequences of the break-up of the Soviet Union. We have heard much about not only the risk to individual weapon systems but the much more serious risk of widespread proliferation of Soviet nuclear technology. As we listened to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and a number of other speakers—including my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell)—it was difficult not to gain a sense of the seriousness of the potential threat to us.

Most of the other speakers—with the solitary exception of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright)—have focused on Trident. I strongly believe that we should purchase Trident; indeed, I consider it essential that we do so. Rather than discussing Trident, however, I wish to deal with another nuclear issue: the sub-strategic air-launched system known as TASM—the tactical air-to-surface missile.

Incidentally, TASM is of crucial political importance. Whatever fussing or fudging we may hear from the Opposition about Trident, we know for certain that both the main Opposition parties are firmly against TASM, while the Government favour purchasing it and, indeed, will do so.

The hon. Member for Woolwich alluded to the various roles in which TASM could be used—mostly against heavy conventional threats of one kind or another. I wish to focus on its anti-nuclear role, in the light of the potential threat from the third world. An interesting parallel can be drawn with the 1950s, when there was considerable military debate about the respective merits of missiles and aeroplanes as platforms for nuclear weapons. Superficially, it appeared that we could get rid of manned aircraft altogether; but, for a political rather than a military reason, we decided that it was essential for us to maintain an aircraft-launched nuclear capability. Only in that way could we have the political flexibility that we required—a flexibility that can never be provided by missiles, especially submarine-launched missiles.

It is impossible to recall a missile; it is not always possible even to know whether communication can take place with the submarine on which it is based. When it comes to a showdown, the flexibility that is provided by air-launched systems is sometimes essential.

We are speaking of a world of nightmares when we speak of the possible use of a nuclear weapon in anger. Certainly, we are speaking of a much greater disaster—or, rather, of many more deaths—than occurred at Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Any modern strategic nuclear weapon would kill far more people. We should not doubt, however, that

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

we live in a world in which nightmares can, and sadly do, happen. The world has seen the concentration camps, and the killing fields of Cambodia.

The most important duty of any British Government must be to make certain that such nightmares never happen in this country or, as far as possible, in the countries to which we are allied, and which we seek to protect.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Or in the world as a whole.

Mr. Brazier: Indeed.

The pattern of nuclear proliferation into third-world countries has, I fear, been set by Saddam Hussein. A number of features of his case illustrate our need for a flexible nuclear capability. First, there is the dispersal of sites, which would no doubt be further magnified with dummy sites. Secondly, there is the tendency to use underground sites—sites which, in some instances, would be very difficult to reach with conventional weaponry. Thirdly, there is the tendency to put such nuclear sites into civilian areas, where a civilised country would be very unwilling to strike at them.

Let us suppose that we are faced with a dictator—it does not matter whether he is in Iraq—who has developed a nuclear capability and is threatening the world with it. He need not even use missiles. Let us even suppose—it is by no means impossible—that he has already armed a number of terrorist groups with such weapons, and that one may even have been used. Our intelligence sources tell us where the bulk of his nuclear sites are. How should we respond? Western Europe could not possibly afford the level of conventional capability necessary to cope with such a threat. America might not be willing to help, or it might not be able to.

We might well face a situation within a few years where the only way to prevent a nuclear attack on Britain or some other country may be the threatened, or even actual use, of a number of tactical nuclear weapons to destroy such sites. In such circumstances, it is immediately obvious why Trident, although it is an essential cornerstone of our defence against the still strong Chinese and Russian capabilities, would not be suitable. It lacks the flexibility that I mentioned earlier and it is much more powerful than is necessary. If a site is in a civilian area, one would wish to use the smallest possible bomb to destroy the nuclear installation. Also, there would be the communication difficulty to which I referred earlier. One can send aircraft loaded with bombs or they may be seen on the edge of a dictator's radar screen, acting as a psychological pressure. However, once a missile has been launched, it cannot be recalled.

For all those reasons, it is essential that, as well as Trident, we retain an air-launched sub-strategic system within our armoury in the United Kingdom—it should be western Europe, but only Britain and France are involved now. That is essential for peace in the world.

Some people say—we have heard it again tonight—that, if we spent less money on weaponry, which we are trying to do, we could spend more on schools, hospitals and other services. No other aspect of Government expenditure compares with the importance of preventing a nuclear attack on this country, and within a few years we may need such systems to prevent such an attack from the third world.

I want to make a political point. Whatever fussing and fudging there is on the Opposition Benches about Trident, there is a clear division of policy between the Conservative Government, who are committed to the NATO policy of developing this system, and both the major Opposition parties, which are determined to scrap it. The Liberal Democrats have put that in their amendment.

It is not only the system that matters, but the willingness, in the last resort, to use it. I believe firmly that there is no surer way to keep this world safe from the actual use of nuclear weapons by the ever-increasing number of countries that are acquiring them than western democracies such as Britain possessing a deterrent that is capable and is backed by a political willingness, in the last resort, to use it. Only the Conservative party, as the British Government, will provide that.

8.4 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I welcome this debate. In the last such debate, instigated by the Conservatives just before the recess, they managed to rustle up only seven Back Benchers, and some of those were critical of the Government. It required a three-line Whip to persuade hon. Members today to support the Government. I suspect that, despite the Government's endeavours to whip up feeling against the Labour party, defence will not be a major issue in the next election. The Government's record, contemporary and historically, is far from adequate and, although some Labour Members dislike it, the Labour party has changed its policy in many ways which will satisfy NATO and our allies and, most importantly, potential Labour voters.

We are living in an uncertain world. The euphoria of 1990 has dissipated and a greater sense of realism has emerged. Some people thought that the collapse of the Warsaw pact would bring peace and justice throughout the world. Those who are serious about security issues realise, as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has, that 30 wars are currently taking place and there have been about 150 wars since the second world war, although none was between nuclear states. For those who use the argument about why non-nuclear powers were not deterred by nuclear powers, the answer is simple: nuclear powers have said that they will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear powers. I believe that the possession of nuclear weaons has acted as a deterrent.

I do not like nuclear weapons and neither did Attlee, but he felt that Labour had to have them. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) told us that Nye Bevan opposed nuclear weapons, but not that a decade later he was converted. The Labour party's policy is that, for as long as other countries have nuclear weapons, a Labour Government will have them. It is vital to get a handle on proliferation, but I suspect that, even if one buttressed any non-proliferation treaty, there would still be countries that would violate it and, regrettably, some will remain or become nuclear powers.

Over the past 10 years or so, the Tory party has benefited from the Labour party's defence policy. Students of the German language or congnoscenti of commercial television now know the word "schadenfreude", which we are told is the malicious enjoyment of other people's

discomfort. I suspect that the Conservative party wishes to see that continue on defence in the future. Having attended the last debate, I shall coin a more appropriate word—"gazzered" which means to intend to do grievous bodily harm to an adversary but to end up inflicting more harm upon oneself. I suspect that that is what will happen at the next election.

I want to discuss a number of issues, but because of the time constraints I shall discuss only one. Is it true that the Conservative party is the only party with which defence is safe? The Tories have published a scurrilous little document entitled, "Britain's Defence: unsafe in Labour's Hands". In the document they talk about the Labour party being historically in the grip of men such as Ramsay Macdonald. I should like to point out to Conservative central office that he was Prime Minister of a Conservative Government, a national Government, for far longer than he was Prime Minister of a Labour Government. His pacifism endeared him to his colleagues such as Baldwin and Chamberlain.

The so-called party of defence does not deserve that title. I am not saying that I fear for our defence when there is a Conservative Government, but each party has its lapses. We had ours in the 1980s, and it was matched only by the Conservative party's lapses. We are told in the Tory document that the Labour party has an inherent aversion to defence and contempt for it. That is wrong. Is it not ironic that when Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in 1951 he said that it was

"a curious commentary on British politics that it should fall to a Conservative Government"

to have to curtail a military budget to which a socialist Government had committed Britain?

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, whom I admire in many ways, lectured us on dissent. He has been involved in many rebellions, and is the Wat Tyler of the Conservative party. It is no wonder that, having gone through what he has, he stands with his back to the wall. He talked about how awful the Labour party has been and about the Liberal Democrats' intention to cut expenditure. In the Chairman's draft report, which became the Defence Select Committee report on the statement on the Defence Estimates, it said that defence expenditure under this Government had fallen from a peak of 5 per cent. of GDP to about 3·8 per cent. It said that defence expenditure in 1993-94 is estimated to acount for 3·4 per cent. of GDP, the same as or less than it was in 1978-79.

The Conservative party has thus maintained the fiction of improving British defence while expenditure has fallen to a level below that at which they took office in 1979. NATO figures show that the amount spent on defence in terms of GDP in 1974-79 was higher than under the Conservative Administration of 1979-92. Hon. Members can study the NATO figures if they disbelieve me. Conservative party policy has meant a smaller proportion of GDP spent on defence. Our Navy has been cut to its smallest size ever, our Army is about to be cut to its lowest levels since the Crimean war, and I have documents on the collapse of the merchant marine. They show that in 1981 United Kingdom registered shipping had 37·7 million deadweight tonnes but that it now has 3·7 million tonnes. That is a disaster.

I give a brief list of the Tories' record on defence. The reliance on nuclear weapons has been to the detriment of conventional defence. To cut the Army to 116,000 is to make it dangerously small. We now have the smallest number of submarines ever; nor do we seem to build them very well, and as I said, there has been a dangerous decline in the merchant marine. There are inadequate airborne warning and communication system offset arrangements and a shared responsibility for the catastrophe of Nimrod.

We have seen procurement foul-ups by the score—the vertical-launch Sea Wolf followed by the Challenger, the seabed operational vessel. There was a delay in replacing Fearless and Intrepid, and a prodigious collapse of the defence industrial base. The checklist goes on and on. There was the messy path of regimental reorganisation. The Conservative party has not a clue what to do with decommissioned nuclear submarines, and morale in the forces is very low. We were lucky to get away with the Gulf in view of Government policies in the 1980s.

We have seen that the Conservative party has little credibility in saying that it is the party of defence, but perhaps it is better on nuclear weapons. Let us consider the record. When Attlee left office, we had an atomic programme which was almost exclusively British. Under the Tories, we saw reliance on the V-bomber force. That was a disaster, because it became obsolescent. The Conservative party then decided on Blue Streak and Blue Steel, all of which were abandoned.

A decade after his party took office, Harold Macmillan was reduced to going to Nassau to plead with Kennedy to be given an off-the-shelf purchase in the form of Polaris. Sorensen, the biographer of Kennedy, said that Macmillan told Kennedy that he was like a ship which looked buoyant but was apt to sink: did Kennedy want to live with the consequences of sinking him? He warned that the collapse of his Government on that issue would bring to power a more anti-American, more neutralist group from either party. That is what we were reduced to. Sorensen said that Kennedy asked whether Macmillan would like to share expenditure on Skybolt but was told, "No thank you, sir." He asked whether he would like Hound Dog but was told "No, we want Polaris." Subsequently, we got a nuclear system on which we are dependent.

We hear talk of the fourth Trident submarine, but let us remember the fifth Polaris submarine which, when the Tories left office, was only an option. When the Tories came to office again in 1970, they had the opportunity to build the fifth Polaris submarine that they are supposed to have wanted, but they declined to do so. It is possible to manage with three Tridents; I should prefer four but the Labour party has said that when it takes office it will consider how much has been spent and how much is contractually committed and then decide, bearing in mind the paramount importance of seeking to control proliferation. Our record——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

8.13 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Whether the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) which renounces the use of nuclear weapons and seeks to cancel Trident

"substituting it by a process of arms conversion"—

whatever that means—is the true position of the Labour party remains open to doubt even after this afternoon's debate. It is also a matter for political argument whether it makes common sense, and the electors will be called to judge, whatever the result in the Division this evening.

[Mr. Richard Alexander]

I have read the official Opposition's amendment several times. I am perhaps intellectually less astute than some hon. Members, but I cannot make head or tail of it. We heard very little about it from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), but it might have helped us to understand his position if, in discussing it, he had mentioned nuclear defence. It would have helped to have those two words in the amendment so that we should know precisely what was the official Opposition's position.

I do not believe that now is the time to let down our guard; nor do I think that the electorate believe that it is time, and they will not be convinced by the Opposition's stance today. This is a vital issue. If we do not defend our country adequately at a time of international unrest, and if a madman obtains a weapon that we cannot counter with our own, the arguments about the economy, education and health are all for the birds. Defence must be the prime issue facing us at the general election. It is right that we should set out out not only for Members of Parliament but for the world outside where each party stands on the subject.

I and other hon. Members have referred to international uncertainty. Can anyone doubt that, if Saddam had not been stopped in his tracks, he would by now have had a nuclear capability which would have been a threat to us? Can anyone doubt that Libya takes no notice of what we in the west do or think? However, it will take note of how strong our guard is. Indeed, where would the threat from the rickety empires which were together formerly called the Soviet Union be if we had no nuclear arms?

The answer must lie in trying to prevent further proliferation of nuclear arms. The 1968 treaty was a start, but not all countries with nuclear arms have signed it, and many of those who have signed have their own nuclear capability in any case. Another problem is that the treaty does not cover nuclear missiles. It deals with technology, but there are no verifiable powers of inspection. There are now opportunities under the new world order to ensure that, together in friendship, countries can sign a new non-proliferation treaty covering nuclear missiles and verifiable powers of inspection.

We have been told today that there are about 27,000 —or perhaps more—nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union. They are in danger of being sold to other third world countries, so co-operation is absolutely vital. The building up of unnecessary arsenals by half the world should no longer be a part of international strategy.

This country has enormous good will towards other countries. We may disagree with their leaders, but there is hardly one country that we do not wish well. The problem is that many of those countries do not believe that we have that good will, and consequently, it is vital that we sit around the conference table and convince one another of our good will and of our peaceful intentions.

Since the breakdown of the east-west confrontation, there is an opportunity for a new reality among nations. In the meantime, our nuclear programme must continue, with, I believe, our first Trident to be launched later this year and a fourth boat available in the late 1990s. Trident must always be available and on patrol. An aggressor must know that a nuclear attack would produce unacceptable retaliation. Polaris has kept the peace for us for 30 years and Trident will do so for the next 30 years. We have never used nuclear weapons in those 30 years.

Terrible conflicts have taken place in the Falklands, in Iraq and elsewhere, but we have never threatened to use nuclear weapons, although some Opposition Members thought at the time that there was a danger that we might use them. The weapons have been there in reserve, and that is the whole point. An aggressor has always known that even a limited attack would be met by unacceptable retaliation.

It has been nail-biting stuff over the years. I sat through the debates in the House on the Falklands, and we all sat throught the debates on the Gulf. We have lived through difficult times, yet we never had to use the weapons that we possess. Nuclear weapons have kept world peace, apart from conflagrations such as those I have mentioned, over almost the past 50 years. In turn, we must now reduce our nuclear weapons, and other countries must reduce theirs. It is right to propose that half the present arsenal will go in the next 10 years, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned. It is right that all sub-strategic nuclear weapons should soon be reduced to one tenth of what they are now.

Our policies are clear. We believe that we should reduce the number of warheads, and press for greater and more effective non-proliferation agreements, with verification. Above all, we should keep up our guard at a time of great and worrying uncertainty, because the future of our country depends on it.

8.21 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): This has been an interesting debate, because we have heard speeches from Conservative Members and especially from Labour Members which have illustrated the fact that parts of the Labour party which were threatened with extinction still exist. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made an interesting speech and the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who is a member of the same party, made a speech that was diametrically opposed to it. There is no harm in that, especially if hon. Members accept what the right hon. Member for Chesterfield said—that he would make it clear to his electorate where he stood on the issue. That is an honourable position.

I am concerned about the falsity of the debate. The real situation in the disintegrating Soviet Union has not been addressed. What was in place in the Soviet Union for 40 years? There was no threat then of a disintegrating command and control structure. There was clear subordination, by dictatorial means, to the political will of the communist party. As others have said, the army in the Soviet Union was loyal because the communist party permeated it. The army had to obey the political will. That system has suffered a severe shock and we are concerned about what is now in place.

Can the permissible action links be recreated? What are the controls over strategic nuclear weapons? More importantly, what are the controls over sub-strategic, especially battlefield, nuclear weapons? People who have studied the question know that, although there are permissible action links and coding, no sensible military command structure would allow the weaponry and the warheads, especially battlefield weapons, to be under

single control. There are extreme dangers in relation to strategic weapons, but time does not permit a discussion about that.

Surely no one suggests that, to make us feel safe in the west, we should go back to a recreation of the monolithic hegemony of the Soviet Union. We must deal with the situation that exists. What is the position on our own strategic deterrent? There has been little mention of the so-called "four-boat" Polaris submarine fleet. It is claimed that we need four boats, although there is some doubt about whether the Labour party means three or four. The current position of both the Tory party and the Labour party on the possession of a strategic deterrent is meaningless in relation to the real issues of defence.

All intelligent observers admit that the United Kingdom does not have a viable four-boat Polaris fleet. The expectation is that, later this year, SSBN Revenge will go into Rosyth—the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement may contradict me if he wishes—to be paid off and decommissioned. Everyone in Dunfermline says that that is the expectation. The other known fact is that SSBN Renown is in Rosyth at present and its refit cycle has been delayed. By the end of the year, there will be two boats out of the possible four-boat Polaris fleet. We all know that all four boats have severe problems with reactors. Whom are the Government kidding and whom are the Opposition kidding about the possession of a viable deterrent?

An incoming Labour Government could not put the Trident fleet into the bargaining because it does not exist, with either three or four boats. We are waiting for the launch of the first Vanguard class boat. A Labour Government would be able to put in only an obsolescent, if not obsolete, Polaris fleet. That may have some persuasive force in relation to Russia, the Ukraine or whoever is in possession of strategic weapons in the new Soviet system, but we cannot kid the people that there is a viable four-boat fleet.

On what are we embarking by continuing to give the impression that possession of nuclear weapons is a cheap military virility symbol? The United Kingdom invites copycat reactions from other states which will strive to become nuclear powers. The best example that the United Kingdom can give the world is to cancel the Trident programme and to devote the resources so saved to far more useful purposes. That is the policy of the Scottish National party which we will put forward in the coming general election campaign, when it will command the support of the people of Scotland. That policy has commanded the support not only of Scottish National party conferences but of repeated conferences of the Labour party in Scotland.

I have mentioned the command and control position that existed in the Soviet Union, although I have not described it in detail. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield mentioned the secrecy involved in nuclear weapons. We are concerned about the command and control structure that was in place in the Soviet Union. What is our own command and control structure? What is that of the United States? Do we have any real information about that? If we ask questions about what is happening to the Drell committee report, and about the investigations into the safety of nuclear weapons and nuclear materials in the United Kingdom, a great wall of secrecy engulfs us. If we ask questions about the composition of certain committees and about the terms of reference, a great wall of secrecy comes up.

Would anyone try to kid us that in the United States, for example, President Bush, carrying his little box, is the sole repository of the power to release the United States strategic deterrent? Of course there are variations in the command and control structure.

Let us consider the "aid" that we are offering the Soviet Union. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, said that $400 million of aid was being offered by the United States Senate to the Soviet Union. And to do what? To go to the emerging republics and say, "We will assist you in dismantling your nuclear weapons as you do not know how to do it. Remove all your secrecy and we will come in and help you." That concept is to be put before NATO and the United Nations. The British are in effect saying to the republics, "You must dismantle your nuclear weapons while we modernise ours. Not only do we want a four-boat Trident fleet; we want a tactical air-to-surface missile as well." If the emerging republics in the disintegrating Soviet Union buy that, they are very naive, but I do not expect that they will.

I recognise that these serious matters must be dealt with in a serious way, and it is a serious proposition that we are putting forward. The best suggestion, in the interests of the United Kingdom, and of Scotland, in particular, is to renounce the deterrent now, and now is a good time to do it because Polaris is obsolescent—indeed, obsolete.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) is a very fair man. Last Friday, he and I attended a meeting in Edinburgh—I do not think that I am transgressing any rule of secrecy—at which Sir Robert Easton explained the parlous position in which Yarrow would be if it did not immediately get an order. Earlier, we were given a guarantee, as I interpreted it, by a Labour Front-Bench spokesman that Labour would secure employment at Barrow. May we have a similar guarantee that the Labour party, if elected, will secure employment at Yarrow by placing orders for type 23s or their equivalent there?

8.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker, albeit, as is often my habit, towards the tail end of the debate.

I begin by saying that I have a natural antipathy to the amount of expenditure that is necessary to maintain our independent nuclear deterrent. The reason for that is that I feel very strongly that Governments should never spend money on something that is not used—let alone something that is designed never to be used.

The prospect of spending 2 per cent., and perhaps 3 per cent., of our entire defence budget on a system that we all hope and pray will never be used sticks in my gullet. In other circumstances, the money could and should be spent on equipment and manpower that have a more serviceable purpose. Unfortunately, however, the circumstances in which that might be possible are not at hand.

Many hon. Members have referred to the dangers posed to this country and others by the break-up of the old world order with its monolithic bloc system, and particularly by the break-up of the Soviet Union. The danger of there being scientists and weapons for sale

[Mr. Andrew Hargreaves]

makes Britain's possession of an independent nuclear deterrent more essential than ever. I regret that, because, as I said, I regret the element of expenditure that is necessary. I believe that these uncertain times dictate that we must continue to have an effective independent deterrent, and it has to be effective.

In one respect, that is more necessary now than ever before. In the past, in our adversary, the Soviet Union, we had an opponent who, as many of us were well aware, respected our ability to respond to nuclear attack. I believe that there is a possibility, in the not too distant future, of our facing potential opponents—tyrants, despots, fundamentalists perhaps—who are quite happy with the idea of using weapons of mass destruction in a way with which even the Soviet Union command structure would not have been happy.

Such Governments may have already used weapons of mass destruction on their own people. I refer, for example, to the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. Those hon. Members who saw Sunday night's BBC "Everyman" programme will realise just how horrific that regime has been in the past three years. We may have to respond to nuclear blackmail from a state which has no compunction about using a weapon of mass destruction and which has used it on its own people.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy) made a very good point when he said that it was not simply a matter of there being one Islamic bomb: there might be several Islamic bombs, none of them in the hands of a particularly stable or peace-loving Government. I therefore agree with the comments made by my right hon. Friend in justifying the level of nuclear deterrence which the Government have defended and paid for and which is to continue.

Let me say something about the position held by the Liberal Democrats, as outlined by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who questioned the necessity for Britain to have an independently credible nuclear force. I believe strongly that Britain needs to be part of an alternative centre of decision taking on nuclear matters. I can readily foresee a situation in which America withdraws sufficiently from Europe—or has other preoccupations—and no longer feels that it has to provide an intimate nuclear umbrella for Europe.

I should not be happy explaining to my constituents that we were prepared to leave that responsibility in the hands of the French, because I do not believe that their position outside NATO gives them that integration of command structure and that joint responsibilty that we have had in this country within the NATO structure. That argument alone puts to bed the comments made by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East about the need for independence.

The Labour party's equivocation on the matter is transparent. It is not enough for Labour Front-Bench spokesmen simply to say that they differ on the number of boats or that they would never use the weapons but think we ought to have them if other people have them. My hon. Friends and I find it extremely worrying that, in times such as these, with such danger and division all over the world, the leader and deputy leader of the Labour party in their recent keynote policy speeches made not a single mention either of Britain's defence and nuclear defence or of the larger threat posed by nuclear proliferation in the middle east and as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union.

I hope that the Labour party's spokesman will reassure Conservative Members who feel that the two parties have common ground that this is an Opposition priority and not a political matter for point scoring. We should like to hear that, in spite of its omission from keynote speeches, this is very much a Labour party priority. Nobody doubts the Opposition's patriotism or its commitment; it is a question of priorities, and priorities have financial implications. In the past, there has been uncertainty about the Labour party's commitment to nuclear defence, so it is reasonable for us, in the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, to expect reassurance on this matter.

I support the Government motion, and I urge my colleagues to do so.

8.40 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The problem about the speech of the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves), like the speeches of many of his colleagues, is that it was made in the wrong decade. There has been reference to Sunday's programme about the dreadful massacre of the Kurds. At that time, the British Government had a presence in Baghdad, in the shape of the present Secretary of State for Social Security. His purpose in going there was to sell arms to Saddam Hussein, and he was very successful. As has been said, we have now discovered that Saddam Hussein had a nuclear weapons programme. One Conservative Member said that we had stopped Saddam Hussein in his tracks. We did not stop him in his tracks; we stopped him in our tracks. The tank tracks that he was using were British, and he had a full range of other equipment.

There has been a move among Conservative Members to have the IAEA safeguards strengthened. Conservatives are slow learners. In April 1990, a question relating to precisely that matter was placed on the Order Paper. The reason for the desire to strengthen nuclear safeguards was that Iraq had a nuclear weapons programme. What was the Government's response to that suggestion from the Opposition? They said that they would not seek to have the IAEA safeguards strengthened, and they asked the Opposition whether they were aware that Iraq was a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty and, as such, had undertaken not to develop nuclear weapons. The Government said that they expected Iraq to abide by its international obligations. A few months later the Iraqis took part in the invasion.

When the Kurds were massacred, hon. Members were denied the chance to table questions about Saddam Hussein's programme, in exactly the same way as, in 1939, Members of Parliament were prevented from criticising Adolf Hitler because he was the head of a friendly state. A great many lessons emerged from the Gulf war, but many of them have not been learnt. One of them is that conventional arms, as used in the Gulf war, are as destructive as weapons of mass destruction.

On 30 January, there were 28 B52s over Iraq and Kuwait, and they dropped enough cluster bombs—small, three-pound bombs—to destroy an area one fifth the size of Wales. The main lesson of the Gulf war is that there has been an escalation in conventional weaponry. I refer, for

example, to cluster bombs and to multiple-launch rocket systems, where the escalation has given rise to as much danger as arises from weapons of mass destruction.

There is a link missing from the logic of the Government's case. They say that we must keep nuclear weapons, but they do not relate that assertion in any way to the present crisis. The most compelling metaphor about politics is that we live in a saucer-shaped world. We are obsessed by our own affairs. The rim of the saucer, over which no one can see, is the date of the next general election. This is all about general elections. But those who look over the rim of the saucer see a nuclear abyss more threatening than any we have ever known.

In the early 1980s, there was a strong case for British unilateral disarmament. At that time there were two men with their fingers on the nuclear button. One of them—Andropov—was on a life-support machine; the other was Ronald Reagan. One of them was dead from the neck down; the other was dead from the neck up. That was a great peril to the world.

We now have a worse threat. There are several problems that have not been addressed. No Conservative Member has attempted to put forward any practical ideas. None has mentioned the reasons for the likely escalation. Let me list the countries that possess ballistic missiles: Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Germany, Hungary, Italy, India, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, Libya, the Netherlands, North Korea, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Syria and Yemen. How many of those countries, knowing that Britain is having three or four votes on this matter, will be thinking tonight that they ought to make sure that they have nuclear weapons to go with their ballistic weapons?

The Government's case is irrelevant. Because of nationalism and fear, the countries which I just mentioned want nuclear weapons. If one starts at the Pacific coast and draws a line through Pakistan, North Korea, South Korea, the Gulf, Israel and north Africa, one goes through a number of countries, every one of which is frightened of its neighbours. Many of them, indeed, are frightened of all their neighbours.

In respect of disarmament one interesting thing has happened in the past few months. I refer to the attitude of the United States to the great threat of the emergence of North Korea as a new nuclear power. Next on the list is Algeria, and after that Iran. What did the United States do to discourage North Korea—a frightened country feeling threatened after the loss of all its friends in the communist bloc—from going full scale for nuclear weapons? It unilaterally disarmed South Korea.

The Government's argument has no logic, no meaning. Conservative Members are simply trying to score political points, as they attempted last week, futilely, to scare people about taxes. Next week they will probably use the racial card, and the week after that the trade union bogey. Among Government Members there is culpable ignorance of what is happening in the world. They have failed to provide answers to questions about the very serious threat of proliferation.

There are terrible problems in the old Soviet Union. That is a real issue that has broken through in the debate. What the Government are putting forward is false. Nuclear technology is now half a century old. There is no secret about the technology itself. It has been denied to many nations, but in that regard there has been only partial success. We know that it is available. In the end, the only answer is political persuasion. In the long run, that will form the basis of international non-proliferation policy. We see on the Government side a group of confused, old cold war warriors without a clue about how to deal with the present situation, and no idea how to deal with the new threat. They are raking coals that are long dead.

8.49 pm

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): These issues are certainly the most important that I have witnessed since I came to the House more than 30 years ago. They represent an unforeseen danger far greater than that of the Falklands or the Gulf war. I strongly support the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I regard four Tridents as essential in the new circumstances in which we find ourselves. I support my right hon. Friend's policy for two reasons—the first is history and the second is the present situation. After all, for 40 years peace in Europe has been kept because of the possession of Polaris by the allies. An enormous stockpile of nuclear weapons has been possessed by the Soviet Union. I fear that if those weapons were loosed, the whole world would be destroyed. That is the lesson that we must learn. Moreover, the Soviet Union was controlled by one man rather than 20 people as is the case now.

There was rightly jubilation when Mr. Gorbachev overthrew a regime which was thoroughly repugnant to us all, but he himself was overthrown by Yeltsin. How long will Yeltsin last? Already, the army is getting restless. As my right hon. Friend said, the Soviet army is in disarray, with a multitude of nations and with dissatisfaction at being disarmed, indeed demobilised, and discipline is undermined. There is an undisciplined force under Yeltsin. How can he control what happens not only in his own country but in the parts of the Soviet Union that have been split? The Soviet Union has broken up into component parts, all of which have atomic weapons. Those areas are also impoverished. Is it likely that those weapons will be used against or sold to other countries for grain and other food? We are up against a serious situation. There are bankrupt states, and they like to flog some of their atomic secrets to other countries.

There is a danger of the union of Muslim states in the former Soviet Union combining with states such as Libya, Algeria, and so on, as the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) said, and forming a fundamentalist group or, alternatively, fighting among themselves and using atomic weapons. We are in a very dangerous position. If Muslim countries such as Iran and Iraq and Soviet Muslim countries formed a super-Muslim federation, rather than a commonwealth of independent states, we would again be in great difficulty. Who could possibly control such forces? Nuclear weapons are extremely dangerous. There is also the matter of countries such as Israel, which also have nuclear weapons. The present uncertainties demand that we have a strong and united front.

It is a great sadness to me—I shall be leaving the House at the end of this Session—that, on this matter, we cannot have a bipartisan policy such as we had in the war. The dangers are so awful that they could affect our children. I am terrified that everything will go up in smoke.

We must remain a strong country. We must remain powerful and be able to resist any aggression. To do that,

[Sir Alan Glyn]

we must do the things that were suggested by my right hon. Friend. But that is not enough. To protect ourselves, we must have force to resist. We must look further ahead. We owe an obligation not only to ourselves but to the rest of the world. We must be able to lead in the control and detection of missiles. How we do that I do not know, but do it we must. If we do not, at some time or other somebody will loose a nuclear weapon. Those are the real dangers that face this country.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to chair the forthcoming Security Council meeting. I do not know how far he will get. I do not know to what extent we can control other countries. Even the detection of missiles could be difficult. If they are deeply hidden, modern technology may not detect them. Those are the ghastly problems that we face. If the Security Council itself cannot do that, we have to use every method and organisation that we can to persuade the rest of the world that it is no use having atomic weapons, because they will destroy either themselves or the world. But it will be extremely difficult to persuade them.

It is most important to locate weapons and to have a system of international inspection and, eventually, international demobilisation. We cannot live in a world in which missiles are under no control. I do not believe that even Russia will be able to control enormous stocks of weapons. I was alarmed by the figures relating to the quantity of weapons floating about in the world. That is why I said that this is one of the most dangerous situations that I have seen for more than 30 years.

We have always known of the Russian danger. Thanks to American technology, we know roughly how many weapons Russia has. At least we knew that we had someone with whom we could negotiate, but now there is nobody. With perhaps 50 or 60 countries holding such weapons, we must find some way of making sure that those weapons are not loosed off by irresponsible people. I do not know how we can do that. The Security Council will try, but we must go further to ensure the security not only of this country, but of the world. It is a frightening situation.

Our primary duty is to be effective and to ensure that we are adequately defended. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State carefully outlined two issues. The first related to the dangers of proliferation and of the results of the break-up of the Soviet Union. He also laid down a firm defence policy, which included four Trident submarines. If that policy is followed, I am sure that we shall be able to defend ourselves. However, it is not enough simply to defend ourselves—we must defend the rest of the world, because if the rest of the world attacks us or if various countries attack one another, the effect would be——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to call the hon. Gentleman to order, but he has had the 10 minutes that he is allowed under the Standing Order.

8.59 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am grateful to be called, Madam Deputy Speaker, even so late in the debate. I understand that, by agreement, the two Front-Bench spokesmen intend to start their replies at 9.10 pm. I deeply regret that, because I should have thought that they could have allowed sufficient time to enable my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and myself to speak for 10 minutes each. I shall have to shorten my speech to enable my hon. Friend to speak. Having been present throughout the debate and tabled an amendment to the motion, which my hon. Friend has supported, I believe that we should at least have an opportunity to put our point of view to the House.

I am the author of an amendment to the Government's motion. I tabled my amendment because I believe that the Government's attitude to nuclear weapons is, frankly, barking mad. When the Secretary of State made it clear earlier that he was refusing either to confirm or to deny that he is prepared to use nuclear weapons, I thought, "What sort of world does he live in? Has he visited Hiroshima to see the actual effects of using nuclear weapons?" The right hon. Gentleman should understand that, once a nuclear weapon is fired, it murders, kills, maims and destroys those on whom it is targeted, those under its flight path, and those who fired it. People are dying of cancers across northern Europe because of what was, in effect, a minor explosion at Chernobyl. That is an example of what happens when a nuclear explosion takes place. The idea that in 1992 we should be seriously contemplating the use of nuclear weapons is abhorrent.

Many people across the world have sought to oppose the use of nuclear weapons. Many brave people, including scientists, who developed nuclear weapons and nuclear-powered systems in the past now recognise their dangers. Just before Christmas, I took part in a demonstration in Kensington High street, opposite the Israeli embassy. We were there to protest about the continued imprisonment of Mordecai Vannunu, a man whom I believe to be very brave. He spoke out about the development of nuclear weapons in Israel. For his pains, he has been given a prison sentence of 18 years, of which he has served at least two years in solitary confinement with a bright light on in his cell all the time. That is a mind-bending experience, as it was intended to be. When our Government's observers attend the middle east peace talks, I hope that they will raise the question of Mordecai Vannunu, his bravery and the need for his release.

At the start of the new year, we have seen the new world order revealed for exactly what it is. The 5,000 nuclear warheads of the United States that used to be targeted on Moscow, Berlin, Belgrade and many other eastern European capitals have been swivelled round and are now targeted on unspecified cities and military installations in the third world. The new world order appears to be one in which the northern industrial nations are getting together to ensure that the world's economic inequalities continue.

We have come to the end of the cold war period, during which the Soviet Union and the United States were engaged in an arms race which wrecked the economy of the Soviet Union and brought it to its knees. It also impoverished the rest of the world, with the United States becoming the world's biggest debtor as it paid for its own arms race. Yet, since 1945, about 20 million people have died in wars around the world, so where is the deterrent in that?

The brutality of those wars is that they have been wars by proxy and about injustice. What was the Vietnam war about other than the Vietnamese people waging a war of national liberation? What was the war in central America about other than being against the oligarchies in El

Salvador and the Contra guerrillas seeking to overthrow the Government of Nicaragua? What are the other wars in the world about, other than instability and inequality?

Tomorrow we shall "celebrate"—if that is the right word—the start of the Gulf war. It ill becomes Conservative Members to talk about the brutality of Saddam Hussein and of the Baathist regime in Iraq when the Government have refused to reveal how much of the billions of pounds' worth of export credit guarantees given to Saddam Hussein and his regime have been lost to the British taxpayer. The Conservative Government armed Saddam Hussein to the teeth. I went to Iraq this August and I saw the destruction in Kurdistan. It did not all happen during the uprising or during the Gulf war. It happened when our Government were buddy-buddy with Saddam Hussein and the Secretary of State was there selling information and materials to him.

In this world, brutally divided between north and south and between rich and poor, in which a billion people are on the point of starvation and serious poverty, the British Government's solution is to spend £23 billion on the Trident missile system, which breaks the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and to continue an annual defence expenditure of about £24 billion. And what is NATO's solution? Instead of winding itself up, as it should, it turns itself into the political police force of the rest of the world—and the European Community seems to me to be trying to follow in the same direction.

Nuclear weapons are not a deterrent. They are inherently dangerous and unstable. We should say honestly that now is the time to get rid of all nuclear weapons and nuclear bases. Now is the time for massive nuclear disarmament. Now is the time to take stock of the situation in which the world finds itself. That situation is not a pretty sight. It is time for us to do something to redress the imbalance in the world. The imbalance between north and south, the plight of starving children in Africa and India, and the debt crisis that ravages Latin America cannot be solved so long as the west maintains its massive expenditure on arms and supports economic inequality in the world.

I hope that the issues that we have discussed today will feature in the general election campaign. I have been a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament since I was 15 and I intend to continue being a member. I have never supported nuclear weapons, and I never will. I ask any of my hon. Friends who believe that there are electoral benefits in supporting the principle of maintaining nuclear weapons to look at the dole queues in Britain, the crumbling schools and hospitals and the inequalities in the world, and to see that there is a solution which involves arms conversion, turning swords into ploughshares and turning away from nuclear madness towards a saner, freer and more democratic world. That is impossible if we maintain nuclear weapons.

9.6 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), for giving me four minutes—now three minutes—to solve the problems of the world. I am sure that I can do a better job in three minutes than the Government have done in 12 years.

When Conservative Members describe weapons of death and destruction, they become positively orgasmic. Looking at them, those are probably the only orgasms that they are ever likely to have. The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) used to tremble with excitement at the thought of being able to press the nuclear button. That frightened me, and it should have frightened every other sane person in the world. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made it clear earlier that he was not prepared to press the nuclear button.

Conservative Members have made great play of the differences of opinion within the Labour party. I, too, am a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. I have been a member since the late 1960s, and I remain so to this day. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I shall make that clear in my election manifesto in Newham, North-West. I do not expect any difficulties when it comes to that election. I shall lay my cards honestly and openly before the electorate, and I shall make arguments in my election campaign that will convince people that my stance is worthy and worth voting for.

I listened to the Secretary of State for Defence, who never fails to fail to rise to the occasion. He had an opportunity to talk about the momentous events in the world and about how Britain could perhaps take a lead. After a few references to that, he reduced his arguments to petty party political mud slinging. The Conservative party knows that it is on a losing streak. It knows that it is done for, come the general election. So, of course, all the smears come out, supported by the fascist loonies on the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Sun*. They will smear the Labour party, but I do not think that the people of this country will be deceived. They can see through the bankrupt arguments of a bankrupt Government.

If the Secretary of State really wanted to do something about the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the crumbling eastern empire—and the real possibility, I accept that, of those leaking out and going to countries which are prepared to buy the hardware and the technology—instead of saying that we would give them advice on what to do, he should have said that we would help them by giving them hard currency in exchange for dismantling those nuclear weapons.

The Government should tell the 100,000 or so nuclear scientists in the former Soviet Union that we will give them jobs. Of course, we have to give jobs to a lot of ordinary people over here, but we could say that in Europe we will give them jobs; we will give them jobs in their own country by helping them to use their great skills in civilian production, so that the people of the east can get the advantages that they now want from democracy. Those are the arguments that the Secretary of State should have put before us, not the petty party squabbling that he has thrown at us in a squalid attempt to win a few votes.

The best defended country is a country which unites its people, a country which can deal with problems of unemployment and homelessness and poverty. A country which can deal with those things is a country well defended. This country, under the present Government, is not defended at all.

9.11 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): This is the fourth opportunity that we have had to discuss these matters since October. We had the defence estimates debate when

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

the House resumed, we had the Loyal Address, we had the nuclear defence debate on 22 November, and now we have today's debate.

The only justification for tonight's debate is the reality of the collapse of the USSR, although I suppose that another would be an attempt by the Government Whips Office to get a few more Conservative Members to stand up and defend the Government's nuclear policy. On 22 November, as I recall, only three Back Benchers were dragged into the Chamber to sit alongside the Secretary of State and his colleague. Certainly, the Secretary of State's remarks today are the same stale mixture of bluster and abuse that we have come to know as a substitute for any Government defence policy.

Today we have had the opportunity to reassess the significance of events since the House rose. We can see the emergence today of four independent states on the territory of the former Soviet Union—independent states with substantial strategic nuclear systems in their territories, as well as an unknown number of states with tactical nuclear weapons and chemical weapons on their soil. Each one of those states is different in its nuclear capability and in the political, social, cultural and geographical factors that might influence its intentions.

This is the argument and the rationale for recognition of the need for a diplomatic as well as a military response to this complex set of security problems. Just as the definition of threat implies not only the capability but the intent, so deterrence demands not only the ability to respond but the willingness to seek non-military solutions to apparently intractable security problems. Following the famous Hoftihouse meeting in Reykjavik in 1986, the United States and the then Soviet Union established that it was possible to construct an arms control and disarmament regime which could reduce and in some instances eliminate elements of the world's nuclear arsenal.

The debate so far over the break-up of the Soviet Union has tended to ignore the tactical nuclear and chemical weapons that were deployed widely throughout Soviet territory. The existence of those weapons, the uncertainty about their command and control system, the confusion over the political institutions and the authorities responsible for them, the attraction of selling off even small amounts of those nuclear and chemical arsenals, and the dangers of the brain drain of the technologists are all present today.

Those are some of the new risks which confront not only Britain and NATO but all states. Concerns about proliferation have been expressed by Members of all parties today. Proliferation is no longer the old problem of new weapons falling into the hands of old-established states with old-established problems and disputes. The reverse is now true. Old weapons are falling into the hands of newly established states with new and little-known problems and disputes.

In the face of all this, it is not enough for the Prime Minister to claim credit for inviting President Yeltsin for a comfort stop on his way to New York. There has to be a framework to incorporate all the CIS states which will permit the implementation of the conventional forces in Europe treaty and enable that treaty to be readjusted to take account of the new military districts which will have been created as a consequence of the military organisation within the former Soviet Union. Rapid steps must also be taken to ensure that the START reductions can be carried out.

The reduction in the nuclear arsenal could be carried out either by a suitably monitored central authority, probably Russia, or through the provision of facilities to the other states, such as the Ukraine, first to disable and then to dispose of unwanted weapons. There is a debate about whether the nuclear weapons in the Commonwealth of Independent States should be disabled immediately and then disposed of at a later date, or whether they should be disposed of without first disabling them. In that process we could make use of the skills of Ukrainian, Russian and other scientists.

In November last year we raised this question and put it on the agenda. So far, it has met with studied indifference on the part of the Government. Two months have passed. Anyone with any sense of history or of what was taking place in the former Soviet Union would have known and anticipated what the probabilities were—that the union would break up, that Pandora's box would be opened, and that myriad problems would emerge. The Government should have known that the countries with expertise, with the diplomatic, technical and political skills which because of its totalitarian character the Soviet Union suppressed for generations, would have to deal with the problem.

This is the complaint that we make about the Government: they come to the problem purely and simply in the interests of a general election, to try to divert attention from the horrendous economic and social problems that twelve and a half years of Thatcherism and Majorism have created in this country. They are more interested in trying to foment an artificial debate in the House about security matters than in dealing with the real problems of the economy and of the social fabric of this country.

The debate is artificial because speeches by hon. Members on both sides of the House have reflected very similar concern about the problems. There has been little difference in the prescriptions for how to deal with the problem of proliferation, the uncertainties of nuclear control and our difficulties as a nuclear power in responding to those challenges.

We are not talking only about a massive strategic arsenal. In some respects, that is the easiest problem. That arsenal is well documented and reported. It has been discussed for a number of years, through the long days of the START process and before. We know the size of the arsenal, and we know roughly where the weapons are. What we are not sure about is the size and composition of the massive inventory of tactical nuclear weapons and warheads. Various estimates have been made today, and 16,000 is probably the agreed figure. We are concerned about the uncertainty on the size, the content and the location of the arsenals. Reciprocal agreements were made between the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce the arsenals. When they were announced at the end of September, it was explicit that there were to be no verification procedures because no one knew where all the weapons were or was confident that their removal and disposal could be adequately inspected and verified.

It was significant that the agreement was a product of the new trust which had grown up between the Soviet Union and the United States. It was an expression of that trust that they could take each other's word that they

would use their best endeavours to get rid of the tactical nuclear weapons as quickly as possible. The problem has been blown back on us because trust no longer exists, and we do not know where the weapons are, who is responsible for them and who eventually is capable of dismantling them.

We require an agreement of the Commonwealth of Independent States for the collection and disposal of the weapons. It is well known that, as yet, there are insufficient facilities for the storage in Russia prior to disposal. It is not too much to ask that the highest priority is given to the matter. If necessary, we could surely provide the means whereby the weapons could be stored, and enter into agreements to ensure that they would be protected. The military required to do that should be paid, with payment based on international agreement between the G7 states, the members of NATO and the members of the European Community. Those countries could afford to assist, and it is as much in their interest as in the interests of the people of the Commonwealth of Independent States that the weapons are taken care of properly.

The ability to deal with those weapons of mass destruction is completely unaffected by the existence or otherwise of British nuclear weapons. The self-satisfied breast beating of Tory Ministers is a matter of total indifference to those members of the Russian military and to the former Soviet scientists who now have nothing to sell but their nuclear materials and expertise, since their labour is no longer a marketable skill in post-Communist society.

Those are the problems which confront us. It is incumbent upon the remaining four original, permanent members of the Security Council—the United States, China, France and Britain—to assert the authority of the Security Council and the United Nations. That is where we can put items on the agenda soon. Because of the British chairmanship of the Security Council, and the leadership role which that affords us in the short term, we can ensure the support of countries which hitherto have not paid their dues to the United Nations and which have not supported institutions such as the International Atomic Energy Agency. We can ensure that such institutions get the financial support and political backing which will not only enable them to carry out their monitoring work and expand their activities but will provide staff to address the problems which lie at the heart of the new peace process.

If we have to work on the process of non-proliferation and also ensure that the sources of dispute between potential proliferators are diminished, we can do so only with a UN secretariat which is capable of handling the problems. If we want to give support to the new Secretary General of the United Nations, the first thing that we must do is to make sure that the organisation that he is inheriting has the appropriate funds and financial support to address the tasks of greatest importance.

We must set in place quickly a framework to stop the leakage of nuclear skills and equipment to the neo-nuclear powers. It is a far higher priority to prevent them from obtaining the means to blackmail us than to spend vast sums of money on as yet untried weaponry which might or might not deter a pre-emptive strike. Once agreement is reached on the implementation of the START treaty, the United States and Russia should be encouraged to go even further. People such as former Defence Secretary Robert McNamara said that it would be possible to reduce levels to as low as 1,000 warheads in the United States and probably in Russia.

Those figures have not been plucked out of the air, but are within the capability of negotiators and the disposal process if we are prepared to give it the support and backing that it deserves. People of the distinction of Robert McNamara have stated time and again that we should seek the peaceful route towards a better world rather than continuing with needless and unnecessary stockpiling of nuclear weapons.

Much has been said today about the ability to deter mad dictators and fanatics. We must not forget that the war in the Gulf started almost 12 months ago. No one should be persuaded that the lethality and accuracy of conventional weapons will not be enough to deter conventional military action by third-world powers. The Government have first-hand evidence of the effectiveness of our troops and forces in the Gulf. We have seen the disastrous and dreadful consequences of conventional weapons. If anyone is in doubt about whether this or any other western country can be held to ransom by third world powers, he need only reflect on the war in the Gulf and the capability that we were able to bring to bear then.

Tonight I do not simply want to say that we should seek to reduce nuclear arsenals; we should also seek to bring about a comprehensive test ban agreement. There is no longer any need for full-scale nuclear testing. There is plenty of scientific evidence to show that non-nuclear tests —computer simulations and other technical means—can provide adequate information on safety and reliability. It can be argued that the complexity and sophistication of many simulations are such that, if other countries seek to test nuclear weapons in the open air and cease to do so in non-laboratory conditions, they will quickly and easily be spotted and could quickly become the targets of sanctions and other such punishments. A comprehensive test ban treaty would quickly expose those countries which do not have the sophistication and capability to carry out such tests. That would enable us to deal with them far more quickly than we can with the ear stroking which currently passes for diplomacy.

If we were able to show our willingness to sign a comprehensive test ban treaty and could persuade the other three permanent members, plus Russia, to sign as well, we would give a clear signal to all potential proliferators that we were sincere in our intent to reduce the increase and spread of nuclear weapons.

The agenda that I have outlined tonight could have been introduced by the Government and have enjoyed the unanimous support of all hon. Members. It could have provided the Prime Minister with the authority that he needs to assume the chair of the Security Council. Tonight the Government have thrown away that opportunity and betrayed the trust that the international community could have given this country, based on its position as a nuclear power which is not only a member of the permanent five, NATO and the EC, but has a unique link with the third world through its membership of the British Commonwealth.

Instead, we have been presented with a narrow, meaningless, and partisan Government motion. I urge all my right hon. and hon. Friends to join us in the Lobby in support of the official Opposition amendment to the Government motion, which shows the route that a Labour

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

Government will take after the general election in addressing the problems of the international situation and the realities of nuclear defence in the new world ahead.

9.29 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Defence policy is always about national security. Sometimes, it is about national survival. Its objectives must always include the deterrence of one's potential enemies and the reassurance of one's friends.

A Government defence policy thus defined will fail, be of no effect, and neither deter nor reassure unless the policies themselves carry public conviction and the politicians who articulate those policies command respect.

There can be neither conviction nor respect unless those who conduct an express defence policy are believed to mean what they say, and to be ready to do that which they say they will do. A defence policy must be founded on a solid basis of conviction. It must be the settled expression of belief. It must clearly reflect a unity of purpose around which a party will rally.

Defence policies that are but expressions of a draftsman's pen, employed to save a political party's fortunes, are contemptible in themselves, discreditable in their purpose, and unavailing in their implementation. As today's debate has made plain, Labour party's defence policy is all of those.

Labour's policy was expressed—if that is not too gracious a word—by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the Obadiah Slope of the House of Commons. He made one of the most lacklustre and undistinguished speeches from Labour's Front Bench that I have heard these 12 years.

The right hon. Gentleman made three pledges, and only three. The first was an uncosted and previously undisclosed pledge to compensate the workers of Barrow against the loss of work caused by labour cuts. The right hon. Gentleman will be obliged to give a similar pledge to any other worker who may be affected by labour cuts. Indeed, he has already been asked to do so by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas). I will place a small bet that pledge was never cleared with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), and I do not believe it.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. and learned Gentleman shows his utter illiteracy by those stupid comments. Anyone who has studied Labour party policy documents—as Mr. Julian Lewis, who briefs members of the Government Front Bench on such matters, surely has—will know that we made that announcement on 9 May 1989, and that it has been well known ever since. Of course, it is part of the costings on which the ludicrous tax fiction drafted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who cannot get his own Government's costings right, is based.

Mr. Hogg: We see how concerned the right hon. Gentleman is when yet another undisclosed pledge is brought to the electorate's attention. No wonder the taxpayer would face a bill of about £39 billion.

The second commitment or pledge given by the right hon. Gentleman was to subscribe to a test ban treaty. That would make it less easy for the United Kingdom to retain a safe and effective nuclear weapon system, and to that extent it is wholly incompatible with the right hon. Gentleman's assertion that he wants a nuclear defence policy to operate. His third commitment was to embark on a course of further reductions in conventional armaments, which is clearly set out in the amendment to which he has attached his name and which, moreover, clearly represents the implementation of Labour's commitment to a reduction in conventional defence spending of £6 billion year on year.

What the right hon. Gentleman did not do was give any pledges about either Trident or, for that matter, our nuclear deterrent. Time and again, he was pressed to tell the House whether he proposed to order a fourth boat—if he was in a position to do so—or to cancel it if it had already been ordered. He declined to answer that question.

More extraordinary still, the right hon. Gentleman declined to say whether the Labour party intended to retain a nuclear weapon. I listened to his entire speech, and I know that he gave no assurances in that regard. If Labour believes in a defence policy based on nuclear weapons, Labour Members were very careful not to say so.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), who said that never had a convert shown so little fervour. It is worth noting that the Opposition amendment proposes to strike out all the commitments to nuclear defence policy contained in the motion. It wholly rejects nuclear deterrence, and Britain's possession of a nuclear weapon. It suggests other things, such as disarmament,but it says nothing about a nuclear weapon.

That is all that I can sensibly say about the right hon. Member for Gorton—no, no; I am being unfair. The right hon. Gentleman made one sensible point, about proliferation. He was supported by his hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy)—who knows a great deal more about the subject than he does —and, indeed, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell).

The question of proliferation in eastern Europe is certainly a serious issue. So far, some encouraging steps have been taken. First, the republics have committed themselves to a single control of nuclear weapons. Secondly, they support the concept of the ratification of START—the strategic arms reduction treaty. Thirdly, they accept that nuclear weapons should be removed from the republics outside Russia; and, fourthly, they accept —or, at least, Byelorussia and the Ukraine accept—that they should join the nuclear non-proliferation treaty organisation as non-nuclear states.

I entirely agree with the concern expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford about the status of Kazakhstan. He feared that the republics might be less willing, as time went on, to surrender nuclear weapons that they currently possessed. I also agree that NATO has a prominent role to play in assisting the process of dismantling the nuclear systems in eastern Europe. That point was urged strongly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford, and I agree with it.

That is partly what lies behind my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's decision to convene the Security Council at the end of January, and it is partly that which explains the invitation to President Yeltsin to visit London. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said, the United States has allocated $400 million to that matter, ande a in December last year NATO committed itself to helping in the dismantling process. That is highly desirable.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Attercliffe said about strengthening the IAEA. That point received support from his right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton. There is a powerful case for reinforcing its powers in terms of inspection and an obligation imposed upon suppliers to furnish more information than they do at present.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden spoke powerfully about the need for Britain to possess a nuclear weapon. He was right to stress, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) that, in eastern Europe and elsewhere, nuclear weapons may be possessed by national Governments who are enthused by nationalism, religious bigotry or just plain tyrants. However, I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden that the circumstances are more dangerous than they have been in the past. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), I believe that circumstances were more dangerous 10, 20 and 30 years ago.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden drew attention, rightly, to the dangers of chemical and biological warfare. He is correct to focus on the requirement for an effective verification regime. The absence of such a regime makes the prevention of the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons so difficult. We hope that, in the 1992 chemical warfare convention, there will be a much more effective verification procedure than we have previously contemplated. In April this year, experts will be further exploring how we could introduce an effective verification procedure for biological warfare.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) expressed the defence policy of the Liberal Democrats. He skilfully shrugged off the reminder of my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) that the leader of the Liberal Democrats has shared platforms with CND and has, in the past, committed himself to withdrawing cruise missiles and cancelling Trident.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East tried to reconcile his defence policy with what he described as his aspiration to reduce defence expenditure by 50 per cent. He cannot have it both ways. It is not achievable in any foreseeable defence position, and it is disingenuous of him to call for it. He said—I strongly agree—that it is wrong for anybody to define with exactitude the circumstances in which a nuclear weapon would be used. It is equally foolish for the Leader of the Opposition to say that he would never use a nuclear weapon. That destroys the principle of deterrence. The statement that he would never use such a weapon has never been withdrawn.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East also expressed his doubts about a sub-strategic weapon. There is a logical gap in his argument. He concedes—it is part of his policy—that Britain should have a nuclear deterrent. He must accept that there are certain circumstances in which the threat of the use of a strategic weapon would not be credible whereas the threat of the use of a sub-strategic weapon might be credible. If one did away with the latter, one would leave a gap in Britain's defence policy which I would regard as a very substantial one.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: I shall not give way. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will forgive me.

The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) made a point of considerable importance about the European dimension. It is a sensible point, and we entirely agree that we need to develop a European element in our defence arrangements. We foresee that role being adopted by the Western European Union. It is not a role which is subordinate to the Twelve—the hon. Gentleman was mistaken in that—but nor is it a function which will be prejudicial to NATO, which is at the core of our defence arrangements. However, it is certainly a role which will add to Europe's capacity in area and out of area.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made the type of speech that the House enjoys hearing. Indeed, it was a pleasure for us to hear him champion the cause of unilateralism. He said in terms that he did not think that the Soviets posed a threat to western Europe. I fancy that he would not have cared to make that argument in Budapest or in Prague, and I find it difficult to make a distinction between the two.

Moreover, the right hon. Gentleman said in terms that neither Iraq nor Argentina was in any way deterred from attacking British interests by reason of our possession of a nuclear weapon. That is not surprising, because it is inconceivable that we would have used a nuclear weapon in those circumstances, not least because of the negative security assurances which positively precluded their use in such circumstances.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): In what circumstances would we use them?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is asking a question which he knows will receive no answer, because the nature of a deterrent is that it remains uncertain—the nation that has it might be prepared to use it.

I return to the language of the motion.

Dr. Reid: As far as I can make out, the hon. and learned Gentleman has just created a precedent by telling the House that, in the two wars in which we have been involved, it was—to use his word—"inconceivable" that the Government would have used nuclear weapons. In what other circumstances would it be inconceivable for us to use nuclear weapons? Will he elaborate and tell us in what circumstances we would have used them?

Mr. Hogg: I am surprised to hear a defence spokesman ask that question, because he knows that the two cases to which I referred are covered by the negative security assurances which made the use of nuclear weapons in such circumstances inconceivable. If he did not know that, I do not mind him admitting it, but it is extraordinary ignorance on his part.

I deal now with the motion on which the House is shortly to vote. It endorses the long-standing commitment of the Conservative party to the concept of nuclear deterrence, to a nuclear-armed NATO, to Britain's own nuclear deterrent, to disarmament through negotiation on strength and to updating where necessary the weapon systems that the United Kingdom possesses.

All those commitments, which are broadly supported by the country, are expressly denied and excluded by the Labour party's amendment. In every one of those commitments, the Conservative party and Conservative Government have led and reflected public opinion and the

[Mr. Hogg]

national interest. The same cannot be said for the Labour party which fought the previous two elections on a programme that the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said was disastrous and should have been consigned to the rubbish heap.

I have already said that the success of a Government's defence policies depends on the conviction that those policies and their spokesmen carry in the eyes both of prospective opponents and of present friends. It is therefore right that, when analysing Labour's current declared policy, we should look well at what, until a few months ago, that declared policy manifestly was.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), when presenting Labour's nuclear policy in the House on 22 November, said:

"Throughout the 1980s the Labour party was committed to a defence policy which, with regard to nuclear weapons, required the Labour Government to renounce ownership of Polaris and to abandon the Trident programme."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 550.]

The hon. Gentleman was somewhat less than full in his description of Labour party policy. In addition to the unilateral measures which I have just described, the Labour party's 1983 manifesto called for the rejection of any fresh nuclear bases or weapons on British soil or in British waters, and the removal of all existing nuclear bases and weapons. The same manifesto committed a Labour Government to preventing the siting of cruise missiles in Britain and to the removal of any that were then in place. Broadly similar commitments were repeated in the 1987 manifesto.

Seldom has the passage of time so swiftly, effectively and comprehensively destroyed the intellectual foundations of the main plank of a party's defence policy. The truth is that, for the past 12 years, Labour has espoused a defence policy which never had intellectual validity and which, if implemented, would have exposed Britain to grave security risks.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not.

The House must now look with great caution at the policies that Labour now purports to espouse. They have been most recently espoused by the hon. Member for Clackmannan, who is not even a member of the shadow Cabinet. That caution is reinforced when one considers the close connection that exists between the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the cause of unilateralism, and the Labour party.

The constitution of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has one merit: it is clear. The policies are silly and dangerous, but at least they are clear. I quote from the declared aims and policies of CND:

"CND believes that British independent nuclear weapons and American nuclear bases and weapons in Britain do nothing to increase the security of Britain . . . and should be unilaterally and unconditionally rejected and removed."

The key elements of the Labour party manifestos of 1983 and of 1987 are to be found in the CND constitution.

It is not at all surprising that there should be a close identity of interest between the policy and constitution of CND and those of the Labour party, because many Labour Members have been or now are members of CND.

Let us begin with the Leader of the Opposition. He joined CND 31 years ago. For 30 years, he was a paid-up and apparently loyal supporter of its policies. Until very recently, his public statements were unreservedly unilateralist. In 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989—in seven of the past nine years—the right hon. Gentleman publicly and enthusiastically endorsed key demands and policies of CND. Unilateral disarmament for Britain was the policy of the right hon. Gentleman. The closure of nuclear bases, the decommissioning of Polaris and the cancellation of Trident were all his policies.

Then followed what was, for the right hon. Gentleman, a period of unaccustomed silence—until, in July last year, *The Guardian* reported that the right hon. Gentleman and Mrs. Kinnock had allowed their 30-year membership of CND to lapse. What a way to disclose a change of strategic policy. What had happened during the previous 30 months to cause the right hon. Gentleman to change his apparent convictions of 30 years? Was it that he suddenly realised that his convictions of the past 30 years were false, or did he simply realise that the electorate could not stomach them?

What about the right hon. Member for Gorton? Where did he stand in the past? We certainly do not know where he stands today. I can tell the House something about the right hon. Gentleman: he opposed the deployment of the cruise missile, and of Trident—something that he now says he supports. As recently as 1987, he sacked his adviser, Mr. Richard Heller, for writing an article that stated in precise terms the Labour party's policy of today. With what I can only describe as a cavalier disregard for the obligations of a good employer, the right hon. Gentleman issued a statement which said:

"Mr. Kaufman completely disagrees with the article"—

which, as I said, stated in every respect the Labour party's policy, in so far as it is comprehensible, as now stated.

What about the rest of the Labour Front Bench? There are 18 elected members of the shadow Cabinet, 14 of whom have been members of CND and a number of whom still are. One of them is a vice-president of CND. As late as 1989, three members of the shadow Cabinet signed *Tribune*'s appeal in support of British unilateral nuclear disarmament and the removal of the United States bases from Britain. According to Ms. Marjorie Thompson, the chairman of CND, there are now between 100 and 130 Labour Members who support CND and are its members.

There is nothing immoral about being a member of CND, but we must understand that the principles and policies of that organisation are wholly different from the principles and policies set out in the motion. They are completely incompatible with the defence policies of NATO, and cannot be reconciled with Labour's policy as currently declared. I therefore approach Labour's declared commitment to a nuclear-based defence policy with great scepticism. I do not believe that what we have heard today represents a settled statement of policy, or that it is founded upon solid conviction.

My scepticism is reinforced by a reading of the words of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who wound up the debate in November last year. Seeking to explain Labour's defence policies in the 1980s, he said:

"I make no apologies for supporting that policy six or seven years ago. It was a tactic, not a principle—and not an end in itself."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 597.]

I find that an extraordinary statement of policy, because I had always believed that, in so far as it had any justification at all, the Labour party's commitment to unilateralism, to the closure of bases, to the withdrawal from NATO, was based on a principle—on a deeply held conviction that those things were wrong.

That was, and appears still to be, the view of Labour Members; it is not the view, however, of those who shape policy on the Labour Front Bench. For them the commitments which, as they now admit, would have destroyed our security were never issues of principle but bargaining ploys, chips on the table, mere tactics.

That brings me to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. We shall remember words that he used in an interview with *The Independent:*

"If we have changed our mind to win we can change our mind when we have won. What is wrong with that?"

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 199, Noes 345.

Division No. 35] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*

Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 49.

Division No. 36] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Douglas, Dick
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Howells, Geraint
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mullin, Chris
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dafydd Wigley and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports unequivocally the concept of nuclear deterrence and the retention of a credible United Kingdom nuclear deterrent, while other countries have, or seek to acquire, nuclear weapons; notes the great dangers apparent in the increase in the number of countries gaining, or seeking to gain, access to nuclear weapons; understands that the country's nuclear deterrent remains essential for the defence of the United Kingdom and NATO; recognises the vital contribution to world peace which the United Kingdom's nuclear forces have made, and will continue to make, through deterrence; and supports NATO's policy of also maintaining an up-to-date, sub-strategic nuclear capability based in Europe.

Ports (Disposal of Land)

10.30 pm

The Minister for Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I beg to move,

That the draft Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land, etc.) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 5th December, be approved.

The draft order makes provisions under sections 17 and 18 of the Ports Act 1991. Its purpose is to enable a levy to be applied to gains arising from disposals of land or of an interest in land carried out by the new owners of trust ports privatised under the Act, in the years following privatisation.

It may assist hon. Members if I make clear the relationship between the order and the sale of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. In reply to a question in the House from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said on 18 December that he was minded to give his formal consent to the sale of the authority's undertaking to Teesside Holdings Ltd., but that this would be possible only after the scheme of transfer submitted by the authority under section 9(1) of the Ports Act and the order which we are debating this evening had come into effect.

The scheme of transfer came into effect on 30 December. The order relates to the whole of the ports privatisation programme, and no sales of trust ports can take place under the 1991 Act until the order is in place. Hon. Members will be aware that, since my right hon. and learned Friend made his statement on 18 December, representations have been put to him concerning the Tees and Hartlepool sale by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South and other hon. Members. My right hon. and learned Friend is looking into those representations carefully and he will not take a final decision on the sale until that process is complete. I do not believe that it would be right for me to add anything further on that subject during the debate in anticipation of the conclusion of the process which my right hon. and learned Friend has put in hand.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Does my hon. Friend agree that he is saying that the decision on Tees and Hartlepool cannot be taken until the order has been passed? Is not that a strong argument for those of us who are concerned about what has happened in Tees and Hartlepool not to allow the order to go through until such time as the matter has been re-examined?

Mr. McLoughlin: The order is general to the whole ports privatisation programme. It is not the case that the sale could not go ahead without the order. The sale could go ahead, but it would be without the clawback provisions which I think the whole House finds desirable. This is a short debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and many hon. Members wish to catch your eye. I think that it would be right for me to describe the outlines of the order and then try to catch your eye later to respond to questions which are put in the debate.

The Government take the view that the sale of ports under the Act should be carried out so as to ensure that the price that is paid for them is the best open market price, subject to whatever other objectives of sale a port agrees with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of

State. Nevertheless, it is still possible that land that some ports hold will turn out to have a significantly higher value than was expected at the time of sale——

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I shall not be able to respond to all the criticisms as the amount of time for this debate will have been reduced.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for showing his characteristic courtesy.

Does the hon. Gentleman's assessment of the sale of the English port authority hold for the privatisation of the Clyde port authority? Since that authority announced its intention to privatise itself, British Steel's director announced the closure of Ravenscraig which, together with the attendant closure of the Hunterston terminal, will have a direct bearing on the earning power of the Clyde port authority. Will the Minister give me a list later this evening of the parties that have formally declared an interest in acquiring the Clyde port authority?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I think that the Minister may find it somewhat difficult to respond to that intervention without widening the debate beyond the scope of the order.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am trying to describe the order. The hon. Gentleman's comments may be the subject of legitimate debate on a wider issue and if he cares to write to me I shall try to answer his questions. I feel that I should now make some progress on the order, as I know that several hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

If land held by some ports turns out to have a significantly higher value than was expected at the time of the sale, that will result in an excessive windfall gain for the new owner which was not foreseeable at the time of privatisation, and therefore not properly reflected in the price paid for the undertaking. The subsequent sale of such land would, of course, be subject to capital gains tax, but we consider that there should be a further levy on the enhanced value of such property to prevent the excessive windfall gains that would otherwise result.

Of course, as was made clear in the extensive debates on the Ports Act last year, one of our objectives in seeking the privatisation of major trust ports is to make it easier for them to realise the value of their property holdings, so we need to strike a careful balance between preventing excessive windfall gains and deterring the port companies from turning their property to best account. That is why the Act provides for the levy to be time-limited to 10 years after privatisation, and why it will amount to a relatively small proportion of the gains. For example, for the first five years it will be 25 per cent., and taper down to 20 per cent. in years six and seven, and to 10 per cent. thereafter —on top of the capital gains tax.

Parliament agreed to the Act providing for the limited period levy on land disposals made after privatisation. Sections 17 and 18 of the Act therefore set out the basic framework within which the levy is to operate, and the order, the draft of which is now before the House, will fill in the details.

The draft order makes provision in the following main areas. Article 6 provides that all disposals of relevant land or interest in land are chargeable disposals. They include freehold disposals, leasehold disposals and the granting of options to acquire land. There are, however, significant instances in which no gain is deemed to arise, and in which therefore no levy is chargeable.

Paragraph 4 of schedule 2 provides that the base data for the valuation of land for the purposes of levy will be the date of privatisation. That will also be the commencement date of the levy period. The base value for the land will be the market value on an existing use basis. The base value will be index-linked.

It is not intended that the levy should apply to all disposals irrespective of size, and paragraph 8 makes provision for exemptions below certain limits. First, the levy is payable on any disposal only when the aggregate value of all disposals over the whole 10-year period exceeds "an overall threshold" of £500,000, or 10 per cent. of the port sale proceeds if that is less. Secondly, individual disposals below a threshold limit of £200,000, or 2 per cent. of the port sale proceeds if that is less, are referred to in the draft order as "small disposals" and do not give rise to a levy, although they do count against the overall threshold.

Finally, individual disposals of less than £4,000, up to a maximum of 20 per year, are referred to as "disregarded disposals" and are exempted from the levy itself, do not count against the overall threshold and do not need even to be recorded. All those limits are index-linked.

Articles 18 to 26 deal with leases. Under article 25, leases of operational land used for operational purposes are also disregarded for levy purposes, since those are considered to form part of a port's normal business activities and could not on that basis be seen as giving rise to windfall gains.

Leases for non-operational purposes are not exempted, but, where they are for rent, they are subject to special provisions reflecting the fact that any gain arising is spread over a period of years. They are treated as if granted for a single premium equal to their market value, but any levy arising from them can be paid in annual instalments. In addition, article 18 effectively provides relief from corporation tax on rental income by reducing the amount of gain on which levy is payable.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McLoughlin: I would rather not, for the simple reason that a number of hon. Members want to speak. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] However, as Opposition Members seem intent on my giving way, I am happy to do so, even thought that will give them less time.

Mr. Janman: My hon. Friend briefly mentioned leases for non-operational purposes. I am intrigued as to why any operational lease taken out later than six months before the start of the clawback provision will be included. It means that, if a port wants to utilise land for operational purposes and increasing the entrepreneurial and useful activity that takes place in the port, it will, in effect, have to pay extra tax to the Treasury for the privilege of doing so. That strikes me as counter-productive to the aims and objectives of the Conservative party, which are to encourage initiative and risk taking.

Mr. McLoughlin: I do not believe that my hon. Friend's assumption is correct. We needed to strike a fair balance in terms of any windfall gain that might occur.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier, you kindly and helpfully guided the House on the scope of the order. A question was put to the Minister relating specifically to whether or not the order's contents conformed with Conservative party policies. Is that not without the scope of the order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Minister will remain in order when he responds.

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) was perhaps arguing that we had drawn the clawback provision for any windfall gains too tightly. Throughout the whole process, we were keen to achieve a balance in the treatment of windfall gains.

Mr. Janman: I was talking not about windfall gains or land leased out for non-operational purposes but about leases entered into by a port post-privatisation that are for the purposes of allowing other companies to use the port's land on a leasehold basis for the importation, storage, or manufacture of products. Those are the purposes for which a port should be used. That the order does not exclude all operational leases is counter-productive to my party's aim of encouraging entrepreneurial and risk-taking activities.

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend and I will just have to agree to disagree on that point. We felt that it was right to achieve an overall balance between what might and might not be a windfall gain, which is why we excluded operational leases after consulting a number of the ports directly affected by the order.

The draft order contains a number of provisions intended as counter-avoidance measures, particularly where there are disposals of land or interests in land within a group of companies.

Article 33 ensures that a transfer between members of a group gives rise to chargeable gains where the holding of the parent company in its subsidiaries is anything less than 100 per cent. Article 34 enables levy to be charged on the full increase in value of assets that have been transferred to a company which subsequently leaves the 75 per cent. group, and article 35 provides for the recalculation of the gain on an intra-group transfer if, following the transfer, there is a decrease in the equity of that company held by the parent company.

Schedule 1 sets out rules for determining when disposals are to be treated as "associated". If a small disposal can be shown to be "associated" with one or more other disposals, it is their aggregate value that is taken into account in determining whether levy should be charged on the small disposal. This is intended to counter attempts to avoid clawback through the small disposals exemption by, for instance, fragmenting one large disposal into many smaller ones to the same purchaser.

In terms of the administration of the levy, provisions are made in articles 13 to 16 for payment, including the payment of interest after certain dates. Where interest is payable, the rate is reduced by an amount equivalent to the effect of tax relief. Article 17 provides for repayment by a Minister of any sums found to have been paid in error or following a recalculation. Repayment by the Minister will also carry interest from certain dates, and will apply to levy, to interest on unpaid levy or both, as appropriate.

Finally, detailed provisions are made in articles 36 to 41 for the recording of disposals, and for the provision of the information to the appropriate Minister; for assessment of levy in certain circumstances by the Minister; for the settlement of certain disputes that might arise by a referee; and for penalties in line with those already in the Ports Act 1991 in respect of the levy on the proceeds of port sales.

An earlier version of the draft order was circulated during the autumn to the trust ports that are seeking privatisation. The process proved extremely valuable in helping us to achieve a proper balance in the draft order in such important areas as the treatment of leases and the provisions for associated disposals—and I am grateful for the constructive comments made by the ports and by Conservative Members who made representations.

I am now confident that the draft order makes arrangements for the levy that adequately safeguard the interests of the taxpayer, without being unduly onerous or restrictive in regard to the operations of the privatised ports. The order is a crucial element in the ports privatisation programme. As many hon. Members will be aware, a number of the largest ports have already taken advantage of the provisions of the Act to begin the process of privatisation. Once the draft order has been approved, it will help to ensure that the interests of the taxpayer are properly safeguarded, and ports will be less attractive to those whose only interest is in realising the property value of the port in the short term.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Select Committee on Statutory Instruments reported that the order was a drafting mess and was likely to lead to a good many legal actions. Are we considering the report at the same time as the order? The Minister did not refer to the report, but I have just read a carefully argued case to the effect that the order is a bit of a mess. Is that relevant to tonight's debate, or is it not?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As Chairman of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, may I point out that the basic part of the order relating to the type of land that was subject to the levy was dealt with by the report because of its defective drafting? Like the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), I was very disappointed by the Minister's failure to make any relevant comment—indeed, any comment at all—on the Committee's report. That is particularly disappointing in view of the fact that the House gives the Committee the task of reporting defects, of which the order provides a prime example.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can confirm to both hon. Members that the Select Committee's report is relevant, and can be referred to.

10.49 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I agree wholeheartedly that the whole order is a mess. It is as much a mess as the Government's entire policy on trust port privatisation. What we have just heard about the Select Committee report may well provide a further opportunity for the House to debate the implications of that policy in detail.

It is a measure of our success in Committee that we forced the Government to make the order subject to the affirmative resolution of the House. An hour and a half is not long enough to debate this controversial issue.

Although we would like to amend the order, it is procedurally impossible. We cannot even throw it out, because I am sure that the Government Whips will have learnt from their experience in Committee and will make sure that they do not lose the vote today as they lost the vote on disposal and levies on clawback and land.

We make no apology for the debate on this order as it is the only mechanism available to the Opposition to expose the sheer blinding incompetence, which we have just seen demonstrated, of the Government's handling of ports policy.

When we sat in Committee last year, I do not think that even we could have anticipated the mess into which the Government have got themselves over their handling of ports policy.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): It was a mess in Committee.

Ms. Walley: Yes, it was.

It is not just the Opposition who are expressing concern about the Government's mishandling of ports policy: it is also the press and media. We need look no further than today's editorial in the *Financial Times*. The work forces in trust ports up and down the country are also saying that the Government have got themselves into a mess as well as local authority leaders of whatever political persuasion. They can spot a bad egg when they see one, and this legislation and the badly drafted order are a clear example.

There is general despair at the Government's wholesale mishandling of trust ports privatisation. That extends, surprisingly, to those who have supported the Government throughout in their bid to sell off trust ports lock, stock and barrel, including land and assets that the Government do not even own. It is reminiscent of the commercial television franchise sell-off fiasco a short time ago.

Transport Ministers have got it wrong. When they got it wrong earlier this week, they went out and bought chocolates and flowers to try to put things right. I do not know whether the Minister is responsible for this fiasco. I could be generous and say that perhaps he is just a scapegoat—I will give him the benefit of the doubt—but he cannot buy himself out of this mess with chocolates and flowers.

Mr. Cryer: He signed the order.

Ms. Walley: There is more involved. The Government have got the ports industry into a mess. The order has given us three weeks grace to hammer home a message which fell on deaf ears this time last year. It has given my hon. Friends, particularly those representing Cleveland, time to alert the local community in Tees and Hartlepool to what Cleveland county council and Labour Members warned would happen. It has given other hon. Friends —and friends who I hope will soon be honourable—time to alert Tilbury to the threat hanging over that port. It has given my hon. Friends who are concerned about Scotland time to assess the implications for the local economy of the lethal cocktail of Ravenscraig closure and trust port privatisation, should the management buy-out bid be unsuccessful.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Lady has mentioned the best port in Britain—Tilbury, which is in my constituency. The biggest threat hanging over that port was the dock labour scheme, which we abolished and the Labour party would bring back.

Ms. Walley: I shall cover that point if I am allowed to continue. I do not intend to give way again because time is limited.

But for the order, the Tees and Hartlepool ports authority would have been signed, sealed and delivered by now. The only reason it is not is because the Secretary of State has not been able to proceed because the order is necessary for the affirmative procedure of the House.

We want to examine the Government's mismanagement and incompetence in their handling of the order. What we have seen in this instance is surpassed only by the Government's mishandling of the entire 1991 legislation. When we were discussing the Levy on Disposals of Land, etc. Order and the 50 per cent. clawback on the net proceeds of the sale, one issue on which we pressed the Government repeatedly in Committee was how the order, once introduced, should take account of the Government's professed commitment to management and employee buy-outs.

We said that such an order must be fair and must not allow huge speculative developments—we are talking about the time before the recession, or before it was admitted that the recession was upon us—and we pressed the Government on the fact that, if there was to be a commitment to management and employee buy-outs, it should be reflected in the order, and that management-employee bids should not be precluded because some companies could make a quick profit.

The order reveals a serious questioning of what I believe to be the Government's lip service to management-employee buy-outs. It shows that the Government's commitment was not real and is not real now. We know that because of the way in which events have unfolded in the Tees and Hartlepool bid. What is the point of writing into the Bill supplementary clauses relating to financial assistance to proposals to maximise employee participation in the equity of successor companies and of setting the trigger mechanisms for clawback, as we have just heard from the Minister, on land and lease disposals, which ostensibly encourage management-employee buy-outs if, by the same token, the Secretary of State is not immediately mindful to go ahead and approve the bids outstanding in Cleveland—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on reading."] I shall not accept any further interventions. The order raises questions that the Minister must answer. Hon. Members talk about reading—they should have asked the Minister why he did not depart from his brief.

There are serious allegations of fraud, bribery and corruption in the Tees and Hartlepool bidding. They have been raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) in Cleveland. The Minister should comment on that. He must also say why, when I asked on 19 December if he would undertake a full investigation of the circumstances of the sale of the Tees and Hartlepool trust board, he replied that there was no need for such an investigation.

What has happened in the meantime? Was it the representations made by my hon. Friends? How has it been possible to move the goal posts halfway through selling off Tees and Hartlepool? Should there not be an inquiry? Are we not in an even worse position now than

[Ms. Walley]

yesterday, since we have learnt, courtesy of the *Financial Times*, that the Government now propose to prevent any information from coming into the public domain? What does it say about the state of our democracy if hon. Members are not allowed information about other bids to consider the implications of what has happened with regard to Tees and Hartlepool?

Mr. Janman: What has that to do with the order?

Ms. Walley: It has everything to do with the order, because the order has so far prevented the sale from being signed, sealed and delivered.

Mr. McLoughlin *indicated dissent.*

Ms. Walley: The Minister shakes his head, but he knows that that is so.

There are further issues. We are told that the Government are concerned that the bid should have gone ahead, yet on Teesside the company that the Minister has thought until now to accept told the work force that, if the proposal went ahead, staff could subscribe up to a maximum of £2,500 in £1 shares. Does the Minister not understand that, although the solicitors admitted that the statement was legally factual, it would be the case only if approximately one in seven of the work force took up the offer? In discussing the issue within the terms of the order, we are raising questions about the Government's approach to Teesside and to Teesside Holdings, whether companies which make such false promises are fit to run our ports and whether a Government who support such behaviour are fit to handle our transport policy.

We hear about ways in which assurances have been given by Teesside Holdings on trade union recognition. To my knowledge, no consultation has taken place. Perhaps the Minister can deal with that issue.

The order raises other issues, not least the port of London and Tilbury. As promised, I come to that aspect now. Before you rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must say that the matter is relevant because the Minister needs to explain to the House how the order is relevant to Tilbury. Tilbury is not covered within the terms and references of the legislation, but what happens in Tilbury will depend very much on and will be guided by the order.

The Port of London paid extensive amounts in compensation under the dock labour scheme. It is important that the Minister should say whether it is in respect of that debt that the port of Tilbury is being treated differently as regards the order and the clawback arrangements for land and lease disposals.

There are other relevant issues. The Minister should tell us how the order affects Tilbury and he should clarify whether the debenture arrangements will be based on the clawback order. Will he clarify the basis for the debenture arrangements? What will happen to the revenue generated by the sale of land and leases relating to the port of Tilbury?

The order gives us the opportunity to ask whether the Minister has approved the scheme to transfer the assets of the port of Tilbury to the Port of Tilbury London Ltd. Was not the deadline supposed to be 31 December 1991? Has the Minister delayed the transfer scheme and, if so, why? Is it because of the comments made by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) about his concerns about the way in which the leases have been dealt with under the clawback scheme and about the implications for the viability of the port of the operations being excluded——

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Walley: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to raise his concerns.

Mr. Janman *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made it clear that she will not give way.

Ms. Walley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Janman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to put words into the mouth of another hon. Member and then not to have the courtesy to give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for debate; it is not a point of order.

Ms. Walley: I was simply referring to the hon. Gentleman's earlier points in relation to my comments about Tilbury. He will no doubt have an opportunity in the debate to raise the issues of concern to him.

Mr. Janman *rose——*

Ms. Walley: I do not intend to give way.

Mr. Janman *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman hopes to catch my eye, he is not improving his chances.

Ms. Walley: It is also important that the Minister should tell the House whether the reason for the delay is that the bidder is seeking to avoid meeting the legal costs incurred as a result of the industrial tribunal's unanimous decision to recommend that the 12 sacked shop stewards should be re-engaged and that a further seven sacked shop stewards should be entitled to full compensation. I have before me the report of what must have been the longest industrial tribunal hearing in history. We need to know whether the delay since 31 December has been solely the result of the new owner trying to avoid having to meet the legal costs. I remind the Minister that the Department and the Secretary of State are responsible for overseeing the board. How can a Minister or Secretary of State ignore the ruling of an industrial tribunal in this way? All those matters are relevant to the present order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Has there been full consultation on the operational issues, which need to be taken on board?

The order deals with finance. It is complicated and badly drafted, and shows the Government's incompetence. As a result of the Government's complete mishandling of trust ports policy, none of us can have any confidence in the way in which they are running their ports and their transport policy. Opposition Members will vote against the order when the time comes.

11.6 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I rise to speak this evening because, as the House may be aware, on 18 December I asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State a question about the disposal of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. In the last paragraph of his reply, my right hon. and learned Friend wrote:

"I am minded to give my formal consent to the sale of the authority's undertaking to Teesside Holdings Limited as soon as I am able to do so. This will be possible only after the scheme of transfer submitted by the authority under section 9(1) of the Ports Act 1991 and the order providing for a levy on disposals of land to be made under section 17 of the Act have come into effect. The latter is subject to an affirmative resolution of the House and is expected to be debated immediately after the Christmas recess."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. *164*.]

That is the order before us.

The present levy comes on top of a 50 per cent. levy on the disposal proceeds of the port. The combination of the levy on the land and the levy on the disposal assets of the port has already created some confusion among those involved in the bidding for the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. One of the bidders—indeed, the successful bidder—apparently had to have the sales proceeds provision explained to him twice to enable him to advance a bid which was acceptable as a final bid and which, in fact, became the successful bid.

As Conservative Members have argued on many occasions, there were three reasons for privatisation: first, to widen the powers of the port authority; secondly, to widen the share ownership by giving a substantial block of shares—I lay heavy emphasis on the word "substantial" —to the management and employees of the port; and, thirdly, to raise proceeds of sale revenue for the Government. Those three objectives were set out clearly in the sale of undertaking notices placed by the board's advisers in the national newspapers and magazines. The first stated quite clearly that the authority was prepared to consider

"financially competitive offers from parties who can satisfy the privatisation objectives",

the first of which was

"to have particular regard to the desirability of encouraging the disposal to managers and staff of the whole or a substantial part of the equity share capital of its privatised undertaking".

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) was quite right in his assertion that without the order that disposal could not take place, but it appears that in the case of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority the key objective has not been the one followed by the port. I was interested to hear that the Minister was minded to accept the board's recommendation, but it came as a considerable surprise to the management and employees of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority, and as a considerable shock to Conservative supporters of privatisation, who had close liaison with the management-employee buy-out team at every stage of the process.

Indeed, this management were the first in the country to put forward a privatisation measure in the form of a private Bill. It will be remembered that it was Opposition Members who opposed that Bill at every stage and that it was the Labour-controlled Cleveland county council that felled it when it was being considered in another place. When the Government introduced their own Bill for the disposal of all the ports, Labour Members voted against it, just as the attractiveness of these undertakings, which was underpinned by the Dock Work Act 1989, is ignored by all Opposition Members. Therefore, it ill behoves those hon. Members to present themselves now as the champions of the management-employee buy-out team.

During this privatisation the objectives seem to have altered. Originally, there were three; now there are eight, and they are more complicated. It appears that, during the privatisation, the indicative bidders were under the impression—having been so advised—that the price was only one of the criteria. When it came to final bids, however, it was taken to be the leading criterion. Each of the indicative bidders was advised by KPMG Peat Marwick, the advisers to the port authority, as to the deficiencies of their bids. In the case of the management-employee buy-out team, there were very few deficiencies. In fact, a very small increment was applied to the price that had been offered. Apart from that, the team's bid, which was the highest indicative bid, was to all intents and purposes nearly perfect.

As I pointed out, one of the other indicative bidders had to have the matter of the proceeds of sale explained again. That bidder then put forward a revised bid considerably bigger than that of the management-employee buy-out team. Had the price been signified to the management-employee buy-out team as the most significant criterion, it would have been open to the team to introduce equity partners, as the other bidders did. Together with those partners, the team could have submitted a very much larger bid. Indeed, I have been told by the leader of the team that it would have been able to submit a bid of about £190 million—in excess of the apparently winning bid.

I wish to confine my remarks to the bidding process that was followed. I do not want to become involved in mud-slinging against any of the bidders—something that has been done in the regional press—nor do I want to become involved in the records of individuals, against some of whose names are marks that have been flagged up by Opposition Members. I am sure that Opposition Members agree that, after a very long time, any person should be given the benefit of bygones being allowed to be bygones.

It is ironic that those who held up the torch of enterprise in the north-east of England should have it snatched from them as a reward for their endeavours. It is a source of great regret to me that that should have happened. The effect on the other port authorities which are now seeking to privatise themselves—for example, Medway, Clyde and others—is that they will be considerably more reluctant to go down the path of privatisation because they have seen what has happened to Tees and Hartlepool. After all, as we all know, turkeys are hardly likely to vote for Christmas. In the words of my constituent, Mr. Hutchinson, "If that is not cheating, what is?"

Mr. Frank Cook: Is the hon. Gentleman trying to say that, perhaps, Opposition Members who voted against the original legislation were wiser on that occasion than he has been on this occasion?

Mr. Devlin: No. I do not think that there is any wisdom in allowing a port to build up a huge cash balance which it cannot spend on benefits to a local community simply because its powers are curtailed. That is exactly what was resisted by all Opposition Members.

[Mr. Devlin]

If I may briefly sum up before any votes are cast on this important order, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his opening comments. He said that he would look again at the process by which the Tees and Hartlepool port authority bids have been received and dealt with by the board. Of course, everyone on Teesside will accept that, if there is a preferred bidder and the board is very much behind that bidder, it would be very difficult for the Government to go against that bid.

Everyone understands that, if the Government picked the lowest bidder, Opposition Members would accuse us of giving the port to our friends. That simply cannot be the case. If there has been some irregularity in the mode by which the bids have been received and if unfair opportunities or, perhaps, not fair opportunities have been given to particular bidders, I would ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to look at the matter again and to give all those bidders a fair chance once more.

11.16 pm

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): I want to reiterate the stand that I have taken for a number of years. I am totally opposed to the privatisation of the ports that are affected by the Ports Act 1991. I make it abundantly clear also that the order is a mish-mash of incompetence. It is typical of the arguments that have been used by the privateers for many months. The privatisation supporters have found, even at this time, great embarrassment arising from the fact that, in respect of other legislation in recent months, there has been a need to rush through the processes of the House in such a manner that there has not been a proper in-depth examination of the consequences of the relevant policies.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who will no longer be with us fairly shortly, referred to the loss of a Bill which was part of this argument and which related, of course, to the order, as I shall show, in a way that suggested that he wants to avoid the truth of what actually happened. The hon. Member for Hartlepool prefers to use the record. The Tees and Hartlepool port authority, the promoters of the private Bill, or the hon. Gentleman, even after my request to that authority, have not published the findings of the House of Lords Select Committee. Under a special heading, "Opinion of the Committee", the Committee stated:

"The Committee does not believe that the promoters have proved their need for this Bill . . . the promoters have not convinced the Committee that the reconstruction of the Port Authority as a Companies Act company in the way proposed is the right way to achieve this end. Nor have they persuaded us that it would be right to give them the very wide powers they seek."

Those powers are not dissimilar to the wide powers under the Ports Act.

The Select Committee report continued:

"It would thus be possible for the privatised Authority"—

the promoters—

"to undertake commercial activities of which it has no experience . . . such risks"—

that is, inviting predators—

"could have a detrimental impact on local industry and on the local economy . . . For the reasons set out in this report the Committee do not consider that it is expedient for the bill to proceed."

That deals with the case of the hon. Member for Stockton, South. The arguments that I have just outlined are not my opinions, but those of the House of Lords Select Committee, on which there is a Conservative majority, as there is in this Chamber. The THPA even refused to publish those significant details.

On 18 December, in response to a question from the hon. Member for Stockton, South, the Secretary of State rightly published a precise and clear statement, which read:

"the Department and its advisers kept closely in touch with the THPA board as it carried out the sale process. I am satisfied that the board discharged its responsibilities in a fair and in a proper manner and, in particular, I am satisfied that it considered carefully each of the bids in relation to the agreed objectives of sale."

The Secretary of State concluded that letter by saying that the transfer scheme and this order are the preliminaries which are necessary before he can make a formal statement of consent. Therefore, the order is relevant to his emphatic declaration that he was satisfied that everything was carried out "in a proper manner".

As has been said, on the following day, in answering a question about the complaints that had been received, the Secretary of State made it quite clear that there was no reason to carry out any further investigation. In my view, he was right then, and he was convinced then. Since then, however, after the complaint had been deposited, the chairman of the THPA has issued a letter to every employee, making clear the reasons why the board decided to recommend the bid that was put to the Secretary of State. The wording of that letter shows his concern about the way in which some of the complaints have been dealt with.

After the tabling of those complaints, in the full knowledge that the Secretary of State was aware of them, and bearing in mind the statements of 18 and 19 December 1991, I wish to make it abundantly clear to the Minister that I shall not make any comments on those complaints, because I recognise from his statement that, as a matter of courtesy, he will consider them, although he will not necessarily agree with the recommendation that was put to him. However, I advise him that John Peart, the chairman of the port authority board and of the reconstruction committee, remains adamant that the proper procedures, laid down in agreement with the Department, were carried out. In addition, Peat Marwick McLintock, the port authority's auditors for many years and responsible for handling the day-to-day administration of the sale, have made it clear in writing that the proper objectives and conditions of sale were met. Furthermore, Mr. K. Fletcher, a partner of Jacksons, the board's legal advisers, is adamant that the proper procedures were carried out.

Indeed, the Minister for Shipping has confirmed in writing his satisfaction about the way in which the sale procedure was carried out. That letter is dated 9 January, which is after the complaints were deposited. He made that point clear to me because I had been concerned to ensure that the proper procedures were carried out. He said:

"both officials of this Department and Price Waterhouse, our advisors on the sale, monitored the process closely. The Department issued clear guidelines to the trust ports on the conduct of such sales, including the release of information. Price Waterhouse tell me"—

that is, the Minister for Shipping—

"that the complaints made to them were satisfactorily resolved."

In that case, the Minister has a problem on his hands. He has rightly gone no further than to say that he will consider the complaints. He has not said one word about reviewing the recommendation made to him. Therefore, I accept that position.

The Minister has many advisors and gave a commitment in writing that he was satisfied with their advice. He knows full well that he has said to the House and to the country that he is satisfied that there was a continuing close working relationship between his advisors and the port authority. In that circumstance, and as others supported the view that the procedures were followed, if on considering the complaints the Secretary of State had doubts for one moment, he was virtually telling people with years of integrity and a good reputation of serving his Department and the board that they were not telling the truth. That is a serious matter.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Following the hon. Gentleman's argument, does he agree that the Tees and Hartlepool port authority was very much the architect and engine of this legislation? It was the first of the trust ports to go for privatisation under the Bill. It is worth commenting that perhaps the procedures and the way in which the privatisation has developed did not conform to the original objectives of the private Bill that the authority promoted. The authority's Bill was for a management-employee buy-out. Does he agree that in those circumstances, and given my hon. Friend the Minister's statement, the Minister is wholly justified in looking one more time at the parameters of the bids to see whether, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) mentioned, they cannot be fitted into the philosophy of privatisation so that employees can share in the wealth that they create?

Mr. Leadbitter: It would be difficult to have a re-run, knowing full well not only the statutory requirements but the obligations in any tendering process followed by any utility and especially by the Government in this form of privatisation in which bidders are invited. Having been satisfied that the procedures were followed properly, it would be wrong to have a re-run on the basis of complaints that have already been rebutted in writing by the Department, the Minister, the board and everyone who gave financial and legal advice.

Mr. Barry Field *rose*——

Mr. Leadbitter: I shall not give way—I will simply respond to the question.

As for the Tees and Hartlepool port authority being the architect, I am sorry to say that the promoters of the private Bill made up their minds in June 1988, but they did not tell anyone until November, three or four days before depositing the Bill on the closing day. They did not consult anyone. They did not consult the county council or Members of Parliament. They simply introduced the Bill. In my experience, it is the only Bill on which the promoters had no independent professional witness. I read out to the House the findings of the House of Lords. If the authority was the architect, it was the architect of its own failure. It was reticent in seeking advice on a Bill which was proven to be ill drafted from the beginning to the end.

Mr. Barry Field: It is extraordinary that such a long-established and respected Member of Parliament should tell Conservative Members that there is no way in which the employees of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority should share in the flotation of their company. I chaired the Committee that considered the private Bill which I believe was the architect of this legislation. I assure the hon. Gentleman that many expert witnesses came before us, not least from the Department of the Transport. There were serious question marks about the true legal status of trust ports. That is why there is good reason for re-examining the position in which we find ourselves.

Mr. Leadbitter: I merely say that the port is in desperate need of an early decision. The uncertainty has gone on long enough, and it is doing harm to the port. If the Government find that objectives have been met, a re-run will do more harm than good.

It is unfortunate that debates of this sort are so short. It is not fair to those who occupy the Government and Opposition Front Benches. The matters under discussion have wide implications. I shall continue my correspondence with the Department in a reasonable way on the basis of fact and not of innuendo and suggestion. I shall seek to promote the interests of the port. I made it abundantly clear that, following privatisation legislation, I would work with the successor company to try to ensure success. Perhaps that was going too far for a good socialist, but I meant what I said. I want to see a decision made and silly complaints put aside. Let us get on with implementing decisions which were deemed to have been arrived at properly.

11.31 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government on taking the opportunity, when considering the Ports Bill on Report, to change the clawback provisions as set out when the proposed legislation was first published. I refer specifically to removing deemed disposals from the clawback provisions and taking up the idea, which I and my hon. Friends introduced in Committee, of a sliding scale of percentages for the clawback levy over 10 years. On behalf of the port of Tilbury, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for pushing through the idea that I and my hon. Friends advanced.

It is important that anything that is done for the ports is undertaken in the spirit of encouraging initiative, risk-taking and entrepreneurial activity. It is important, of course, that we do nothing to reduce the chances of such activity taking place. I wish to correct the implication of the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms. Walley) that I have been suggesting that the slight imperfections that I detect in the order will undermine the viability of the port of Tilbury. That is nonsense. The viability of the port would be undermined by a continuation of the dock labour scheme. That would be a continuation of the counter-productive and cynically negative activities that the shop stewards at the port used to get up to. That is what would undermine the port's viability.

Mr. Moate: And the election of a Labour Government.

Mr. Janman: Indeed—my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

I am concerned about some parts of the order. When the consultative draft order was published, I think that it is fair to say that it took everyone by surprise in the industry. That was because it included a clawback

[Mr. Janman]

provision for not just the sale of land where there would be a windfall profit, but also a provision for the leasing of land.

My hon. Friend the Minister is aware that I wrote on 20 November 1991 to the effect that I was very concerned about what seemed to be the inclusion of leases where land was to be used for operational purposes—not for property development or the like, but directly related to normal, traditional port activities, or for the manufacture of goods and services within the confines of the port.

I wrote to my hon. Friend on 20 November expressing my concern; my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) did likewise. In his reply, the Minister implied that operational leases would not be included in the provisions of this order. He said:

"leases of land which have been used for operational purposes during the six months immediately before the levy period are to be exempted from clawback."

That is welcome, but since the abolition of the dock labour scheme—there is an ever-increasing amount of empirical evidence that abolition was right for the British ports industry—a great deal of new business has been coming to ports such as Tilbury in each quarter.

It is all well and good excluding operational leases in existence up until the six-month period before the port becomes a plc and therefore up until the six months before the levy period starts, but what about operational leases entered into in the following six months? And what about operational leases entered into after privatisation, once the port has become a plc and the clawback levy period has started?

If my hon. Friend suggests that there is a problem with defining operational and non-operational leases, that is invalid. He had no difficulty in his letter in defining an operational lease for the period up to six months before the levy period starts. He stated:

"The definition of land used for operational purposes used in the draft order follows the definition of port operational purposes used in the Town and Country Planning Act General Development Order 1988."

So we have a good definition of a lease for operational purposes. If that definition can be used for the period up to six months before the levy period begins, it can equally be used for leases within the six-month period and after the levy commences.

There are good grounds for my hon. Friend to re-examine this matter. Including such leases under the clawback provision is not fair to the port and is counter-productive to our aims and objectives.

The wonderful extrapolation by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North—that I suggest that the order will undermine the viability of the ports—is of course quite wrong. Compared with the positive aspects of the Ports Act and of the abolition of the dock labour scheme, the negative aspects of this order are small indeed, but if we are to help our ports into a far more entrepreneurial environment, we should take every opportunity to maximise such development.

Earlier today, I had a debate on the telephone with one of my hon. Friend's officials about this subject. The first argument put to me to defend the inclusion of operational leases is that, after the port is sold and if there is wasteland in the port that it wants to develop for operational purposes, the price of that wasteland will reflect its value when the port is sold.

That is rather like saying that, if I buy a house from someone and use my money and initiative to improve that house, or if I lease out a wing of the house and someone else spends money on improving that wing, I should then pay a tax to the person from whom I bought the house. Yet that is what the order stipulates.

Nor is it reasonable to say that, because the port will get relief on the costs of doing whatever has to be done to that land to turn it into whatever it is to be used for, it will neutralise the extra clawback levy that the port will pay. If the port is to retain the freehold and is only leasing the land to somebody for operational purposes, it is often not the port itself that will incur the costs of what has to be done on the land to turn it into whatever it has to be turned into: it will be the person who is leasing the land who will bear those costs. Therefore, the benefit of the relief will not accrue to the port, yet the port will still have to pay a levy because it has leased the land for operational purposes.

Time is short and other hon. Members wish to speak; I hope that the debate will not be hijacked for the purpose of a debate about Tees and Hartlepool. The order is important. I do not wish to oppose the order, because it is only one facet of the overriding objective, which is to get ports like Tilbury into the private sector quickly so that they can be run efficiently in a spirit of enterprise and risk-taking, but unless my hon. Friend has the opportunity at the end of the debate to reassure me on my concerns about the order, equally I do not think that I can go into the Aye Lobby either.

It is important to take measures to make sure that windfall gains are properly taxed, but equally it is important not to put through the House an order which in some way, however small, will create an unnecessary barrier to the risk-taking and entrepreneurial activity that we wish to see in our ports.

11.41 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I will try to be brief because other hon. Members, some with constituency interests, wish to speak. When the section under which the order is being made came before the House on Report, it did so after a defeat in Committee. At that time my right hon. and hon. Friends supported the clause. We felt that, if a port had been transferred into the private sector, and there were windfall gains, it was not unreasonable, in order perhaps to discourage land speculation, that some of the gains should be taxed.

We would argue again that, if there were a windfall gain to be taxed, it should not necessarily be the Government who would benefit from the windfall. It is not unreasonable that some of the revenue from the levy should be reinvested in the community of the port where the tax was raised, not least given the amount of investment which the community would often have to make—for example, in the road infrastructure to support the port. Therefore, when we have an order implementing detailed parts of the section, it might be perverse to oppose it in principle.

That said, I think that the Minister owed it to the House to respond to three points made in the report of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments. First, there is the failure in article 25(2) to define a precise time when land use for non-operational purposes begins. Secondly, there was no understanding among those who gave evidence to the Committee about what was meant by a tested telex.

Thirdly, the Committee was concerned about the loose drafting of article 36. Is there or is there not a requirement to furnish documents under that provision? As the Committee pointed out, there are penal provisions attached to the failure to provide such documents. Therefore, the circumstances in which they ought to be provided should be clear. I hope that the Minister will respond to the serious points raised by the Committee.

There are hon. Members from the Tees and Hartlepool district who wish to make important constituency points. I shall make two related observations. First, on a number of occasions in Committee and on Report the Minister said that one of the Government's objectives in supporting the privatisation of ports was to encourage employee and management buy-outs.

In Committee on 12 February, in response to a question from the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate), the Minister said:

"The ports would have objectives that would need to be agreed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. They would need to include obtaining the best price for the port, taking into account other considerations such as future plans for the port, and employee-management participation levels."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 12 February 1991; c. 45.]

That was embodied in section 5(3) of the Act, which states that the Minister

"shall have particular regard to the desirability of encouraging the disposal of the whole or a substantial part of equity share capital"

to management-employee consortia.

Mr. Barry Field: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: I wish to be brief, so I will proceed.

Clearly, the Secretary of State is minded to approve the scheme for a port with only a 5 per cent. equity holding for employees or management, which is not what any of us understood by the substantial encouragement of which the Minister spoke when the Bill was being discussed.

I am sure that, if the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) has a chance to speak, he will wish to comment on the proposals for the movement to the private sector of the Clyde port authority, where those who have been the driving force behind the privatisation measure have placed considerable emphasis on encouraging an employee-management buy out. What price is to be paid for their encouragement for that option now, and for the other factors that they are said to have agreed with the Government in relation to the need to maintain substantial control of that company in west central Scotland?

Yesterday's *Financial Times* reported that, to avoid future embarrassment, the Department of Transport has put a blackout on any information on the bids tendered for further privatisations. In a document that I received yesterday, the Secretary of State for Transport said that he was once a supporter of freedom of information. That claim looks pretty hollow when we hear that a blackout has been placed on information for no other reason than to cover up future embarrassment caused to the Department of Transport. That is no reason for the secrecy. I hope that when the Minister replies he will say that the *Financial Times* report is incorrect and that openness will be the hallmark of future privatisations of ports wishing to take that option.

11.47 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) was right to remind the House that the order comes before us partly as as result of a vote in Committee on an amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), which inflicted a defeat on the Government. As a result of that vote, the proposals are much less harsh than they might have been, in relation both to the period in which the clawback provisions apply and to the rate of levy that applies. On that occasion, we were supported by the Opposition, but it is a mark of their confusion that, having secured that excellent result, they are now going to vote against it.

However, we should not be surprised at that, because the Labour party was confused on the major issue of the ports levy, which was set at 50 per cent. Its members tabled an amendment to increase that level to 100 per cent. and then voted in support of an amendment that successfully reduced it to 10 per cent. That shows their total confusion on the matter, so nothing should surprise us this evening.

I warmly welcome the principles of the order, but I am tempted by the Minister's express statement—I think that the record will show that I am right—that the Tees and Hartlepool bid could not be finally consummated until the order was passed. If that is so, it is proper to say that we should perhaps defer the decision until there has been ample time to review it, as it might well prove an unfortunate one.

I understand and respect the point made by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter), that indecision must be unhelpful to the port, but we are entitled to be worried, for the reasons so properly expressed by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. We incorporated through amendments supported by both sides of the House provisions for substantial management-employee participation. We were assured again and again that that was a primary objective. In fact, I understand that the criteria used in the management-employee buy-out bid were guided largely by the views expressed by the House.

I understand also that the employee bid was for 100 per cent. of the equity, but that the successful bidder is offering only 5 per cent. participation to management and employees. The order is part of a whole package of measures designed to help the management-employee buy-out.

The House went further. A specific provision giving some advantage to management and employees was incorporated, but I understand that that has been interpreted as just a 5 per cent. price advantage, which I do not believe accurately reflects the intentions of the House or the assurances given by Ministers.

It is hard for right hon. and hon. Members to judge whether the bidding process was totally fair, unfettered, and proper in every respect, Perhaps it was. However, I believe that other ports and the public are entitled to be worried.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will carefully examine the whole process—the first in the chain—to determine whether it should not be thoroughly reviewed, perhaps even with a view to going through the bidding process once again or moving to the alternative of flotation. It is vital that the ports industry should get it right, and many of us feel at this moment that it has not done so.

11.52 pm

Mr. McLoughlin *rose*——

Dr. Godman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice, because my genuine view is that the House has been given insufficient time to debate this important issue.

I refer you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to Standing Order No. 14(1)(*b*), which states inter alia:

"Mr. Speaker shall put any questions necessary to dispose of such proceedings not later than half-past eleven o'clock or one and a half hours after the commencement of those proceedings, whichever is the later: Provided that, if Mr. Speaker shall be of the opinion that, because of the importance of the subject matter of the motion, the time for debate has not been adequate, he shall, instead of putting the question as aforesaid, interrupt the business, and the debate shall stand adjourned till the next sitting".

I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in all conscience to adhere to that Standing Order and to adjourn the debate at midnight.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) raises an important point. I accept that there is a serious problem in the Tees and Hartlepool port authority area. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) and others of my hon. Friends were unsuccessful in catching your eye tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker—but not because you did not want to call them. The Minister rose to reply, and my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh, who could have made a major contribution to the debate, was prevented from doing so. No reference has been made to two major port authorities in Scotland—Forth, located in my constituency, and Clydebank. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow is right to submit that, under the Standing Orders, you should exercise the power vested in you to adjourn this debate until tomorrow or the next convenient sitting.

The Minister is laughing, but this is no laughing matter. It is a very serious matter when my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh and the interests of two important Scottish port authorities are excluded from the debate—not at the will of the Chair but because only a restricted amount of time had been allocated to debate the issue.

I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to exercise the power vested in you and to adjourn the debate.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have here the report of a Select Committee which sat for a full day and which concluded that the order was defectively drafted in three respects. If we are to end the debate with no reference to that conclusion being made by the Government, are we not failing to do our job?

Do you think that Standing Orders should be treated seriously, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Do you think that they are more than just a load of codswallop? If so, I suggest that you take account of the fact that, in a debate lasting an hour and a half, not one reference has been made to the conclusion reached by a Committee consisting of four hon. Members—who had considered the order for a full morning—that it had been defectively drafted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now raising a point for debate, not a point of order for the Chair.

Let me respond to the two earlier points of order. Unfortunately, it is often impossible to call every hon. Member who wishes to speak in debates on orders lasting for an hour and a half. Tonight's circumstances are therefore not unusual. I must tell the hon. Members concerned that I am not prepared to grant their requests.

Ms. Walley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have listened carefully to what you have said. However, given the number of hon. Members on both sides of the House who wished to speak, and whose constituencies contain trust ports—hon. Members such as my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) who have spent a long time preparing for tonight's debate—and given the points that have been raised, will you at least tell us whether you will discuss the matter with Mr. Speaker and give a further consideration, if you cannot give a ruling now?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a matter for the discretion of the Chair, and I have given the House my decision.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlebrough): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance on an entirely different point? We should like some guidance on the principle of ministerial statements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) read out the response given to a private notice question asked by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin). In his response on 18 December, the Secretary of State said that he was minded to accept the recommendations of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. The Ports Act 1991 was perfected on 31 December.

The Minister is right to say that tonight's proceedings are not relevant to the Act or to the decision in relation to the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. However, tonight he made a statement to the House that conflicted with his response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Stockton, South. He said then that he would look carefully at all the representations that had been made and that until he had completed the process he would not endorse the recommendations. He therefore made a ministerial statement to the House without the application of the normal convention that Opposition Members can put questions to him. We, as Back-Bench Members, have been deprived of our right to demand a ministerial statement and the normal cut and thrust of debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is making a speech in the guise of a point of order. I call the Minister.

Mr. Harry Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Am I right in assuming that the Minister must seek the leave of the House to address the House a second time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not on this occasion.

Mr. McLoughlin: What we are witnessing is Labour's total opposition to the privatisation of trust ports. Labour Members hide behind the mask of support for management-employee buy-outs; yet, whenever we have debated this question, they have used every possible

opportunity to obstruct the process of the sale of trust ports. Now they are shedding crocodile tears because they have not received some of the answers that they wanted.

As I made clear, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is looking into the representations carefully and he will not make a final decision on the sale until that process is complete. I do not believe that it would be right to add anything further to that subject now.

It has become clear from the debate that the Opposition are determined to oppose the privatisation of trust ports. They are now trying to hide behind that by saying that on every occasion we should provide an option for a management-employee buy-out, irrespective of the price. If we had considered doing that, the Labour party would have accused us of selling off assets on the cheap as it has on many occasions in the past.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 136.

Division No. 37] **[12.00**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*

Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cleland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land, etc.) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 5th December, be approved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 15th January, the Ways and Means Motions in the name of Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer relating to Stamp Duty may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Health Services (Mid-Glamorgan)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

12.12 am

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I express my appreciation for the opportunity to address the House on the important matter of the planning and development of health services in Mid-Glamorgan. Due to time constraints, I must confine my remarks to the Rhondda and Taff-Ely district, served by the East Glamorgan general hospital. That area is covered by my hon. Friends the Members for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), and I know that they hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a little later in the debate. To enable them to participate, I shall have to be rather cryptic. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will be able to provide fuller answers in writing if he cannot get in at the end of the debate.

I am very concerned about the level of health service provided for my constituents. In voicing my concerns, I make it abundantly clear at the beginning that there is no criticism from any of us of staff in all sectors of the health service in Mid-Glamorgan. All the staff labour mightily, often in difficult circumstances, to provide health care for my constituents. All my complaints and criticisms arise from points that have been brought to my attention by people who work in the health service.

The catchment area of the district general hospital and of the Rhondda valley is, by any socio-economic indicator, a poor region of Wales and of the United Kingdom. That is not the fault of the people who live there. It is part of our inheritance, as is our radicalism and our peculiar and particular valley culture.

The area is one of high morbidity, demanding an equally high standard of medical input if that morbidity is to be effectively treated. Even after allowing for differences in the age and sex structure of the population, Mid-Glamorgan has a standardised mortality rate 13 per cent. above that for England and Wales as a whole. The rate is higher than in any other county in England and Wales except Cleveland and Durham. Let us consider the childhood morality figures. The infant mortality rate in mid-Glamorgan is 9·4 per cent. higher than the average, whereas in Wales as a whole it is 8 per cent. higher. The perinatal morality rate in Mid-Glamorgan is 10·1 per cent. higher than the average; in Wales as a whole, it is 8·3 per cent. higher.

My first question to the Minister is this: what account is taken of social deprivation factors in calculating the moneys available to Mid-Glamorgan for health care? I understand that social deprivation is not taken into the calculation, and I am absolutely amazed at that. As I understand it, it is taken into account in some English regions. If that is the case, why cannot it be taken into account in the allocation of resources to health authorities in Wales? Social deprivation creates greater health demands, and extra resources are needed if only to introduce some equity into the health care provided across the whole of Wales.

The crucial problem facing us in Mid-Glamorgan is the underfunding of the service, which has culminated in the deterioration of the fabric of the buildings, although successive managements have tried hard to patch them up. The underfunding is also apparent in the waits for new and

replacement equipment, and in the fact that consultant staff have to spend much of their time in argument—sometimes quite bitter argument—about equipment priorities.

Underfunding also means that proper staffing levels cannot be reached, and inadequate remuneration is available for those who are employed—particularly ancillary and domestic staff. Highly skilled medical secretaries are paid at levels way below those paid in outside industry.

Competent managers have struggled hard to balance the books to keep departments open but have sometimes failed. The high dependency unit in the district general hospital is a classic example. It has been completed for six months but it cannot be opened because of the lack of staff to operate it.

In the district general hospital, there are insufficient medical beds. I should have thought that, in this day and age, every patient with an acute medical illness ought to have the right to be admitted to a medical bed in a district general hospital. That is often not the case.

There are insufficient cardiac care beds. For a number of years, the health authority has admitted that the coronary care unit, which at present has only four beds, is half the size that it should be according to NHS norms. It is ironic that, in an area with a high incidence of coronary heart disease, many patients cannot be admitted to the specialist high care area to which they deserve to be admitted. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd and I have been most concerned about the admissions policy of the health authority, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will wish to refer to that a little later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In Taff Ely and Rhondda, there is a shortage of medical consultant staff. There are almost twice as many medical consultants per head of population in Merthyr and Cynon valley as in Taff Ely and Rhondda. Underfunding has had a devastating effect on the morale of the staff in the service. It has led to the resignation of three of the nine medical consultants appointed to Taff Ely and Rhondda in the past 20 years. The fact that one third of those medical consultants have voted with their feet—something unheard of in other hospitals—clearly indicates the poor working conditions in the area and the demoralisation of the consultant work force. It cannot be said that these are the underpaid members of the health service. These are not problems of the past. The last consultant to resign left work only last week, and it has been disclosed to me that, because of the conditions in which they have to work, others are contemplating leaving.

The resources coming into the area as a whole are inadequate. We all suffer from this problem, but there is additional inequity in Mid-Glamorgan. Health resources are not distributed equitably, and once again the valleys are losing out. I emphasise that this maldistribution must be seen in the context of a total lack of resources. This reinforces my argument for the provision of more resources for the area as a whole. Reasons for the maldistribution have been put forward. For example, it has been said that the area of Bridgend has more representatives on the health authority than other parts of the county have. It is a question either of better lobbiers or of better voters. In any case, it seems to us that the traffic is one way—from the valleys to the south.

With regard to membership of the health authority, all Mid-Glamorgan Members of Parliament are appalled at the Secretary of State's appointment in the past year or so of authority members who do not even live in the authority's area. Those friends of the Tory party and friends of the Minister have not been appointed because of their involvement in the community. That is something that my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) will rectify as soon as we win the election, which will be shortly.

The Rhondda valley, which represents one half of the district, is obviously of particular concern to me. My constituents are extremely worried about the delay in the construction of a second community hospital in the lower part of the Rhondda. The Minister was present at the opening of the new community hospital in the upper Rhondda. That is a splendid facility, but the Minister will acknowledge that, with the closure of two older but perfectly adequate hospitals, there has been a decrease in the number of beds. Almost all the beds available in the community hospital are for geriatric or psycho-geriatric patients. There are no extra acute facilities.

If we get a new district general hospital, it will lead to the closure of the Llwynypia hospital in the southern part of the constituency, and the hospital service in the Rhondda will become a geriatric ghetto with no acute facilities at all. My constituents in the top part of the Rhondda will have a 20-mile journey for the most mundane examinations and treatment. Why are maternity services being transferred from Llwynypia hospital? Hospital births are not now possible in the Rhondda. When I have raised the matter, I have been told that there is no demand for those facilities and that the existing facilities are under-used. Yes, they are under-used, but that is because mothers are not encouraged to use them. It is a pretty old trick to run down a facility to such an extent that people do not or cannot use it and then to use that as an excuse for closing it down.

There is no 24-hour accident and emergency service, and out-patient facilities are appalling and cramped. Morale among staff working in such conditions is at an all-time low. I could quote from an unsolicited letter received on 20 December, but shortage of time prevents my doing so. The writer did not want to have his name divulged as he felt that if it were known that he had given the information he would be victimised.

The rundown in services has caused a substantial problem in the Rhondda. Communities such as mine have depended on heavy industry. If we are to keep our population, which is declining, and if we are to keep our young people in modern houses, which are being built in some sectors, they must have the facilities to keep them there. Otherwise, they will leave. The valley communities, with their special culture and special background, will end up empty—like wild west towns which have served their purpose and closed down. I recently visited an old friend with whom I worked in Montana, and I went to him to an old mining town that had been closed. Only two or three people live in the town, whereas about 4,000 people once lived and worked there. I do not want my communities to end up like that. That is why I am anxious that we get facilities back into the Rhondda.

I can remember when bad mistakes were made by the Welsh Office. I am not being political—I do not know when the original decision was made. When it was decided to build the University hospital in Cardiff and the so-called Cardiff plan was introduced, it was decided to have one centre of excellence in south Wales or in the eastern part of south Wales. The valleys were drained of services in

[Mr. Allan Rogers]

Caerphilly, Aberbargoed, Llwynypia and Porth hospitals, to which the miners had contributed out of their own pockets. All the facilities and staff were drained out of Cardiff.

Fortunately, when the Mid-Glamorgan health authority was set up—I sat on the authority when it was set up in 1973—we stopped the Cardiff plan dead. We stopped the closure of those community hospitals. Medical opinion—or bureaucratic opinion. I should say—which runs the health service within our structures has now caught up with us. It now realises that the development of community hospitals is needed in our valleys.

We also have the problem of the district general hospital. By odd coincidence, although it serves primarily the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd and myself, it is situated in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, who therefore has a very strong vested interest in it.

I wish that the Minister would listen rather than talk to the Government Whip. Perhaps the Whip could leave the Minister alone for a moment so that I could address him. Is the construction of that district general hospital to go ahead? In a private conversation—he will not mind my repeating it—the Minister said, "We have given authority and approval." I went back to the health authority and said, "Why do you not go ahead and build it?" It said, "We have had approval for the design, but we have not had the money approved." I will gladly give way to the Minister. Will he give the assurance that he gave in answer to me during a radio programme as well as in a telephone conversation? Will he say that Mid-Glamorgan can have the money to proceed immediately with the district general hospital?

It is no good the Minister saying that it is up to the health authority. Under the new financial arrangements, it being an item worth more than £4 million capital expenditure, the decision is now to be made by the Welsh Office. The decision does not now lie with the health authority. Will the Minister give the assurance that he gave me, that the health authority can now proceed with the new district general hospital?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): I shall do so when I reply.

Mr. Rogers: I thank the Minister. While he is at it, could he also say what size it will be? The Percy Thomas Partnership did a survey on the need for hospital beds in the Rhondda some years ago. It said that, in order to meet health needs, a hospital of 800 beds was required. There is a huge population in that area. I now understand that there is a proposal to construct a hospital of 530 beds. That is just not adequate. It is smaller than the present hospital in Church Village. In 10 years, we shall have the same problems and, as a consequence, the service will operate on a split site.

There is enormous concern about the fact that psychiatric services will not be provided at the new hospital. A consultant has written to me, stating:

"I am writing to you to express my own very deep concern, and that of my colleagues working in psychiatry . . . that the new District General Hospital planned at Ynys Y Plwm will have no provision for the treatment of psychiatric patients as part of its first phase . . . The Mid Glamorgan strategy for the development of Mental Health Services has been based on belief in the idea of the devolution of psychiatric services from hospitals which are isolated from other parts of the medical and social services, instead of linking them with the mainstream of these services, as near as possible to the patients' homes . . . It is particularly ironic that the closure of one psychiatric ghetto, Parc Hospital, in 1993 will now be closely followed by the establishment of another, more so at a time when a new District General Hospital Psychiatric Unit is being built at Bridgend."

Will the Minister give us an assurance that psychiatric services will be included at the new district general hospital? We grew up with our mentally ill friends, families and neighbours being committed to vast institutions which depersonalised them. We moved from that Victorian concept of care for the mentally ill to the point where we look after them in the community on a decent, caring basis. It would be utterly wrong to exclude psychiatric services from the main stream of hospital services. We do not want another psychiatric ghetto in Mid-Glamorgan.

I shall conclude because several of my hon. Friends wish to speak. I plead with the Minister to look carefully at Mid-Glamorgan's case. We need extra money and decisions to be taken soon in the interests of serving the people of that area.

12.31 am

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I hope that the Minister will realise that I, too, have a great deal to say, but no time in which to say it. I also hope that he will give us the straight answers that he often has in the past, although we might not have agreed with them.

I should like to amplify a couple of points that have already been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). We should like to know whether we are to have a new district general hospital at the Ynys-y-Plwm site, and how large it will be. Is the Minister aware of the concerns that have been expressed to us by consultants, staff, auxiliaries and everyone else who is concerned with health care about what they perceive to be a lack of adequate planned space and facilities at the new hospital? They are afraid that the new facility will be smaller than the existing one and that many of the units, many of which were named by my hon. Friend, will not be adequately replaced in terms of space and facilities at the new hospital.

They are especially worried about the departments of paediatrics and physiotherapy. There is a famous physiotherapy centre at Talygarn, which Mid-Glamorgan health authority proposes to close. We have been told that it will be all right and that "space will be found at the new hospital to replace it". But that is not the perception of those who have seen the plans, who are extremely worried that those important functions will not be catered for in the new hospital. I should like to know whether that will be the case.

The Minister will know that there is a spending crisis at East Glamorgan hospital. The funding crisis involves a current overspend of about £900,000. What will the Minister do to ensure that that does not involve the closure of wards or the non-reopening of certain wards that have been closed for refurbishment? I am sure that he agrees that in an area of social deprivation, such as Mid-Glamorgan, there are great inadequacies in the provision of speech therapy, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy for children. What will be those areas' future health provision under the new hospital provision plans that are being hatched in the Welsh Office and Mid-Glamorgan?

We are talking not simply about community services but about combined services by both hospitals and communities, in just the same way as is required for mental health services under the new legislation. Many of us are worried that ambulance services are greatly stretched in Mid-Glamorgan and especially in the Rhondda and Taff-Ely areas. We are worried that there may be instances in which adequate ambulance cover is not provided.

I ask the Under-Secretary to ensure that never again will an admissions policy such as that operated by Mid-Glamorgan for so long be pursued. The over-70s were treated almost as if they were the walking dead. They did not qualify for the cardiac facilities and treatments offered to people under that arbitrary age. I hope that the Minister has something to say about that.

The staff of Mid-Glamorgan and especially East Glamorgan hospitals are doing a magnificent job. They deserve much better facilities. The fabric of East Glamorgan is falling apart. I hope that the Minister will tell us that we shall get a new hospital.

12.35 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I shall be brief because of the time factor. We want a response from the Minister to all the questions that have been put to him. We hope to see a hospital established one day. It will not be in the lifetime of the Government, because they have only a few months to go. There is no doubt that it will need a Labour Government to establish a hospital in Ynys-y-Plwm to cater for the population in the area, and especially in Taff-Ely, the Rhondda and the part of the Ogmore constituency that stretches to Ynys-y-Plwm.

Promises have been made in the past. My hon. Friend for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) referred to the Princess of Wales hospital and the facilities in the Bridgend area. It took 25 years of campaigning in that area to establish the hospital in the Bridgend area. The services do not fulfil the promises made by the area health authority when it closed the small hospitals in the Ogwr borough area. The authority said that the Princess of Wales hospital phase 1 would be developed to replace the services. Indeed, the Minister of State, Welsh Office promised me in 1983 that he would have phase 2 established immediately following the completion of phase 1. We are still waiting for phase 2 to be developed in Bridgend. We are well under-provided for in the Bridgend area.

Therefore, it is more necessary now for Ynys-y-Plwm hospital to be established. I eagerly await the Minister's reply, and promises not only from him but from the area health authority. I endorse what my hon. Friends have said about the disturbed condition of hospital services, especially in East Glamorgan. East Glamorgan is in a terrible state of repair, decoration and equipment. The staff are becoming frustrated daily and leaving the service. We cannot afford to allow that to continue.

I would like to speak for much longer, because the hospital will be established in part of my constituency. I hope that the area health authority will read in *Hansard* the speeches made tonight and take note of them. I hope that, in future discussions about Ynys-y-Plwm, it will include me among those whom it invites to discuss the problems of some 15,000 to 20,000 of my constituents who will be in the catchment area. I hope that the Minister will have sufficient time to reply to the questions that we have put to him.

12.38 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) is a little optimistic if he thinks that in four minutes I can reply adequately to the debate. I assure the hon. Gentlemen who have spoken that I will look through everything that they have said and write to them.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on obtaining this debate. It is an achievement to obtain an Adjournment debate. However—the hon. Gentleman knows that I am going to say this—most of the matters that he has raised are for the district health authority. I am sure that the chairman of the authority and his colleagues will look carefully at the remarks made in the debate.

I have visited seven facilities in Mid-Glamorgan during the past year. At five of them, I was opening new facilities; at one I was attending the opening of a new facility by Lord Tonypandy, which was named after him—ysbyty George Thomas. The hon. Member for Rhondda was present when Lord Tonypandy opened that facility. There have been considerable achievements in Mid-Glamorgan during the past year, one of which was the opening of a new regional treatment centre. Mid-Glamorgan now has two of the four centres.

I acknowledge that the Rhondda area is one of great social deprivation. Of the 11 wards, four are in the top five of the index and nine are in the top 50. That has been recognised in our urban programme. We have given £2 million to the Rhondda this year, a higher amount than to any other district in Wales. The health authority has received £16·5 million in total under the programme for the valleys initiative for 17 schemes, one of which was the new community hospital in the Rhondda, ysbyty George Thomas. The know-your-midwife scheme received £120,000 under the programme of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales for the valleys initiative. A further £36,000 is being made available during the current financial year to complete the pattern of service in the Rhondda valleys.

The hon. Member for Rhondda mentioned the new formula. It helps health authorities because it weights the population of an area according to the social problems in terms of the age of the population and of ill health. It will be of great importance to the health authority.

The hon. Member for Rhondda asserted that the health authority was underfunded. We are spending about £204 million this year, which is a cash increase of 11·3 per cent. Expenditure in Mid-Glamorgan, after inflation, has risen by 34 per cent. since 1979. During the same period, there has been capital investment of £127 million. I am glad to say that, as a result, activity in Mid-Glamorgan has increased considerably. Between 1974 and 1979, in-patient numbers rose by 9 per cent., and they have risen by 40 per cent. since then. Day case surgery decreased by 29 per cent. under the Labour Government, but since then it has increased by 840 per cent. As for new out-patients, it was minus 2 per cent. during 1974-79; it has increased by 29 per cent. under the Conservative Government. I congratulate the Mid-Glamorgan health authority on its excellent work.

As the hon. Member for Rhondda said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave approval for a new district general hospital at Ynys-y-Plwm only last April. It will cost about £70 million, and it will have about 529 beds.

[Mr. Nicholas Bennett]

It will be a brand new health facility for the Rhondda area by the end of the century, and I believe that it will be the best in Europe. Far from criticism, we can see an excellent record of achievement by the Mid-Glamorgan health authority—new facilities, high expenditure and many improvements in the health service. I am committed, as the Minister who is responsible for health in Wales, to continue that.

I am sorry that I have had only four minutes to reply to the debate. I shall respond in writing to the detailed questions of hon. Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 15 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) *[Lords]* BILL

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL

As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Inward Investors

1. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the impact of the Maastricht agreement on the relative attractiveness of the United Kingdom and other European countries to inward investors.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): The United Kingdom is already the number one destination for foreign investment in the Community. The fact that we shall not have burdensome employment legislation imposed on us by Maastricht may make this country more attractive still for foreign investors.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree with Commissioner Delors that the absence of a social chapter makes Britain by far the most attractive place for overseas investment within the European Community? Will he guarantee that if Commissioner Delors and his friends seek to impose a social chapter using other headings the Government will challenge their legal right to do so?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with President Delors that the exclusion of that aspect from the full Maastricht settlement would make Britain a paradise for inward investment, and I have had that message communicated to all trade attachés in our embassies throughout the world. We shall, of course, resist any attempt to introduce such legislation by other means. Legally, it will be harder for anyone to do so now that the separate protocol to which we are not party provides, for those who wish it, the opportunity to introduce such legislation.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the most successful recipients of inward investment has been and can continue to be the financial services sector? Does he agree with the chairman of that industry, Sir Patrick Sheehy, that to opt out of the single currency would be a foolish measure? Does he agree with Sir Patrick that the United Kingdom can retain its pre-eminent role in Europe in the financial services sector only if it subscribes enthusiastically to the principle of a single currency?

Mr. Lilley: We shall have to consider that decision if and when the time comes, and we have a right in this House to do so. We should, however, recollect that one of the reasons for the strength of the City of London is that it has consistently followed a very open policy, which is not always followed on the continent and elsewhere. That is what has made us so attractive. Uniformity of policy throughout Europe would have prevented us from building up the strength of the City of London.

Mr. Favell: My right hon. Friend will remember that when the Government came to power the country was suffering from the problems of being hopelessly non-competitive. If a Government who embraced the social charter were returned from the Opposition parties, would we not soon be back in those waters and simply become an industrial desert?

Mr. Lilley: That is, indeed, the risk that British industry foresaw, which is why it urged us to do what we did. That is also why it so much welcomed the successful outcome of the Maastricht agreement on those lines. It is pretty clear that Labour believes that it cannot get a majority for those policies domestically and therefore wants to achieve a situation in which they can be imposed on us by a majority of continental countries. I thought it particularly strange that the Labour party should label its new policy, "Made in Britain", when its strategy is to ensure that British policy is made on the continent.

Mr. Hoyle: Will the Secretary of State stop looking for scapegoats for Maastricht? He boasts about inward investment, but is he not aware that following the last slump under this Government, between 1979-81, investment in manufacturing industry was so slow that the capacity is now hardly any higher than it was 12 years ago? Investment is falling back rapidly and all forecasts show that unless the Government's policies are changed there will be 4 million unemployed by the year 2000.

Mr. Lilley: That is absolutely incorrect, and I take it that the hon. Gentleman is dissociating himself from Labour Front Bench policy on the Maastricht settlement. Comparing this point in the economic cycle with the same point 10 years ago, during that period manufacturing output has risen by a quarter, manufacturing investment by a third, manufacturing productivity by a half and manufacturing exports by three quarters.

Telephone Charges

2. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the system for regulating telephone charges since 1984.

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): The Government have set up an effective system of regulation. During the period of controlled prices, those that are under the regulator's eye have fallen by 27 per cent. in real terms. The three-minute cheap rate for local calls is now cheaper in cash terms than it was in 1981. That is effective Conservative regulation in action.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend confirm that 96 per cent. of phone boxes now work and that phone call charges have been cut faster in this country than in any other country, thanks to the Government's privatisation policy? Will he ensure that there is more competition in both phone and postal services, and will he bear in mind the excellent postal service provided in my constituency by Document Interlink Ltd?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right that this country has the best regulatory system for reducing real phone charges. He is also right to say that regulations improve the quality of service. Not only do a greater proportion of phone boxes work, but there are more boxes today than there were before we introduced the privatised control system. My hon. Friend may like to know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State today set out in a speech the importance of improving and strengthening competition in a range of postal services. I am well aware of my hon. Friend's constituency interest as I visited that company and know how good it is.

Mr. Lewis: Will the Minister recognise that some of the benefits that he announced this afternoon are the result of cross-subsidy from the dirty, sleazy pornographic phone calls that he and his colleagues have encouraged for some time? Will he today resist the introduction of the 75p per minute further added value services now suggested?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman knows that that allegation is untrue, but I am glad that he accepts that the quality of service has improved and that there have been improvements in the pricing of a number of British Telecom services. Bearing in mind the hon. Gentleman's interventions and today's debates in the House, he may like to know that there has been yet further strengthening of the regulatory system in relation to the services to which he objects. I assure him that there is a common interest across the Floor of the House in seeing that nasty services of that kind are not allowed on the BT network.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that nearly half of the top 500 companies in the European Community are British, led by British Telecom?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right—United Kingdom firms have done extremely well in the list of top companies in Europe. That came as no surprise to us, as we know how good the business climate in this country has been in recent years with the success of deregulation and low taxation and the attractiveness of Britain as a home of inward investment. My hon. Friend is right to say that BT is one of the leading companies and has made an important contribution to our economy.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Why is the Minister so selective and defensive in his choice of statistics? Why will he not accept responsibility for the rise in telecommunication charges above inflation during the 13 years of the Government's misrule? Why does he not give the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) a copy of last month's Department of Employment gazette, which shows that the rise in telecommunication charges during the past year has been 7 per cent. while the retail prices index has risen by less than 4 per cent? Is it not true that too many people have phone bills that are too high? Why has the Secretary of State failed effectively to tackle those problems and to take action against the excessive profits and unacceptable boardroom pay rises and perks?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman's question was as excessively lengthy as the price increases under Labour, with the nationalised industry in the 1970s, were excessively great—far greater than any under the regulatory regime set out by this Government. The hon. Gentleman should also know that the average residential bill has been falling. Of course, the extent of the fall depends on the use made of the service and on the balance between rental and call charges. Nevertheless, the average bill, assuming equal use, has been falling.

RECHAR

3. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on RECHAR.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): The European Commission's approval of the programmes for RECHAR grants for British coalfield areas is overdue.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Secretary of State for the Environment mistaken in pointing out that the Government's position on RECHAR has become untenable?

Mr. Leigh: For a start, the so-called leaked document in question dates from last July. Discussions do take place within this Government—we are not so Stalinist as Labour's national executive committee in these matters.

Secondly, our position is clear: we will not allow the House of Commons to lose its control of public spending. Labour Members may be interested in devolving power to the nomenklatura of Brussels—we are not.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The Cannock Chase area badly needs these funds, not just in my constituency but in surrounding constituencies. Is my hon. Friend aware that we hold entirely responsible for this delay the former Labour Member of Parliament and now Commissioner in Brussels, Bruce Millan, who is playing a fairly despicable party political game? Will my hon. Friend do everything he possibly can firmly to nail the blame on Bruce Millan for the delay in these funds coming to the coalfield areas?

Mr. Leigh: I find it difficult to understand Mr. Millan's position. On his own admission he is dissatisfied with additionality procedures in other countries—for instance, in Italy, the Netherlands and France—but, uniquely, he picks on this country, despite the fact that the structural funds have doubled and we are not receiving any benefit. Why is that? I understand that Mr. Millan is a socialist; could he be making a party political point? Is he an honourable man?

These funds have been administered in this way since 1975. When Mr. Millan was Secretary of State for Scotland he administered them in exactly the same way as that for which he criticises us. What is he trying to do?

Mr. Eadie: The Minister himself was making a party political point in his reply. Will he come back to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths)? The Department of the Environment says that the Government's position is untenable. Is the Minister aware that France, Germany

and Spain have carried out their undertakings under the agreement? Does he not realise that his party is being slaughtered in Scotland? We are job-hungry in Scotland and we need this money. Why does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the position is untenable and reach an agreement to bring the money to the areas which need it?

Mr. Leigh: I agree with the hon. Gentleman to this extent—that the coal mining areas need this money. If Mr. Millan releases the money, every last penny of it will go to the coalfield areas. I have said that Mr. Millan is an honourable man—*[Interruption.]*—and I am sure that Mr. Millan wants the money to go to those areas. We pay in £300 million more to the European Commission than we receive back. The ball is now in the Commission's court. These moneys are genuinely additional. All that Mr. Millan has to do is to release the money and it will be spent.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Is it not outrageous that coalfield areas such as Nottinghamshire which have been waiting nearly two years for this money are still denied it because of the party political games played by the former Cabinet Minister and now Labour Commissioner Millan? Will my hon. Friend make sure that he or his officials contact the office of Commissioner Millan today and demand that the money be freed so that it can be well spent in areas such as the one that I represent?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is quite right. There is another point: the additionality test is to ensure that the moneys are spent only because of the grant. Clearly, the moneys are not being spent, because Mr. Millan is holding up their distribution. What clearer laboratory or litmus test could there be to show that our methods are genuinely additional? I repeat that Mr. Millan has had his day in court. These moneys are genuinely additional and we await his decision. We want these moneys to go to the coal mining areas, many of which are represented by Labour Members. I hope that they will take the opportunity to ask Mr. Millan to release these moneys for the benefit of their areas.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Minister accept that although some of us may have a disagreement with Bruce Millan, we have known him for many years and we know that he has always been, and is, punctilious in the exercise of his duties? He could certainly teach the hon. Gentleman how to master legislation. I have complete confidence in Mr. Millan's analysis of the situation. When will the Government own up to their responsibilities and release the money to areas such as Fife which need it?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. When Mr. Millan was Secretary of State he was punctilious in operating a system that he now condemns. The House is entitled to ask why that was so. For the sake of the hon. Gentleman's constituency and areas such as the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), these moneys must be released. Some £109 million is being held up. We made it absolutely clear to Mr. Millan and the Commission that we were prepared to be flexible and to listen to any representations. At the end of the day, however, we must ensure that the House retains control of public expenditure. That is the reality of the dispute. Hon. Members must address that problem. Opposition Members may wish to make party political points, but do they want to lose control of public spending?

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the Minister's unsatisfactory reply and the slur on Bruce Millan, I shall have to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Inward Investors

4. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the impact of the Maastricht agreement on the attractiveness of the United Kingdom to inward investors from the United States.

Mr. Lilley: The United Kingdom has for many years been the preferred location for United States investment in Europe. The Maastricht agreement will help us to maintain that privileged position.

Mr. Soames: Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents fully recognise the enormous benefits of inward investment from the United States and elsewhere, from which my constituency has benefited greatly? Business men in my constituency believe that the Maastricht agreement set exactly the right tone for business in the 1990s. Does my right hon. Friend welcome the splendid announcement of a multi-million pound investment in my constituency this week by Smith Kline Beecham?

Mr. Lilley: I am happy to welcome that investment, and I imagine that it owes much to the climate and environment that the Government have created and which might have been threatened by an alternative settlement at Maastricht such as the Opposition would have supported and implemented if they were ever elected. That is why we shall continue to pursue our policies. Our success in attracting more investment from the United States than has been attracted by all the countries of western Europe put together is proof that we have created a more attractive climate for investment than anywhere else in Europe.

Mr. James Lamond: Which aspect of this industrial investment paradise does the Secretary of State think is most attractive to inward investors? Is it that they will not be bothered by maximum working hours or minimum wages, or is it just that the trade union movement in this country has been crippled by repressive legislation over the past 12 years?

Mr. Lilley: We have carried out surveys to determine what aspects of the environment in this country are most attractive to inward investors. They are, first, the reforms of industrial relations which have created harmonious working practices, all of which were opposed and many of which would be reversed by a Labour Government. Secondly, this country has a lower burden of tax than many of our European partners, but the Opposition are determined to reverse that. The third reason is the end of nationalisation and the introduction of privatisation, which is being opposed by the Labour party. Finally, inward investors find attractive the measures that we have taken to improve training and skills, almost every one of which has been opposed by Labour.

Sir Michael Grylls: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the message goes out from British trade missions throughout the United States to American firms contemplating investing in Britain that we operate an open free market economy with low taxation and that we have no intention of introducing unnecessary social costs which would make business less competitive? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that that message is made known throughout the American business community?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in congratulating my hon. Friend on the recognition of his distinction, not least in defending the business and small business communities in this country. I entirely endorse what he said: we need to maintain a liberal, open, free market society. That is what attracts investment from abroad and makes it profitable for domestic industry to invest as well.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are making rather slow progress today. I now propose to move on more rapidly, and would ask for brief questions and answers, please.

Industrial Policy

5. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet representatives of the north-east regional CBI to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lilley: Ministers and officials of my Department keep in touch with the CBI on a wide range of business matters. I shall be visiting the north-east again on 19 February.

Mr. Campbell: Business failures are now running at 57 per cent. in the north-east and 65 per cent. nationally. Will the Secretary of State admit that the Government have made a right mess of the economy and of businesses of the north-east?

Mr. Lilley: The north-east has been transformed for the better, not least by the flow of inward investment and the diversification that has taken place. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman runs his region down instead of talking up its successes. Nissan is to employ 4,000 people by August 1992 and Fujitsu is creating 1,500 extra jobs. The Department of Trade and Industry alone has spent £1·5 billion in the past 10 years in the hon. Gentleman's region, the success of which is shown by the success of local businesses and industry. The hon. Gentleman should pay tribute to them.

Mr. Dunn: When my right hon. Friend meets the CBI in the north-east, will he try to explain away the inconsistency that has occurred in the Labour party? Last week it announced a "Made in Britain" campaign; yet its deputy leader is a Birmingham Member of Parliament who drives a top of the range French Citroen motor car.

Mr. Lilley: I thought that that was interesting news. It shows—we are not allowed to use the word hypocrisy, are we? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Then it shows the hypocrisy of the Labour party, which claims "Made in Britain" as its slogan while its Members of Parliament drive around in French motor cars and spend most of their time denigrating British industry.

Mr. Beith: Does the Secretary of State agree that trade and industry in the north-east need good communications and that the existence of direct rail links to the channel tunnel and a much better A1 between the north-east and Scotland are extremely important to trade and industry? He has a legitimate voice in governmental discussions. Will he use that voice to get such projects approved?

Mr. Lilley: In many respects, the hon. Gentleman is right. I have to be the voice of industry within the Government, arguing the case for the needs of business, and I do. The Government have given renewed priority to improvements in the infrastructure—in roads and railways and other transport. That shows through in many ways. We have harnessed the private sector. The channel tunnel is entirely privately financed. Had we relied on public sector finance, it would have been another century before we had such an opportunity for British industry, with all the infrastructure back-up that will flow from it.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Karl Watkin, the chairman and managing director of Crabtree, an engineering company employing 270 people in Gateshead, whom the Secretary of State knows, as he visited the plant last year, was last week voted north-east business man of the year. In his acceptance speech, he said that the Government's economic policy was damaging business in the north-east. Does the Secretary of State dismiss him as a dismal Jimmy, or does he agree with me that Mr. Watkin knows what he is talking about?

Mr. Lilley: I have met Mr. Watkin, and found him a lively and stimulating character. Last time I met him, he said that words attributed to him in the House had not been words that he had uttered. Perhaps the same is true again.

Industrial Development Act 1982

6. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the working of the Industrial Development Act 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: A description of the way in which the powers conferred by the Industrial Development Act 1982 are exercised is contained in the statutory annual report. This includes details of financial assistance to industry.

Copies of the most recent report for the year ending 31 March are in the Library.

Mr. Wigley: I am well aware of the contents of the report. Is the Minister aware that many of the schemes in the report now appear dated, as do the geographical definitions of the areas that can benefit? For example, in Wales, the micro-electronics scheme has provided only £100,000, for a total of £80 million spent on it. Moreover, selective regional assistance in Wales fell, from £80 million three years ago to only £50 million a year ago. Will the Government please review the workings of the Act and make them more effective?

Mr. Leigh: The Act is already very effective because grants made under it are selective. We spend about £567 million on regional selective assistance in the public expenditure survey round, and I think that most people now accept that it has been more effective than the automatic grants made under the regional development

grants system. Wales benefits greatly: about £124 is spent per taxpayer in the assisted areas there, compared with £82 in Scotland and £41 in England.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the assisted area map. That map will be reviewed, as it is once every Parliament, at the beginning of the next Parliament.

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: Will my hon. Friend ensure that, in areas of Devon and Cornwall where unemployment reaches levels as high as those in similar areas of Scotland and Wales, similar benefits under the Industrial Development Act 1982 will be available, as they are not at present?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is wrong—if he does not mind my saying so—in the way in which he phrases his question. Regional selective assistance is equal wherever it is applied for in Great Britain, although the limits for Northern Ireland are higher. A large part of Cornwall is covered by assisted areas. The assisted area map may well change after the general election, but I can assure my hon. Friend that we ensure absolute fairness between assisted areas and that no one area is disadvantaged or advantaged in relation to the others.

Mr. Jack Thompson: Is the Minister aware that, after the general election, the assisted area map will change because the Government will change, and that changes are necessary? For instance, in the county of Northumberland, we have an assisted development area pattern that runs from east to west—to areas such as Ponteland and Darras Hall, a huge executive residential estate which does not want or require industry. The industrial pattern runs from the south-east to the north of the county and the assisted area pattern ought to be changed to reflect the needs of the county as a whole. The industrial pattern in Northumberland runs from the south-east corner to the north—to the area represented by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). That pattern needs to be changed now, not after the general election, to reflect the needs of industry and the county.

Mr. Leigh: The European Commission allows assisted areas to cover about 35 per cent. of the population. We are up against a ceiling and if we added new areas to the map, we should have to remove other areas. If we are to maintain confidence in the system, there is no point in our mucking around with the map several times in each Parliament. It is much better to have one review and to have it at the beginning of the Parliament, and that is exactly what we shall do. The assisted area map will change not because the Government will change but because circumstances have changed since the last review. We shall ensure that the map is drawn objectively.

Investment Location

7. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from business men concerning the impact of the regulatory environment on decisions about location of investment.

Mr. Redwood: Overseas undertakings investing in the United Kingdom often comment favourably on our regulatory regime. It is one of the reasons why the United Kingdom is the preferred location for United States and Japanese undertakings investing in the European Community.

Mr. MacKay: As my hon. Friend has said, our regulatory climate has encouraged a lot of inward investment. How distressed and worried is industry in those regions that we might mistakenly have a Labour Government, which would do so much damage to inward investment?

Mr. Redwood: Many people are asking worried questions about just that point. They do not like the prospect of higher taxation, the minimum wage, the social charter or the Maastricht social clauses. These would put a massive burden on business. It is very important, therefore, that the Conservative Government continue in power to ensure that the climate remains favourable for the attraction of the lion's share of foreign investment into the European Community.

Dr. Moonie: The Minister will not be surprised to learn that my question concerns the regulatory environment of British Steel, in which the Government hold the golden share. Are the Government prepared to exercise their right, as the holders of that share, to ensure that British Steel agrees to implement its promise that it would either stay at Ravenscraig or sell the plant to somebody else?

Mr. Redwood: That question has been answered very fully by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and by other Ministers, and there is nothing that I want to add. These are commercial decisions and British Steel's actions are within the terms of the guarantees that it has given.

Political Risk Insurance

9. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he intends to take to ensure that British firms are able to obtain political risk insurance with speed and on terms that enable them to compete on equal terms with their international competitors.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The Government have already ensured that competitive political insurance can be provided by the private market, supported where necessary by Export Credits Guarantee Department reinsurance facilities.

Mr. Michael: Can the Minister tell us how the Government are ensuring the speedy response necessitated by changing circumstances in other parts of the world, particularly areas with which Britain had close links in the past? I am thinking of the current situation in Somalia and of events in eastern Europe. How is the Minister making sure that in the new situation that the Government have created they are able to respond quickly and effectively? Other countries seem to do better.

Mr. Sainsbury: I take it that the hon. Gentleman is referring to reinsurance provided by the private sector through the recently privatised insurance services group, which was formerly in ECGD but is now in NCM Credit Insurance Ltd. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have put in place arrangements under which, in the very few markets that the private sector does not accept,

reinsurance can be provided through ECGD. There are 200 countries in which the private sector is providing the necessary reinsurance.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Is not it a fact that the principal political risk against which British industry needs insurance is the risk of a Labour Government? In the event of the Labour party coming to power British industry would be overtaxed, over-inflated, over-regulated and overburdened with additional costs such as the minimum wage.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes his point very effectively. There is a growing awareness of the disadvantages to employment and industry that a return to the discredited and failed policies of the Labour party would create.

Industrialists (Representations)

10. **Mr. Grist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from industrialists on Government intervention in the strategic direction and investment in companies.

Mr. Lilley: The CBI report "Competing with the World's Best" rejected the notion that the Government could or should

"be in the business of picking winners, or of engaging in direct intervention in the strategic direction and management of companies".

Mr. Grist: Does my right hon. Friend mean that British industrialists do not want to go back to national plans, solemn and binding undertakings, high inflation, nationalisation, high taxation and trade union unrest? That, after all, is the Labour party's policy for this country. Is it really true that industrialists do not want to return to such a situation?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When I meet industrialists their first question is, "How can we prevent a return to the policies still advocated by the Labour party?" On the specific question of picking winners, they remember all too well the failures of the national enterprise board, which invested in just over 100 companies. Of those, 35 were liquidated or went into receivership, 38 were sold at a loss, and only 29 were sold at a price that returned the initial taxpayers' investment. Industrialists know that that policy was a failure, and they do not want to go back to it.

Dr. Reid: Is not that the most open admission yet that, despite the honeyed words of the Secretary of State for Scotland, he has done nothing, is doing nothing and will do nothing to intervene in any way to help to save the Ravenscraig plant? The Government will not assist in finding a purchaser. They are refusing adamantly even to investigate thin slab technology. I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the Secretary of State for Scotland's words in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), in which he refused a meeting and stated:

"Ravenscraig shows the folly of political intervention in commercial decisions".

Does not that show that, despite all the promises and pledges, in the past five years the Government have carried out a sorry and tragic charade and have connived at every stage with Black Bob Scholey to sell off the Scottish steel industry?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland made our position on that matter clear yesterday. What was not made clear then was the Opposition's position. When questioned on the radio, they admitted that their policy was to talk about the issue. When pressed and asked, "What if British Steel refuses to change its policy after talking?" the Opposition gave no indication of what they would do. I offer the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman an opportunity now to say what they would do. Would they renationalise British Steel, intervene in British Steel, subsidise British Steel or just talk about it?

Manufacturing Output

11. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has recently received about manufacturing output.

Mr. Leigh: I have received the recent excellent report by the CBI's manufacturing advisory group which showed that there has been a transformation in manufacturing performance during the 1980s.

Mr. McMaster: Has the Minister no shame about the fact that his Government have committed industrial genocide against Scottish manufacturing? Is he aware that, in addition to what is happening at Ravenscraig, the Paisley postcode area lost 76 per cent. of its manufacturing jobs between 1979 and 1989 and that a further 3,600 redundancies have been announced since then? Does he agree with the Prime Minister who told me in a letter this week that even that does not justify a special economic initiative or does he agree with local industry which is crying out for a partnership with Government to take Britain out of recession?

Mr. Leigh: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, we are in the midst of a world recession. Even in the engine rooms of the world's manufacturing market place, such as Japan and the United States, output is falling. The first important point, however, is that compared with the same point on the economic cycle 10 years ago, manufacturing volume is up three quarters, productivity is up half and output is up one third. The second point is what I call the "two Ks" point. If one is in the midst of a worldwide tempest of economic recession, whom does one want on the bridge —my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary or their shadows, the two Ks?

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my hon. Friend remind Opposition Members that under this Government manufacturing output has increased by a quarter whereas it fell under the last Labour Government? Will he also remind them that we now have a surplus on steel products of £1 billion per year compared with a deficit of £1 billion per year under Labour? If the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), has the guts and really cares about Ravenscraig, will my hon. Friend ask him to stand up now and commit a future Labour Government to keeping Ravenscraig open?

Mr. Leigh: We shall wait to see whether the hon. Gentleman does precisely that. My hon. Friend is right to

point to the transformation of British industry. For proof of that, one need only read the CBI's report which, among other things, stated that recent years have seen

"a transformation of Britain's manufacturing base . . . there is now a solid base on which to build. The performance of UK manufacturing over the last decade shows what can be achieved . . . Companies based in Britain are able to compete sucessfully in some of the toughtest technology-intensive markets in the world"

That is what this issue is about—making British industry competitive, and that is what we have done.

Industrial Policy

12. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet representatives of the west midlands regional CBI to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lilley: I shall be visiting a number of companies in the west midlands in March.

Mr. Turner: Does the Secretary of State accept that urgent action is needed in the west midlands if we are to halt the worst fall in manufacturing investment in history? What are the Government doing about the investment gap, the technology gap, the skills gap and the regional gap in the west midlands? I will tell the Minister what his Government have done; by their policies they have turned the west midlands from a productive landscape into an industrial desert.

Mr. Lilley: That is not the view of local industrial leaders as expressed in an article in *The Economist* this month. It quotes the Confederation of British Industry in the west midlands as talking of

"the tremendous potential for the medium and long-term future of the region".

It talks of Chris Tillett, a Birmingham-based economist, saying that

"the 1990s 'will be the decade of the resurgence of manufacturing regions'. Sir David Lees, chairman of . . . GKN, says there are 'great opportunities ahead'. David Boole of Jaguar Cars describes the medium-term as 'healthier than for a long time'."

Some Opposition Members have been talking down the region. Indeed, we recently saw that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has taken actions to run down the region and its potential. We believe that its potential is enomous and we have every confidence that the people of the west midlands will achieve that potential under our policies.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: May I take the opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend for accepting my invitation to address Wolverhampton chamber of commerce at its annual dinner, where he will meet many members of the west midlands region of the CBI? When he comes, will he take the opportunity to listen to them—the business men on the ground—rather than to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner)? If things are as bad as the hon. Gentleman says, will my right hon. Friend ask the business men why the west midlands has managed to attract so much investment in manufacturing from abroad, why foreign countries have chosen to locate in the United Kingdom and whether they believe that those people would stay if they had to experience the burden of heavy taxation, job losses and days lost in strikes that would occur with the return of a Labour Government?

Mr. Lilley: I am very much looking forward to meeting my hon. Friend's constituents on that occasion. She is right in saying that the west midlands has benefited from a vast increase both in the amount and the share of inward investment into this country. Ten years ago only 6 per cent. of inward investment went to the west midlands. *[Interruption.]* I am responding to the supplementary from my hon. Friend. Now 24 per cent. of inward investment goes to the west midlands. I very much hope that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), as well as my hon. Friend, will welcome the fact that whereas in 1979, 4 million working days were lost in the west midlands, recently days lost total little more than 100,000 a year.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Given that 100 companies are going under every week in the west midlands and that 1,000 companies are going under in England, Scotland and Wales, will the Secretary of State apologise to business and to the unemployed for the false promise throughout 1991 of a recovery which never materalised? Will he explain why he and the Chancellor have ruled out a manufacturing investment incentive as demanded by the CBI and other organisations? Will he explain why he is cutting the industry budget even as manufacturing investment and employment are falling and are predicted to fall further throughout 1992? Will he tell us how many thousands more people will lose their jobs while the Prime Minister tries to hang on to his?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman—a Scottish Member—refused to take the opportunity to tell us what he would do about his Scottish problem at Ravenscraig, but he has views about the west midlands. What the west midlands would like to know is whether he will now do what he has not already done, that is, repudiate the motion of the TUC to reject alien investment—as it describes Japanese investment—in this country. The west midlands, like the rest of the country, welcomes investment into the country. People there want to see more of it and they wonder why the Labour party will not repudiate measures which are designed to repel that investment.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that when he next meets representatives of the west midlands CBI or any other CBI—the north-west is my area—they are likely to raise the fact that the most powerful economies of the world, especially Germany and Japan are based on a substantial manufacturing base? Therefore, will he use all the influence of his Department to expand the shrinking manufacturing base of Britain? Manufacturing industry produces the only non-inflationary substantial economic growth—growth that is so necessary for Britain.

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with the importance that my hon. Friend attaches to manufacturing. We cannot have a successful economy without a vigorous manufacturing sector. However, I refer him to the recent report on our manufacturing performance produced by the CBI entitled "Competing with the World's Best". It refers to the resurgence of manufacturing during the 1980s and the mistaken but widespread belief that manufacturing is still shrinking. Of course, it was shrinking when Labour policies applied and afflicted the manufacturing sector more than anything else. Manufacturing suffered from poorer industrial relations as a result of Labour's union

policies, from nationalisation and from a lack of incentives. We will build up all the policies that have reversed that. We will bring about a resurgence of manufacturing. That is what we want to achieve in the 1990s.

GATT Uruguay Round

15. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the negotiations over the Uruguay round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Director General of the GATT, Mr. Dunkel, issued a draft final agreement for the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations on 20 December. Initial responses were given at a meeting on 13 January. There will now be a further, final, round of intensive negotiations, with the aim of concluding the round within the next few weeks.

Mr. Arnold: Bearing in mind the importance of the conclusion of the Uruguay round of the GATT to many industries in Britain and to third-world economies, what does my right hon. Friend see as the prospects for overcoming the obstructionism of the socialist Government of France to a successful outcome?

Mr. Sainsbury: I entirely agree that a successful outcome is important to not only the British and European economies but the economies of the developing world. The European Community has made clear its commitment to reaching an early agreement. It is true that several countries have problems with the agricultural part of the round, but those problems will have to be resolved. I emphasise that the Community has made it clear that it is ready to continue and to complete the negotiations according to the work plan laid down by Mr. Dunkel.

Mr. Cryer: Has the Minister received representations from the British Textile Confederation? It simply states that present proposals are unacceptable because they do not retain a fair and equitable trading system. Will he press that where commitments are made to open markets for textile products, a proper verification procedure must be established? If not, thousands more textile jobs will be lost in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury: Not only have I received representations from the Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance, but my right hon. Friend and I have had most useful discussions with it. I am glad to say that we were broadly in agreement on our approach to the round. The AKT welcomed features in the proposed text such as the improved protection of intellectual property rights—very important to the textile trade—more rapid and effective procedures for settling trade disputes and improved rules on anti-dumping subsidies and safeguards. Those features are all welcome to the textile trade.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friends ensure that they maintain a robust position in the final round of the GATT? It is most important to our textile industry that we reach a satisfactory conclusion. We need to preserve the jobs that we have. We have massive investment at present and we want to see it continue.

Mr. Sainsbury: I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to attach the greatest importance to achieving improved rules and disciplines, as we have throughout, along with better market openings, both of which are of importance to our textile industry, which wants lower tariffs on woollen textiles in the United States of America, where it already has a substantial export trade but where there is great further potential. We shall continue to press to achieve that objective for the benefit of that industry.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister go further and give assurances that, however desperate the European negotiators are to achieve a GATT agreement, nothing will be done to sell out the interests of British textiles and clothing? Secondly, if the GATT round collapses, will he give an assurance that contingency arrangements will be made by the British Government to ensure that the multi-fibre arrangement continues and that everything is done to defend employment and the trading position of the British textile industry?

Mr. Sainsbury: I can assure the hon. Member that there is no question of selling out any section of British industry because it is greatly to the advantage of British industry and the British economy that there should be a satisfactory outcome to the present Uruguay round.

Machine Tool Industry

16. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new incentive to manufacturers he intends to introduce to stimulate the home machine tool industry.

Mr. Leigh: The Government can best help industry—including the machine tool industry—by providing a stable economic framework and low inflation.

Sir John Farr: Is my hon. Friend aware of the dire state of the many east midlands machine tool companies? Is he aware of the real problems over on-going research? Will he consider some way to enable those firms to fund the costs of developing and bringing into use new and competitive machinery long before their existing equipment is out of date?

Mr. Leigh: The Government spend about £3 billion a year on research and development, which is a higher proportion of gross domestic product than Japan spends, but I hear what my hon. Friend says. If there is a perceived market failure, we are prepared to act, as I have already shown by pointing out how much we spend. We found that a previous scheme, which was designed to help the machine tool industry—the small engineering investment scheme—was distorting business decisions. Normally the best way forward is to create a stable environment and to cut corporation tax so that businesses can make their own investment decisions, rather than to distort those investment decisions.

Industrial Policy

17. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lilley: From time to time I meet representatives of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, or of individual chambers of commerce, to discuss industrial and trade policy.

Mr. Ross: Is the Minister aware that after two years of deep recession, 200,000 companies have gone under? As Britain entered 1992 with falling investment, rising unemployment, with the highest number of bankruptcies in western Europe, will the Government finally admit that manufacturing matters, and implement an industrial policy which will lift the United Kingdom from the bottom of the manufacturing league table?

Mr. Lilley: The House will be interested to hear from another Scottish Labour Member of Parliament who will not tell us about the Labour party's policy on Ravenscraig. I made clear in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) the importance that we attach to manufacturing and the success, which was acknowledged by the CBI, in bringing about the resurgence and renaissance in manufacturing. The fact is that manufacturing output fell under Labour. It is now up a quarter on what it was 10 years ago, investments are up a third, productivity is up by a half and exports are up by three quarters. We shall build upon that achievement in the 1990s.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

18. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about Export Credits Guarantee Department premium rates and the relative rates of the United Kingdom's principal industrial competitors.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have received a number of representations on that subject.

Mr. Pawsey: First, may I thank my right hon. Friend for the courtesy which he showed in receiving a delegation from GEC Alsthom in my constituency? May I also thank him for agreeing to visit Rugby and Kenilworth? Is my hon. Friend aware of the growing concern among industrialists about the high premium rates of the Export Credits Guarantee Department, especially when compared with those of our overseas competitors? Is he further aware that many industrialists believe that those high premium rates will cost us business and jobs? Therefore, will my right hon. Friend meet with his opposite number in the Treasury to agree a much lower figure for the premium rates of ECGD?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure my hon. Friend that I very much look forward to visiting his constituency and to meeting some of the industrialists whose interests he energetically represents.

On the rates charged by the ECGD, my hon. Friend will be aware that it is necessary to strike a balance between the national interest in providing ECGD cover for capital goods exports and the interest of the taxpayer that that should not prove to be too expensive. My hon. Friend will be aware that as a result of the debt crisis, over the past few years the ECGD has accumulated a deficit of more than £4 billion which is, of course, a deficit that falls to the taxpayer.

Devon and Cornwall Development Company

19. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support his Department has given to the Devon and Cornwall development company.

Mr. Leigh: The Department has provided no financial support for the DCDC. However, my regional director has worked closely with it in its efforts to bring together the public and private sector throughout Devon and Cornwall.

Mr. Taylor: The Minister should realise that it says everything that the Government should put in no financial support for the Devon and Cornwall development company. Many involved with its setting up feel deeply unhappy that they were misled when it was set up because the Government encouraged them and they believed that they would get direct financial support. Given the current job losses in the country, will the Government reconsider their appalling position?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. This says nothing about the Government's industrial strategy, because although the Government give nothing to the DCDC, they give more than £500,000 to the Devon and Cornwall development bureau, the inward investment bureau. The hon. Gentleman is also mistaken because he has ignored the fact that in the past three years alone, £10 million of Department of Trade and Industry money has gone to the assisted area in west Cornwall. We are fully committed to reinvigorating the economy of west Cornwall.

APEX Trust

3.31 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the APEX Trust.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): The APEX Trust was established 27 years ago to assist with the employment and rehabilitation of offenders. It is one of a number of organisations working in that field, and it has made a valuable contribution. APEX has been involved with the employment and training programmes of my Department for many years. It has participated in employment training since the launch of that programme in 1988. It has also received core funding from the Home Office.

In April 1990 the first training and enterprise councils were established. In 1990-91, 51 TECs were set up. The remainder were established in the current year, 1991-92. The TECs took over the task from the Department of contracting with providers locally for training. In the spring of 1990, the Department recontracted with employment training providers, with some adjustments in volumes and unit price. In doing so, we of course gave the providers the necessary contractual notice. When all the TECs had been established, my Department ceased to have training contracts with APEX.

All TECs have available working capital loans to meet initial costs and to enable them to advance funds to providers where they have thought that appropriate. The position of APEX was no different in those respects from that of any other training provider.

In March 1991, my Department agreed to make available up to £500,000 to assist APEX in adjusting to the new contractual levels of employment training. So far, APEX has been paid under that arrangement £250,000 at the end of March 1991 and a further £100,000 at the beginning of October. Meanwhile, APEX has concluded contracts with a number of TECs and has generated revenue from those contracts.

My Department made a duplicate payment to APEX in April 1991. It is difficult to know how that payment could have added to APEX's financial difficulties. The effect has been to provide APEX with an interest-free loan. We have told APEX that we shall be willing to phase the recovery of that sum over a substantial period.

In autumn 1991, APEX was again in touch with my Department and with the Home Office as a result of its continuing financial difficulties. My Department has been helpful to APEX in a number of ways, as Baroness Seear has recognised. I am sure that the House accepts that it would be wrong to make payments of taxpayers' money to an organisation that is on the brink of liquidation. The trust has announced that it plans to call in receivers at the end of the week. I have today instructed my officials to get in touch with each of the training and enterprise councils which have contracts with APEX to make it clear that I expect them to ensure that all APEX trainees continue their training with other providers.

Mr. Blair: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he agree with me that, if APEX Trust closes, over 130 trainers will be made redundant, hundreds of training places will go, and that it is unlikely, because of the nature of the work, that other organisations will take its place? Will he confirm that, up to today at least, not one word of criticism has passed ministerial lips? Indeed, the opposite is the case: it has been highly praised, not least by himself, for both its work and the manner of its operation.

As to the facts about the sum of £250,000, will the Minister confirm that a year ago, when it was clear that there would be a reduction in funding and employment training, APEX Trust entered into negotiations with his Department about the financing of costs associated with the closure of certain of its centres and the making redundant of about 100 staff; that APEX Trust then put to his Department a figure of £500,000 as the reasonable estimate of the cost of the rundown, and that this was agreed by his Department as a reasonable estimate; that on 20 March it was told that it would receive £250,000 as an advance, that on 27 March it received one payment of £250,000, and that on 16 April it received a further £250,000, making £500,000; that on two occasions APEX Trust called the Department of Employment, checked that it could go ahead and use this money and was told that it could go ahead and use it; that the Department of Employment's accountants spent some time with APEX in September, examining its accounts because of problems in relation to further funding; and that in early October, at a meeting with the permanent secretary to the Department of Employment, it was confirmed that any difficulties it had related to funding from the Government, not the running of its business, and its accounts were subsequently drawn up and certified?

To recap, will the Minister confirm that APEX sought £500,000, was given £500,000, checked that it was all right to use the £500,000, was told that it was and went ahead and used it? Will he also confirm that the first that the people at APEX knew about any difficulty with one of the cheques for £250,000 was a letter posted from his Department on Christmas eve and received on 3 January, demanding immediate repayment of one of the cheques and saying that it had been a mistake? As APEX has been given the money, taken it in good faith and used it, how can he justify attempting to snatch it back when the fault lies entirely with his own Department?

Are not the training places that will be lost at APEX part of a much wider picture—the closure of Fullemploy last week, the shutting of information technology centres throughout Britain, and the failure of the Government over their youth training guarantee which still persists even now? Will the Minister now admit what we have constantly said and what he has constantly denied—that training provision is being devastated by cuts in funding from the Government?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm specifically that, according to his Department's own figures, 110,000 places have been lost for the training of young people and the unemployed in the past 12 months? At a time of recession, rising unemployment, bankruptcies and still crucial skill shortages in Britain, how can he justify the crass irresponsibility of shutting another training provider?

In relation to APEX and other centres, when will the Secretary of State and his colleagues realise that spending on training is not a cost but an investment in people that allows them to make a contribution to society and that is vital to the success of our economy? A Government who betray our country's training betray our country's future.

Mr. Howard: On the first question of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), I made it plain earlier that I have asked all the TECs involved to make arrangements for the continuation of training of those trainees who are presently receiving training under contracts between various TECs and APEX.

I said earlier that the circumstances surrounding the duplicate payment are under investigation. However, contrary to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, and as I have already made plain, there is no question whatever of my Department seeking to "snatch it back"—to use the hon. Gentleman's words. We have made it clear to APEX that we are prepared to consider with it arrangements for the repayment of that sum over a substantial period. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that we have a duty to recover taxpayers' money that was paid in error. That is what we are seeking to do, but in a manner that is as sympathetic as possible to any difficulties in which APEX may find itself.

There is no question whatever of that payment being the critical element of the difficulties in which APEX now finds itself. If the hon. Gentleman seeks to give that impression, he is misleading the House. APEX has made it clear, as it did at its press conference this morning, that it needs an infusion of a substantially larger sum of money if it is to avoid calling in the liquidators at the end of the week. It is wrong of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that that sum is the critical factor in the sequence of circumstances.

On training in general, I have made it clear on a number of occasions that we have a duty to those who require training, but that we have no duty to training providers. Other training providers have effectively adjusted to the changed circumstances in which they must now operate. It is a matter for considerable regret that APEX does not appear to have done so.

As to resources, the essential fact is that the Government are providing two and a half times as much money in real terms for training as was provided by the previous Labour Government. Whenever the hon. Gentleman says that the resources devoted to training are inadequate, the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury says that training would not be one of the two immediate spending priorities of any incoming Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman must not mislead the country by suggesting that the election of a Labour Government would lead to an immediate increase in training. The contrary is the truth, as the shadow Chief Secretary constantly points out.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that the private notice question that I granted was on the future of the APEX Trust. Questions should be confined to that, please.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Would my right hon. and learned Friend comment on the following phrase extracted from a letter of 2 December and repeated in a letter of 7 January:

"I wish to state for the record that Apex Trust is fully solvent and has over the last few weeks extracted itself from the TEC-caused cash flow crisis"?

The Minister may like to know that that letter was written by the chief executive of APEX.

Mr. Howard: I understand that the letter was written then. All the circumstances of the matter will no doubt be investigated. The facts are as I recounted them in my statement.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The House will be grateful for the Secretary of State's admission that the Government were responsible for the error of the payment of £250,000, but it will not be grateful for his failure to acknowledge that it is that which has tipped the company into liquidation proceedings. How can he make a lengthy statement from the Dispatch Box without even mentioning the predicament of the ex-offenders who have been served so nobly by APEX over the years? How can he fail to recognise that 65 per cent. of APEX's clients have been re-employed or given further education and training? For those who leave prison, reoffending is one of the major problems and prisoners are a third less likely to reoffend if they are employed as a result of the work of organisations with records such as that of APEX. The Government cannot wash their hands of the responsibility and must not knock that organisation, which has the best record for the re-employment and retraining of ex-offenders.

Mr. Howard: I paid tribute in my statement to the work that APEX has carried out, and I indicated my determination to ensure that proper arrangements are made for the continuation of the training of those presently in receipt of training. We give prisoners preferential access to our training programmes and shall continue to do so. Other organisations in that field, including specialist organisations, work to provide training for ex-offenders, and I have no doubt that they will continue to do so. Both my Department and the training and enterprise councils will continue to afford them every assistance in their valuable work.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): Has my right hon. Friend been advised as to what are the main factors leading to the financial crisis within APEX, and does he feel able to comment on that?

Mr. Howard: I was not present at the press conference that APEX held this morning and I have not yet had an opportunity to examine exactly what was said. On the information available to me, it is clear that the payment of £250,000 was not the critical factor precipitating the difficulties in which the organisation finds itself.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): My Select Committee produced a report on those matters in November. Is the Secretary of State aware that two thirds of adult males released from prison will be reconvicted within two years, but that those who obtain suitable work are three times less likely to reoffend? In that area, APEX has had 26 years' experience and in 1990 it helped 9,000 prisoners and ex-offenders with employment and training.

Two problems have hit APEX: first, the major cuts in ET funding from the Government, and, secondly, the fact that it must now negotiate with 82 different TECs, many of which have not given priority to that work or renewed the contracts. The Minister's Department gave money for closure costs. The Treasury is now asking for some of it back, and that is what has pushed APEX into insolvency.

Is the Minister aware that Judge Stephen Tumim, the chief inspector of prisons, told the Select Committee that he deplored the reduction in financial resources for APEX,

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

and the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. What he said is particularly important now. As Judge Stephen Tumim is against what the Minister is doing, may I appeal to him to go away, review the matter and return with a rescue package for that valuable organisation? It will not be cost-effective to shut it down.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is right to stress the considerable importance of providing training opportunities for ex-offenders and those who leave prison. I am determined that arrangements for that training should continue to be in place, but that task is not the monopoly or preserve of a single training provider. Other training providers operate in that area and do valuable work. NACRO is the most conspicuous example and I have no doubt that NACRO and other organisations will continue to provide the valuable training to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will accept that many Conservative Members wish to pay tribute to the work that APEX has done and would be sorry if it were to go into decline or be liquidated. Does he agree that the principal need is for the training of ex-offenders, not to support any specific provider? If my right hon. and learned Friend were to intervene centrally to dictate to TECs over who should provide any particular type of training, that would undermine the central plank of the success of TECs.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If one takes the view, as we do and the Opposition—or at least the Front-Bench spokesmen—claim to do, that the devolution of responsibility for training to the 83 TECs is a sensible way of dealing with matters and should be supported, we must accept the logic that it is up to each TEC to make the appropriate arrangements for training in its district. We encourage TECs to make training available for ex-prisoners. I believe that the TECs take that responsibility seriously, but neither we nor they are committed to any particular training provider; the interests of trainees are paramount, as my hon. Friend rightly recognises.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question, so I shall call two more Members from each side of the House, then we must move on.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): In view of the Secretary of State's previous answer, does he not appreciate that NACRO schemes have also been decimated? If a former offender is prevented from reoffending, or if an offence that may have been committed is not committed, does that not represent a substantial saving to the Treasury? Would not those sums have shown a good return on investment?

Mr. Howard: NACRO continues in existence and continues to provide valuable training opportunities for ex-offenders, and I have absolutely no doubt that it will continue to do so.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I do not think that the overheated political response that we have just heard from the Opposition is very helpful. I can speak only for the Battersea branch of APEX, but I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend would agree that it has provided an invaluable service to former offenders in that district. Does he also agree that, although we hope that APEX will continue, if that is not possible, it is important to ensure, as he wishes to do, that the training of ex-offenders continues? Will he talk to those concerned at the TECs to ensure that they fulfil the other half of the role of APEX: to educate employers so that they feel able and willing to take on former offenders once they have been trained?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend that that is an important matter. His question affords me the opportunity to emphasise not only the training role of APEX, which we very much hope will continue—perhaps through other means—but its other responsibilities. My right hon. Friends the Home Secretary, and the Minister of State, Home Office—my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten)—who is present, are determined that the Home Office should ensure that the other work of APEX also continues.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Both Opposition and Conservative Members have this afternoon expressed their admiration for the APEX Trust. The Secretary of State was badly prepared to explain to the House how, if the Government were to fail to help the APEX Trust, he could ensure that his guarantee would be worth anything and trainees would find places in equivalent schemes through TECs. Will the Minister now undertake that he will make a further report to the House about saving APEX Trust and the negotiations taking place with his Department or, if not, about sound guarantees and named places for the transfer of those trainees who will lose their places?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady is entirely right to highlight the importance of ensuring that those who currently receive training from APEX continue to do so. The responsibility for delivering that training rests with the TECs involved. My officials are today in touch with the relevant TECs to emphasise the importance that we attach to maintaining training for those people. I am answerable, and will continue to be answerable, to the House for the training responsibilities of the TECs. The hon. Lady will have ample opportunity to question me about those and other matters in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Does my right hon. and learned Friend, as a fellow lawyer, agree that many of the problems of prisoners stem from the fact that they have never done an honest day's work when they go to prison, and that far too many of them emerge from prison not having been properly trained to do an honest day's work? Surely we should concentrate our resources on training prisoners while they are a captive audience in gaol, not afterwards.

Mr. Howard: I note my hon. Friend's suggestion. We have looked carefully at the extent to which we can introduce effective training schemes for people who are in prison. More of that is taking place now than ever before. I agree that it is an important part of the measures that we should have in place to assist with the rehabilitation of offenders.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

3.55 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

I shall today lay before both Houses of Parliament five statutory instruments providing for revisions to the environmentally sensitive area schemes that were first designated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) in 1987. They cover the Broads, the Pennine dales, the south downs, the Somerset levels and moors and west Penwith——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: (Workington): Those were announced recently.

Mr. Gummer: They were not; they are an entirely new extension.

These upgraded schemes signal a further significant step forward in the development of my Department's environmental policies. I am therefore glad of this opportunity to inform hon. Members of the steps which I plan to widen the coverage of the scheme and to secure further conservation and enhancement of our countryside through the encouragement of environmentally friendly farming practices.

As I was Minister of State in MAFF when the ESA scheme was first launched in 1987, I know only too well how important a step we took, breaking new ground in our approach to agricultural support. It provided the clearest possible recognition of the dual role of farmers as producers of the nation's food and custodians of the countryside.

The Agriculture Act 1986 provided the legal base, but within a short period the European Community was sufficiently convinced of the merits of our approach to make similar provision in EC law and to go on to provide an element of support from Community funds. Our pioneering work was thus, in due course, followed by similar actions by other member states, including Denmark, France, Germany, the Irish Republic, the Netherlands and Italy.

We remain, however, firmly in the lead in promoting this policy and there is no doubt that the European Commission would now like to see much greater application of these measures throughout the Community. Indeed, the package of agri-environmental proposals linked to Mr. MacSharry's proposals for common agricultural policy reform include provisions aimed at encouraging wider adoption of such measures.

I am sure that most hon. Members understand how the scheme works, but to assist those less familiar with the scheme, I have deposited in the Vote Office copies of a single-page leaflet describing the arrangements. I am also writing to all hon. Member whose constituencies include an existing ESA or are likely to do so when the boundaries of the proposed new ESAs are determined.

This afternoon, however, I want to underline the first objective of the scheme. It is to single out those areas which have environmental features of national importance, which are threatened by impending changes in agricultural practices, and to encourage the continuation of traditional, but less remunerative systems. Our second aim, which characterises the new schemes, is to give farmers the opportunities to restore environmental losses already sustained. This is the key change that we have made and it will increase the cost of the original ESAs from about £5 million to £11 million a year. In these ways ESAs ensure that some of our most valued landscapes and wildlife habitats may continue to be protected and enhanced by farming methods.

When the schemes were opened for application in 1987, our first year's expenditure was £2·8 million. In 1988 we designated five further areas. These were Breckland, North Peak, Shropshire borders, Suffolk river valleys and Test valley, and by 1991 the expenditure in the 10 areas designated in England had increased to £9·5 million. The schemes in England now cover more than 530,000 hectares, which is almost 4 per cent. of agriculture land, and involve more than 3,000 agreements with farmers and landowners. The changes now proposed to the first five areas, together with the proposals that I announced in December for designating a further 12 ESAs in England, will more than treble the area of land covered by the scheme, and by 1994 expenditure is expected to reach £45 million in England—£65 million in the United Kingdom.

The approaches pioneered in the first five schemes have gained the full support of environmental interests and, importantly, of farmers whose voluntary participation is essential if the schemes are to succeed. Given its experimental nature, we decided in 1987 that we should carry out a thorough review of the impact of the schemes after they had been in operation for five years. To assist in our evaluation, we set in place a comprehensive monitoring programme to measure the environmental benefits achieved and the effect on farm incomes. The results of that work have been published and the reports are in the Libraries. They show that the schemes have largely achieved their objectives. In virtually every case, damage to sensitive landscapes and habitats has been averted and in some areas we have recorded positive environmental gains. To take but one example, in the Pennine dales there has been an increase in the floral richness of some grassland that was previously more intensively managed.

In the Somerset levels and moors, however, we found that the scheme had been less successful in conserving the wetland habitats so important to wading birds, and there was evident need for some fairly radical changes to that regime.

My proposals for modifying and upgrading the five schemes were the subject of extensive and detailed consultations with all the interests in the second half of last year. I also had the benefit of the advice of the Countryside Commission, English Nature and the Department of the Environment. My conclusions are incorporated in the new statutory instruments which I shall today lay before the House. The important point to note is that, in all the areas, the schemes have been reoriented to provide greater rewards for agricultural practices designed to deliver positive environmental gains while continuing to conserve what is already there. I have also introduced a greater range of conservation options. All participating farmers will also now be able to submit a conservation plan for their holdings and obtain payments for carrying out work on specified environmental features which will enhance the particular character of the areas.

I will not go into the details of each of the five schemes, but as examples I would mention that in the Pennine dales, we have again focused on the importance of maintaining and enhancing the flower-rich meadows, and the

[Mr. Gummer]

designated area has been considerably expanded to take in a further 18 dales bringing the total covered by the new scheme to 28.

In the Somerset levels and moors, the important change is the introduction of a new option aimed at encouraging the raising of water levels in those parts of the ESA where there is the greatest potential for farming under the wetter conditions that are vital to the breeding bird populations. We have had long discussions with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on these matters. It is most concerned that this important area should be protected and enhanced, and by these major changes I seek to make that possible. This is an internationally important wetland and I am especially anxious to encourage farmers, with the co-operation of the NRA and the inland drainage boards, to return to the traditional management of the area.

The revised schemes tabled today will effectively open for business in February when the new scheme literature and application forms will be distributed. New agreements will begin to be made from 1 April——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): That is an electorally sensitive area.

Mr. Gummer: That may be a hint from the hon. Gentleman although I have no idea of its meaning.

As I say, new agreements will begin to be made from 1 April with payments to farmers in October. Perhaps to the hon. Gentleman that is also a hint. This year I shall review the second round of ESAs designated in 1988. I expect to outline my conclusions and any proposals for their future development during the summer. After the usual consultations, the schemes will be renewed early in 1993, when I shall be happy to renew them.

Following my announcements of the proposed new designations to be made this year, detailed work has been in hand to define the boundaries and appropriate prescriptions for the areas concerned. I expect to announce during February my proposals for Exmoor, Hampshire Avon, lake district, north Dorset and the south Wiltshire downs, north-west Kent coast and the south-western Peak. Following a period of consultation, I plan to lay the necessary statutory instruments before the House so that the schemes can be open for applications in July.

Also during this year work will begin on the designation of the further six environmentally sensitive areas in the Blackdown hills, the Cotswold hills, Dartmoor, the Essex coast, the Shropshire hills and the upper Thames tributaries. Following the same procedures for designation and consultation, those schemes will open for business early in the summer of 1993.

All that amounts to a substantial development of my Department's environmental policies, which I know will be welcomed by farmers and environmental interests as well as by all Members of the House. The proposals have been followed and copied extensively in Europe and beyond. They represent a major revolutionary step initiated by my right hon. Friend the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—now the Leader of the House. We in Britain have every good cause to be proud of them.

Mr. David Clark (South Shields): The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is quite right that we welcome the Government's intention to extend the concept of environmentally sensitive areas. I look forward to accepting the right hon. Gentleman's invitation and standing at that Dispatch Box this summer to announce the extension of the scheme, as the right hon. Gentleman suggested.

As the Minister knows, the Labour party has been a long-time supporter of environmentally sensitive area schemes. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that I advocated such a scheme first, in my successful private Member's Bill, now the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985. Unfortunately, as the Minister will also recall, at that time the Government had not quite seen the light and they managed to block that section of the Bill, but we were delighted when, a year later, they did an about-turn and accepted our ideas about a scheme for environmentally sensitve areas.

We welcome the Minister's announcement. We have long argued the case for environmental objectives to be incorporated into the very core of the agricultural support system. That is right. But we believe that the people in the country want value for money out of all these schemes. We do not want farmers to receive money for doing nothing, as so often appears to be the case under the set-aside scheme. Farmers must not be given the idea that environmentally sensitive area schemes are a soft touch. It is important to get that message across.

The whole scheme has environmental objectives. They must be attainable objectives that can be measured and paid for by results.

The Minister devoted considerable time—more time than he spent on any of the other ESAs—to examining the case of the Somerset levels. That specific case seems to us an example of an ESA that has not given value for money either for environmental purposes or in financial terms.

That ESA was designated to protect its wading birds, especially snipe and black-tailed godwit, and to preserve its rich meadow flora. According to research conducted by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds into sites of special scientific interest, the dramatic decline in that bird population has not been arrested. Vast sums of taxpayers' and consumers' money have been poured into the scheme area—more than £550,000 in SSSI management agreements and ESA payments, to which must be added approximately £3 million in price support under the common agricultural policy agreement, also paid for by taxpayers and consumers. In short, the scheme has absorbed huge sums of public money, for virtually no discernible environmental benefit. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] Conservative Members may say that it is nonsense, but I think that, in that particular case, the Minister will agree with what I have said. That is why he has announced the changes.

As we understand it, one of the major problems with the scheme has been the action—or, rather, inaction—of the drainage board. Does the Minister agree that that is one of the major problems and, if so, can he give the House a categorical assurance that he has the powers to deal with the drainage boards and to force them to integrate environmental objectives into their operations?

Has the Minister received any results of any work that has been done to try to ascertain the cost savings on the CAP Community price support systems that have accrued as a result of the ESA schemes, because there is also a financial gain to be made from environmental payments?

The Minister mentioned the reform of the CAP. Is he satisfied that the environmental provisions of the

MacSharry proposals are included not in the main text of the proposals but in a bolted-on package that will require individual state funding? Will he follow Labour's policy of advocating the incorporation of environmental premiums and criteria into the main thrust of agricultural reforms?

Does the Minister accept that the green premium payment system advocated by the Labour party would extend the benefits of environmentally sensitive farming not only to the restricted areas but gradually throughout the country, so that all farmers could benefit from such environmental objectives?

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) for his first couple of sentences, in which he was kind enough to thank us for the considerable expansion of the schemes. When I made some notes on the sort of questions that I might be asked, I thought that there would be no need to be party political because this is an issue on which we all agree. As the hon. Gentleman raised the issue, however, I remind him that the leader of his party has said that any saving from the CAP reform will be spent on Spain and Portugal and on cohesion and that none of it will be available to help Britain. The hon. Gentleman has so far failed to convince the Leader of the Opposition.

In answer to a question about how the regional and social fund and the cohesion fund should be paid for, the right hon. Gentleman said that the common agricultural policy would be the major source of reoriented finance for the development of cohesion in the Community. That means that the only ESAs that Labour would support would be those in Spain and Portugal. It is outrageous for the hon. Member for South Shields to try to make a party political issue out of something which he knows has hitherto been accepted by all sides. He has once again failed to rise to the occasion and recognise—as hon. Members on both sides of the House could and should have done—that the proposals are valuable to us all.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the need to ensure that we get the best value for money. That is why we monitor these matters carefully and why the customers—those concerned with environmental matters and the farmers—have agreed that the scheme is very successful.

I was direct enough to include the Somerset levels in those areas that I intend to discuss. The problem there is that the water levels cannot be dictated by one farmer entering the ESA if his neighbour does not enter. By means of this improvement, we seek to build on the considerable benefits already provided by the Somerset levels ESA. We wish to secure further benefits by encouraging more farmers to come in so that the water levels may be raised further. I believe that this step will make that possible. Having had very long discussions with the various bodies concerned, I believe that it will be a success.

It is my intention that this should be a voluntary matter. It saddens me that the Labour party never wants people to do things voluntarily; it wants to force everybody to do everything. The Opposition spokesman says that he will not even discuss the issues that I have raised. He asks, "Do you have the power to force them?" The Labour party has only one prescription for everybody: people ought not to be encouraged to do something better, but forced to do what the party wants them to do. Sadly, that attitude characterises the hon. Gentleman's view, which represents a fundamental departure from any proposals that he made either before or after the passage of the Agriculture Act 1986. We have advanced very considerably by voluntary means, and we intend to continue along that road.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of the common agricultural policy. I have always said that, as a central feature, the common agricultural policy ought to enhance and improve the environment. Mr. MacSharry's proposals have other failings, and this is an add-on package that is not central. All along I have insisted that it should be central. It would not be proper to agree a common agricultural policy without achieving agreement on this measure as part of the total package.

On the question of the financial reform of the common agricultural policy, I remind the hon. Gentleman that it has been made clear by the leader of his party that, despite the fact that the MacSharry proposals will cost more than the present common agricultural policy, the Labour party is committed to taking money from British farmers and giving it to farmers abroad.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I am relieved to hear that this is a non-political matter. That being the case, we shall no doubt be able to get through questions very rapidly. I shall allow questions to continue until 4.45 pm, when we shall have to move on to the next business.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does the Minister recall that when the scheme began, some farmers—particularly those in upper Dentdale in the north of England—were immediately suspicious about it? However, they discovered that it was both voluntary and generous, and it has been a huge success. Indeed, it has been so successful that all the farmers in lower Dentdale have demanded that they be included. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the extension to the scheme will take in not only lower Dentdale but Garsdale and Mallerstang? The addition of those to the extra 18 dales—the number in the north of England having gone up from 10 to 28—will assure the new scheme of a warm welcome from many hundreds of farmers in the north of England and in much of the rest of the country. My right hon. Friend deserves the warm congratulations of people who farm in those areas, as well as people who visit them for their natural beauty.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend created the idea and has won support for it right across Europe. We have tried to carry further forward the proposals that he outlined in the Agriculture Act 1986. I agree that farmers and conservationists were suspicious to start with but, throughout the country, both farmers and conservationists have learned to use the method to work together.

I am sad that the Opposition's first questions on the statement sought to cast some doubt on the way in which farmers have been treated in the environmentally sensitive areas. Throughout the conservation movement, ESAs are widely welcomed as an affective way of using taxpayers' money to enable farmers more properly and effectively to look after the land. Casting aspersions on farmers may be electorally convenient for some parties, but people in the countryside will remember from where those aspertions came.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I welcome the extension to the ESA scheme and I am delighted that it is voluntary. As a practising farmer, I

[Mr. Geraint Howells]

can advise the Minister from my own experience that farmers are pleased with the present scheme. However, does the Minister agree that Britain may have too many environmental schemes at present? Might it not be advisable to have one scheme in this country which could be administered by the Countryside Commission and which, in the end, would produce the same results? I am sure that the Minister is aware that many farmers farm within our national parks and that they unfortunately cannot apply for such grants. It is a great shame that those farmers will never have the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his support. However, I do not think that the Countryside Commission would agree with him, because, when we had that argument originally in Committee on the first Bill, the Opposition—not the hon. Gentleman's party but the Labour party—argued that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should put the scheme into commission with one of the countryside organisations. We argued firmly that there were two reasons why that should not happen. The first was because I wanted an increasing number of MAFF officials to be trained in conservation matters so that when they moved on to other things, conservation as well as production would have been part of their training process. Those officials therefore became concerned not only with the farmer's job of producing food, but with his duty to care for the countryside.

Secondly, I said that if we did not introduce the provisions in that way, the farmers would be unhappy because they would be worried about whether, in the end, the scheme would make it impossible for them to make a living because they did not have the same relationship with some of the organisations as they had had historically with MAFF. I believe that that experience shows that we took the right decision.

The Countryside Commission has now said publicly that it would be happy to hand over to MAFF the administration of the scheme that it has started. I am pleased that we are now discussing with the Countryside Commission how best we can draw its countryside premium scheme into the ambit of our provisions so that it is easier for people to make their choices and to know about the scheme.

The ESA scheme is not suitable for the whole country. There are specific detailed prescriptions for each area. As the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) pointed out, the prescription for the Somerset levels is wholly different from that for west Penwith and the like. Therefore, we need to aim specific work at particular areas. I believe that we now have the right balance. However, I am looking at ways in which I can get closer to what was said by the hon. Gentleman by bringing together the schemes, many of which are pilot schemes, so that, when they become fully fledged and we know about the detail, they can work together more precisely.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a wholly admirable extension of the wise policy that was introduced a few years ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)? Can he confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has similar policies in mind for extending the ESAs in Scotland, where they have also been successful? Does he agree—I believe that to some extent he has already done so—that conservationists, of whom I have been one for many years, feel that this is a worthwhile extension? After some misgivings at the beginning, the scheme is now accepted as being the right way forward, bearing in mind the fact that this is a much simpler method than that used for dealing with developments within sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right about the conservationist view. He is also right about the fact that my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales will be making announcements about further extensions to ESAs in the near future.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I welcome the extension of ESAs. Does the Minister accept that, if the quality of life and the health and vitality of rural areas within ESAs are to be maintained, it is essential that the presence and activity of the majority of farmers, particularly small farmers, are sustained in those areas? Does he accept that he has failed to secure any advantage for those farmers? Does he agree that, until such advantage is secured, his Government will have failed disastrously?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. ESAs will help farmers considerably and they have shown that they are being helped. We are supported cross-party on that basis. The hon. Gentleman has not considered the facts. I am sorry about that, because the first part of what he said is right.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): If he has not already done so, will my right hon. Friend consider extending the north Peak ESA to cover the village of Marsden in my constituency? There is a pressing problem there. Sheep wander off the moor into people's gardens and homes. Indeed, sometimes they wander on to the very busy A62 Manchester road. An extension would provide incentives to farmers to take sheep off the moor. An extension of the north Peak ESA would not only be environmentally friendly but would bring long-awaited relief to many of my hard-pressed constituents in Marsden.

Mr. Gummer: I shall be reviewing the north Peak this year, together with the second round ESAs, and I shall take account of the sheep problems.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): May I press the Minister further on the extension of ESAs to national park areas? Bearing in mind that one fifth of the land area of Wales is within national parks, is he aware that many farmers find it difficult to understand why an area designated as a national park is not important in ESA terms? It would be much more beneficial to bring the ESA benefits into national park areas rather than to put greening criteria on to the hill livestock compensatory allowances, as is proposed. Can he consider again an extension to cover national parks?

Mr. Gummer: Some parks and national parks are in ESAs and get the full benefits. The hon. Gntleman proposes that all national parks should be covered by ESAs. On that I am advised by the Countryside Commission, by English Nature and by the Department of the Environment. That was not the order of priorities which they gave me. I took in large measure the order of

priorities which they put before me. It was difficult because the different bodies had slightly different priorities. I tried to get the right balance. That was not the proposal which they put forward. Probably it would be wrong to make all national parks ESAs. I should not like to deny the greening of HLCAs. Wherever possible, receipt from the common agricultural policy should have cross-compliance of an environmental kind. I wish to keep that in the forefront of my policy.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): My right hon. Friend's statement amounts to another considerable step towards environmentally friendly farming. Can he say whether restoration of environmental losses will involve the inclusion of payment for more conservation headlands in more ESAs? As to wetlands, I hope that there will be payments in other ESAs besides those in the Somerset levels.

Mr. Gummer: We are now considering the prescriptions for the new ESAs announced in the first round. Later there will be a second round. I shall take my hon. Friend's comments into account. Certainly our intention is to ensure that the losses sustained by farmers in the way wanted by the Community are properly recompensed. The fact that farmers can opt out after five years of the 10-year period and that there will be regular review of payments on that basis should give confidence.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Minister of Agriculture have the decency to admit that ESA stands for election sensitive area? Is he aware that, in Derbyshire and other coalfield areas throughout Britain, one of the most environmentally important issues is opencasting, which has doubled during the period of the Government's tenure of office? While he is here, will he deal with the environmental issue in Bolsøver—the dioxin problem which has not yet been cleared up? Will he have a public inquiry and pay the environmentally conscious farmers who have to put up with the problem some compensation?

Mr. Gummer: The idea that English Nature or the Countryside Commission is in some way electorally involved is insulting to those organisations and unacceptable to the House. As the decisions about the areas are based on their advice, the hon. Gentleman should realise that, while it does not matter if he mixes it with people in the House, to those outside who provide independent advice his comment is unacceptable.

On the dioxins problem, the hon. Gentleman knows that we are doing research in his area and paying the farmers while we do so.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I commend my right hon. Friend on the extension of this British initiative. I am delighted that it is finding its way in the rest of Europe, and particularly pleased that 10 per cent. of the cost will be refunded by the European Community. The beauty of the scheme is that it redeploys resources from the common agricultural policy budget to promoting environmental protection instead of encouraging and paying for surpluses.

I have a specific question for my right hon. Friend. I am delighted that his second tranche includes an area of north-west Kent. Will he have a quiet, urgent word with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and let him know that the east Thames corridor is not simply a stretch of derelict land? There is some good agriculture there, some wonderful wild marshes which are among the last in the United Kingdom, and some green belt. I welcome my right hon. Friend's initiative in the area. Will he ensure that the Secretary of State for the Environment is mindful of it?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend knows that I spent much of my childhood in wellington boots around that very area in All Hallows, Cliffe marshes and the rest, so she will not find me unwilling to press the case for that wild area so near to London. That is one of the reasons why we especially want to protect that whole area, including her neighbour's area of Sheerness. I take my hon. Friend's point and will put it to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Have you noticed, Mr. Speaker, the extraordinary way in which the Secretary of State manages to turn every announcement that he makes from the Dispatch Box into something akin to news of the relief of Mafeking? He has made an important statement, but will ESAs be as cheerfully destroyed as the Government have allowed the sites of special scientific interest such as Oxleas wood and Rainham marshes to be destroyed? What sort of protection will the ESAs be given by the Government?

Mr. Gummer: I find it difficult when Opposition Members can find nothing nice to say even when a good statement is made. It must make people outside wonder whether Opposition Members can be believed about anything. The Government have announced some major improvements, yet the Opposition can do nothing but complain. Therefore, no one can take any complaint that they make seriously.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the SSSIs have been clearly championed by the Government. They were given considerable support under the Government's Acts. The Government introduced ESAs and have extended them. I have announced further extensions today. The Government are clearly guardians of the countryside, which from the comments of Opposition Members, clearly the Opposition are not.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): In view of the churlish remarks and attitude of certain Opposition Members, may I assure my right hon. Friend that his announcement today will be welcomed, especially by the farmers, as well as the conservationists, in west Penwith? I would go so far as to say that some farmers have been saved by the ESA scheme. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the statutory instruments for the first five areas amount to an expansion of all those ESAs, including that at Penwith moors? If so, by how much will the area of that ESA be extended?

Mr. Gummer: On the west Penwith ESA, the main changes are not the extension of the area but the change in the prescription: increased payments of £65 per hectare; the option for farmers to earn additional payments under conservation plans when they carry out works to improve the characteristic works of west Penwith; and an extension in the period of agreements from five to 10 years. When we originally drew the line in West Penwith, it was viewed by most people as accurate and reasonable. However, if my hon. Friend wishes to raise a point about that, I shall be happy to talk to him.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Would it help if I were nice to the Minister? Halvergate marshes in the Norfolk

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Broads has been a success but how is it that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has said, for £4 million in the Somerset levels we now have fewer breeding waders? Does he accept that when I was the guest of the National Farmers Union in West Lothian last week I became exceedingly uncomfortable at what its members were saying about the value for money involved in set-aside?

Mr. Gummer: First, on the Somerset levels, we must not think that the only purpose was to ensure that we improved and continued opportunities for wading birds. There are a range of interests there and the previous prescription met a number of those needs. If there is an experiment, as was the case there, clearly there are lessons to be learned. One lesson is that we have not satisfactorily provided a mix to deal with wading birds, and that is what I have added. That is a proper way to extend and that does not mean that we have wasted money until now but that the money has bought some environmental benefits, although not enough. I shall therefore spend some more money, with a different prescription, to extend the mix and to try to ensure that we get all the environmental benefits that we want. I happen to believe that it will work, but if it does not—or if any of the other prescriptions do not work—the purpose of individual prescriptions is for us to learn by them. That is why I told the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) that I was anxious to have a staff who were increasingly in day-to-day touch with environmental matters.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): First, may I thank my right hon. Friend for his courtesy in advising me of the creation of an ESA on the Dorset side of the River Avon in my constituency and of its relevance to the River Stour in Dorset? Will farmers be able to include in submissions that they make to his Department, alleviation of the problem of Blandford fly? Will he include the Department of Transport in his consultations? Is he aware that there has been a suspicion in my constituency since the Dorset structure plan was approved that the removal of the word "outer" from the proposed Christchurch relief road plan has meant that the preferred plan could be jeopardised by his announcement today? Will he please consult the Department of Transport and let me know—although he cannot do so today—how his announcement might affect the ultimate choice for the Christchurch relief road by that Department? Finally, on aircraft noise—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. What the hon. Member has already said was rather wide of the statement, and aircraft noise is even wider.

Mr. Gummer: Certainly during debates on the Agriculture Act, 1986, it was said that an ESA designation would not be used for planning purposes. It purposely does not carry a planning designation, because one of our greatest problems when trying to get farmers to come into the scheme was that they felt that, if they signed up for 10 years, they might be signing up to planning blight for that time. I think that that answers the second part of my hon. Friend's question. I am not intimately connected with the Blandford fly and my knowledge of it is not sufficient to give him a direct answer, but I shall do so as soon as I can.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is the Minister aware that the beautiful and unique Gwent levels in my constituency, which provide a habitat for wildlife virtually identical to that of the Somerset levels, are not now protected as environmentally sensitive areas? Although the Gwent levels in Newport have been jealously protected by the Newport and Gwent councils, the levels have been destroyed on the Cardiff side and they are now little better than a semi-rural, semi-industrial slum. There is a need for such areas to be protected. Will the Minister liaise with his colleagues in the Welsh Office to ensure that the Gwent levels are included as a future environmentally sensitive area?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should first address himself to those who advise me and the Secretary of State for Wales on where the areas should be designated. Those organisations are statutorily required to do that. In those terms, he will understand why I had to reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) as directly as I did. If the hon. Gentleman applies himself to those advisers, they will no doubt consider his proposals and they may revise their propositions in light of them. I know the area well and I know the problems to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I saw the area last week and noticed, as the hon. Gentleman has, that there is a degree of growth of rather less than good development which does not help the wildlife as the hon. Gentleman wishes.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on behalf of areas such as Exmoor? Will he accept my thanks for the lifeline that he is throwing to the hard-pressed farmers of upland north Devon? A little more help is needed because, in years to come, although the environment will be there, the farmers may not be.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to say that the farmers are essential if our beautiful countryside is to be conserved. I am only sorry that I could not look further and do something for Bodmin moor. It was not recommended, largely because it is an area that has no basic management arrangements to enable me to do anything, let alone establish an ESA. I very much hope that something can be done in that part of the world because it is another place where we need, one way or another, to try to enhance the environment.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents are extremely grateful for the proposed extension of ESA status to Exmoor and to the Blackdown hills? We hope that he will consider including the Brendon hills within the designation of Exmoor.

On the Somerset moors and levels, I am grateful that my right hon. Friend recognises that there are farmers in my constituency—based on North Curry and Stoke St. Gregory—as well as wading birds, who have interests there. I visited that area a short while ago to see the consequences of a rise in the water level. I hope that my right hon. Friend has the balance right there.

Will my right hon. Friend accept that there is a need for administrative back-up for the ESAs to continue from Taunton and that it should not be moved to Bristol?

Mr. Gummer: I do not accept my hon. Friend's last comment. Administrative back-up is most importantly carried out in the ESAs themselves. That is the most

important location so the rest of the work can be done just as efficiently from Bristol as from Taunton. I have made my changes to use our money effectively. If I carry out a considerable expansion of ESAs, I must ensure that I do not waste money on ill-organised administrative systems. I must use the benefits of modern technology to be able to centralise in major centres the supply of services to farmers and to others in the way that we should expect in the spirit of the citizens charter. That is why I have made those changes.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there must be a balance in the Somerset levels and moors. However, farmers in that area will have to recognise that the importance of those levels and of the water support for the future of our wading bird population, and the whole question of how one ensures that their interests are looked after is of national and international importance. It cannot be thought of as a mere secondary matter. As those matters have to be decided jointly between neighbouring farmers, which is the only way in which one can get the levels right, and as they have to be carried through by drainage boards, it is important that the farmers get the kind of return that makes it possible for them to farm with higher levels of water. That is what we have sought to do and that is why we have sought to do it on a voluntary basis and not by diktat. I am sure that a voluntary system is likely to get far better results in the end.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Will my right hon. Friend accept a strong welcome from the Yorkshire dales for the improvements that he has announced to the Pennine dales ESA? Will he accept an even stronger welcome if, as I hope and as I have suggested to him, upper Wensleydale and the smaller dales that surround it are included in the ESA in future?

Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that, without his announcement today, many of our finest pastures and meadows in the area would soon have been lost for ever? As a result of the announcement, much of our finest countryside will be preserved and many of our hardest-pressed farmers—hill farmers—in that area will be given greater assistance in preserving it.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to say that this is a major change. There is a threefold increase in the designated area to bring in 18 new dales and to cover 46,000 hectares of land. We could have dressed it up and said that it was a new ESA because it is as large as many individual ESAs, but I felt that it was right to run the whole area together and that the Pennine dales were better run as a unified group.

It is one of the areas in which we have learnt most from the association between conservationists and farmers. I well remember meeting farmers, who may have been my hon. Friend's constituents, who proved to the conservationists that they had their dates wrong if they wanted to ensure that the hay meadows were cut at the right time. I am pleased that that incident shows that the practical experience of farmers can often enhance the theoretical views of the scientists and that conservationists are able to teach farmers things that farmers originally felt that they did not need to learn. It is the fact that throughout the country, both farmers and conservationists are now praising the others' part in the ESA system, which makes the system a significant contribution to the countryside.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I thank the Minister warmly and comprehensively for including Dartmoor in his second tranche of ESAs. That is magnificent and he has scored a unique double with the ESAs of giving pleasure to millions and of continuing the livelihood of the farmers who allow the ESAs to be continually beautiful.

When my right hon. Friend thinks further on the matter, will he bear in mind the Culm measures which meant so much to the late Professor George Allen of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, who died tragically last week, and which are of large importance in my constituency and in the neighbouring constituencies?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for her remarks. Dartmoor, like Exmoor, was made possible only by the clear method of management which has been achieved in the area. I congratulate the county council on its work which made it possible for me to make those areas ESAs.

The Culm areas are less well dealt with by an ESA. I understand that the Countryside Commission is discussing those matters along with its associated scheme, which would probably deal with patchy individual areas which are rather more complex than the areas that we cover. I hope that we shall be able to deal far more effectively with such areas through that system. As we work so closely with the Countryside Commission on those areas, I hope that they will not fall between the two schemes.

Local Authorities etc.

4.47 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to oblige local authorities and the providers of public utilities to communicate to one another the notice received by any one of them of the decease of a chargepayer or customer.

The Bill is a small measure, but it has a strong humanitarian purpose in today's complex and bureaucratic society. The background to it is that a constituent of mine whose mother died found that his mother was taken to court by a public utility for the non-payment of outstanding bills. What causes concern is how that came about.

About 600,000 people die every year, about half of whom die intestate. No problem arises if there is a will, because executors are appointed and the business of death progresses. If there is no will, there is generally a total lack of experience among the relatives and friends of the deceased person. The bereaved people at a time of stress do not know how to progress.

In the instance that was brought to my attention the district council was informed, because it was a council house tenancy, and took the necessary action, but the water and electricity authorities were told by telephone, and somehow or other the message failed to get through. As the bereaved people thought that the matter had been seen to, the business of getting the bills paid just did not happen. As a consequence, the courts were approached by the water authority, which in due course achieved a judgment in the county court, to the extreme distress of my constituent, the survivor of the deceased person.

On the face of it, this is not a big issue—in fact, it is a very small one—but in talking to other hon. Members, I find that it strikes a very strong chord in all parts of the House and at all levels. People who die intestate are generally those who have relatives who are not prone to writing letters and giving formal advice to those authorities, but rather resort to the telephone to tell them. We all know how unreliable the telephone message is.

If the bereaved person has transmitted, as he believes, to the authority the facts which are necessary for the closing of the account on the death of a relative, he then believes the matter to have been dealt with; accordingly, he takes not much notice of other pieces of paper that come through and, as a result, this distressing situation arises with far greater regularity than I had realised until I started digging into the matter.

The purpose of the Bill, therefore, is to oblige the local authority, the water authority, the electricity company or the gas company to advise the other utilities of the notices that they receive of the death of one of their customers or charge payers. They have the kit to do this. They are doing it already. They are taking administrative action when they receive notice.

If one of those undertakings is contacted by telephone and another by letter, therefore, all will eventually be put in the picture about the death of a particular housholder or customer, and the cause of the distress will be removed. The purpose of this very small measure today is to prevent distress among people who do not understand and are not adequately geared to this complex society—the sort of distress that my constituents, and, I gather, those of many other hon. Members, have undergone.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Colin Shepherd, Mr. Kenneth Hind, Mr. Michael J. Martin, Mr. James Kilfedder, Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Geraint Howells and Mr. Charles Wardle.

Local Authorities etc. (Notices of Decease)

Mr. Colin Shepherd accordingly presented a Bill to oblige local authorities and the providers of public utilities to communicate to one another the notice received by any one of them of the decease of a chargepayer or customer: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January and to be printed. [Bill 51.]

Orders of the Day

Coal Industry Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): No amendments on consideration. Third Reading what day?

4.53 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I draw your attention to a certain aspect of the new clauses that were placed on the Amendment Paper today, and also seek your advice? I am in no way questioning Mr. Speaker's ruling that none of the new clauses will be called.

It will not have escaped the attention of the House that virtually all the new clauses are in the name of various Liberal Members, and also that, when the Bill was in Committee, the only Liberal member of the Committee, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who has just arrived, attended not one sitting of the Committee. A number of Government Members and a number of hon. Members representing the Labour party desperately wanted to serve on the Committee and could not do so because the place was taken by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. I regard that as a positive insult to the House; and the insult seems to have been aggravated today by the new clauses on the Amendment Paper.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is very observant of the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) to notice that no Liberal Members were present in the Committee, especially as he was not a member of the Committee himself, but I have to tell him that there has been no breach of the Standing Orders. I hope that we can now get on with the Bill.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The matter has been dealt with. No further point of order arise.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): On another point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it another point of order? It had better be.

Mr. Brown: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a member of the Standing Committee, I can confirm that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) did not attend.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is an abuse of the House. The point of order has been dealt with.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. No further points of order arise. The matter has been dealt with and there has been no breach of Standing Orders.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it a new point of order and not further to the original point of order?

Mr. Haynes: I was the Whip responsible for organising the Opposition membership of the Committee. We left a place for a minority group representative and one was appointed, but he never attended the sittings of the Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members are now going round in circles. The Minister had better move the Third Reading.

4.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill has been extensively discussed and has passed through all its stages so far without amendment. It is a necessary measure for the achievement of a productive industry whose future is secured by the sale of coal to willing buyers. We want the largest possible economic coal industry that the market can support.

It has to be recognised, however, that fundamental changes in the nation's fuel requirements are reducing overall demand for coal, and indeed this process has been going on for many years under successive Governments. Coal faces increasing competition from other fuels, in the industrial market, in the domestic market and in power generation. The coal industry also needs further to increase its productivity, building on the substantial and impressive improvements of recent years.

Heavy restructuring has been required, as the House knows. Colliery closures and substantial job losses are involved. This is why clause 1 of the Bill extends the overall limit on the payment of restructuring grant by a further £1·5 billion and makes it available for a further three years beyond the original time limit.

The money goes predominantly towards redundancy costs, enabling British Coal to offer lump sum payments to redundant coal miners which are perhaps the highest in any industry. Restructuring grant also supports the financing of transfers between collieries, retraining for jobs outside the industry and the work of British Coal Enterprise. The rate at which these payments will be made is a matter for British Coal, but by the end of this financial year some £1,340 million in restructuring grant will have been paid. The existing ceiling of £1,500 million is therefore likely to be reached in the coming year. That is why clause 1 is necessary.

Clause 2 provides the power to repeal the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1980. Hon. Members on both sides know that the 1908 Act is widely ignored in practice. That was conceded many times by Opposition Members in Committee. If the Act were to be enforced, which no one advocated in Committee, miners' pay would be cut and productivity reduced. Certain collieries with long journey times between shaft and coal face would be particularly hard hit and jobs would be threatened if the 1908 Act were enforced.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): The Minister has just said that the 1908 Act is to be repealed. However, I understand that health and safety issues come under the jurisdiction of the Department of Employment and the Health and Safety Commission. Can the Minister tell the House why the Department of Energy has chosen to pilot

[Mr. Alexander Eadie]

the repeal of the 1908 Act when responsibility for it comes under the jurisdiction of the Department of Employment, the Health and Safety Commission and, in turn, the Health and Safety Executive?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I will explain that very point.

The issue of safety has been raised on a number of occasions during our consideration of the Bill. It is the Government's view that safety is of paramount importance and we want recent and continuing improvements in safety standards to be maintained. We also strongly believe that repeal of the 1908 Act will not prejudice safety standards. I remind the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) that a number of other provisions on the statute book deal specifically with safety. He will be aware that the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 are directed specifically at safety.

It is true that the Health and Safety Executive and the Health and Safety Commission come under the general jurisdiction of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, and we have been careful to ascertain the opinion of those bodies. I assure the House that neither the HSE nor the HSC regards the 1908 Act as a relevant safety measure. They would prefer, as we do, to lean on specific safety legislation to safeguard the health and safety of workers underground.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The House is obliged to the Minister for his comments, but nothing he has said detracts from the point I made on Second Reading. I said then that on 7 November 1988, during this present Parliament, the then Secretary of State for Energy—the office remains even though the occupant has changed—gave categorical assurance that no changes to safety law would be made during this Parliament.

On Monday, on the television programme "Panorama", a Department of Employment Minister gave an assurance to millions of viewers that the Government would not act in such a way as to separate us from practices prevailing in Europe. The European regulations governing the number of hours worked in mines are different from those envisaged under the terms of clause 2. Therefore, the Government have a great deal of explaining to do.

On Second Reading the Minister said nothing when I reminded him of the assurance given on 7 November 1988. However, he must comment on the assurance given on television on Monday and explain why a Minister in another Department is offering a certain assurance while he is maintaining a different position today.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Let me repeat that I assure the House that the repeal of the 1908 Act will not diminish safety in British coal mines. That is not just my opinion, but that of the HSC and the HSE. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that one third of the members of the HSC are drawn from the membership of trade unions.

It was conceded in Committee that the 1908 Act is disregarded in practice and has been for many years. It belongs to a past era when coal mining was a pick-and-shovel operation. That Act is irrelevant to the needs of a modern, highly mechanised industry. Mechanisation has been under way for many years, which is why successive Administrations have not enforced the 1908 Act. They would have enforced that Act had it been crucial to the health and safety of workers underground.

In Committee a number of hon. Members spoke about the timing of the repeal of the 1908 Act and when it will take effect. Let me restate the Government's position. The 1908 Act will not be repealed until either the proposed European Community directive on working time is implemented or, if agreement is not reached, an alternative United Kingdom measure is introduced. The repeal of the 1908 Act will not take effect on enactment of this legislation. Hon. Members are aware that, if the proposed European Community directive on working time is agreed, it will be necessary for British Coal to comply with it immediately. British Coal and the mining unions will not be able to negotiate sensibly on new and alternative working arrangements within the limits set by the directive until it is clear that the 1908 Act is to be repealed. British Coal has to give six months' notice before renegotiating working hours agreements.

Powers to repeal the Act are therefore needed well in advance of the date when the directive may be implemented, which may be as soon as 31 December 1992. If agreement on the directive is not reached by that time, the 1908 Act will not be repealed. If no agreement on the directive can be reached, alternative proposals for the coal industry will be brought before the House and repeal of the 1908 Act will take effect at that time.

The provisions of the 1908 Act will continue until such time as the Secretary of State shall implement its repeal. The Government have no plans to implement the repeal until either the European Community directive or an alternative measure is brought into force. There will therefore be no gap between the repeal of the 1908 Act and any replacement measure.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): If the Minister found that British Coal was breaking the law of the land, would he insist that it should be prosecuted?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Not only British Coal, but all the workers concerned would be in breach of the 1908 Act. Any coal miner who works overtime in excess of the seven and a half hours provided for under the 1908 Act is technically in breach of that Act. That situation has obtained for many years, certainly during the currency of Labour Administrations, and hon. Members on both sides of the Committee accepted that that was so. The Committee therefore concluded that the Act was obsolete. If the Labour party believes that an Act that has not been enforced by any Government in recent years should nevertheless remain on the statute book, that is a bizarre position to adopt. Perhaps we can seek clarification on that during this debate.

I am aware that Opposition and Conservative Members wish to speak in the debate. I have set out the Government's position on this short Bill and shall seek to respond further later in the debate. At this stage, I commend the Bill to the House.

5.9 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Coal Industry Bill is just as objectionable today as when it was first published on 1 November. It still represents a squalid effort to reduce safety in British mines and to use taxpayers' money to pave the way for coal privatisation. It

is intended to fund the rundown of the coal industry from the existing 56 working pits to just 14, or possibly even 12, working collieries. It would also replace the limit on miners' hours with a general European directive that makes no special provision for the hazards of working underground.

Since the Bill was published and has been debated on Second reading and throughout its Committee stage, it has not been amended in any way, and we shall vote against it tonight, as we did before, because it represents a threat to safety.

Although the Bill is unamended, much relating to it has changed. For instance, the position in the coal industry has changed for the worse. Since the Bill was published, three collieries have closed in the Nottingham coalfield alone. The European Energy Commissioner has made it clear that he regards the Government's policy of running down the British coal industry as stupid and short-sighted. Furthermore, the commercial director of British Coal is in the process of being sacked for expressing similar views. The Maastricht summit has been and gone but, despite misleading briefings to the British press—in many cases accepted by them—the European directive on working time remains.

Clause 1 seeks to increase the restructuring grant, as it is strangely called, from £1,500 million to £3,000 million to fund the rundown of the industry. Yet again, the Government have refused to say why an increase on that scale is necessary. Fortunately, we are in a position to tell them that the money is needed because of the scale of the pit closures that they envisage, as set out in successive Rothschild reports. The first Rothschild report reduced to just 26 the number of collieries to be considered as candidates for survival. Of those, just six were to remain in the Nottingham coalfield.

When I said that on the news media in the east midlands, the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) responded that I did not know what I was talking about —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I said that the existing 15 collieries in Nottinghamshire would be reduced to six, and that nine would close over three years. Three have closed in just two months. Since the Bill was published, Creswell, Gedling and Sherwood have gone.

The second Rothschild report gave even worse figures. It revealed that Rothschild—the great expert in money but certainly not in coal—had whittled down the original 26 to 14 or possibly 12 collieries, in this case including just four in the Nottingham coalfield.

What is in the third Rothschild report, which the Government have received? Will the Secretary of State confirm that it says that the prospects for the industry are even more gloomy than the second report envisaged? Will the Secretary of State tell us, or is it to remain a squalid secret between Tory merchant bankers and money-grabbing Tory politicians, when and how many British miners they intend putting out of work? Apparently, for the time being at least, it is to remain secret—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that the Secretary of State will not guarantee that it will remain secret.

If such large sums are needed, it must be because closures on the scale that we predicted are envisaged. When an order for the smaller sums was being debated a couple of years ago, the then junior Minister said that, each year, the Government, to convince the Treasury that the money was necessary, had to produce rough and ready estimates of the number of pit closures.

Now that we are in the 10th month of the financial year, we are entitled to ask about the Government's estimates of the number of pit closures in this financial year. We do not expect the Government to look very far forward—they never do—but we are entitled to know what estimate they gave the Treasury for this year. How many closures does the Secretary of State expect there to be between now and the end of this financial year? I shall give way to the Secretary of State or the Minister of State if either of them is prepared to tell us——

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Silence is golden.

Mr. Dobson: I am not sure whether it is golden, but there is certainly silence.

One reason I ask that is that we are now becoming concerned about whether even the enormous sums concerned—£3,000 million, an addition under the Bill of £1,500 million—will be enough to cover closures on the scale envisaged. Those funds are used to finance redundancy and concessionary coal and to continue certain welfare payments. Obviously, those have first call on the money, but we are worried about whether enough money will be left to finance the training and job creation necessary if the money is to be spent properly in Britain's coalfields.

The position has changed, and the demand for jobs and training is growing. When pits were closed in the past decade, the miners who retired were considerably older than the ones who now face redundancy. Relatively speaking, they received a bigger lump sum, so they had more to get by on. Many were retiring early and, after two or three decades down a pit, who can blame a man for wanting to retire early? Even in their early or mid-50s, miners regarded redundancy as an opportunity to retire early. Some of them may have wanted to retrain or find another job, but many were satisfied with the possibility of a part-time job.

Requirements for retraining and new jobs within the coalfield communities were relatively limited, but the position has now substantially changed. The average miner today is 32 years old——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): The average miner today is 33 years old.

Mr. Dobson: I am happy to be corrected. He is therefore much younger than the miners who were made redundant five or 10 years ago. They still receive their redundancy payment and there is still a requirement for them to receive concessionary coal and for other immediate benefits. However, is there enough money to give those young ex-miners the retraining and job opportunities that Parliament was told that they would receive when the funds were forthcoming? We doubt whether the sums are sufficiently substantial.

Young men cannot retire at the age of 33. The general level of settlement for redundancy payments is more than £30,000, which seems like a few bob, but I remind hon. Members who are paid at least £30,000 a year that the redundancy payment is a one-off, one-life payment. That sum is just as much as the chairmen of the East Midlands or Yorkshire electricity are paid every two months of every year, and it is not a vast amount.

There is no question of young miners who have been made redundant ceasing work altogether. Nor can there be

[Mr. Dobson]

any question of anyone suggesting that the redundancy pay will fund those former miners through a period of retraining and help them to obtain another job.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): The hon. Gentleman has spent all his speech writing off the industry in a most depressing and negative way. Is he not aware that, only this morning, the chief executive of National Power, Mr. John Baker, told the Select Committee on Energy that he had no doubt that, in view of the enormous improvements in productivity resulting from the efforts of the work force that the hon. Gentleman is so anxious to write off, National Power will negotiate future contracts for coal, and British Coal has a secure market in power generation? Will not the hon. Gentleman allow a few minutes of his time to give credit to British Coal's achievements and the competitive position that it has won in order to compete in the power generation market?

Mr. Dobson: The Select Committee might do well to summon the chairman of British Coal before it again and ask him why, when he made his feckless presentations to the two generating companies, he told them that he thought that the maximum economic output from the industry—including up to 20 million tonnes of opencast—was about 40 million tonnes. According to my simple arithmetic, that gives a figure of about 20 million tonnes of deep-mine coal. Anyone who knows that information must feel somewhat dismal about the industry's prospects as long as the present Secretary of State undermines the efforts of the only member of British Coal's board who want to maintain the British coal industry, rather than merely say, "Yes, sir, no, sir, three bags full, sir," to the Secretary of State, which is apparently the function of the rest of the board members.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): My hon. Friend will not be aware that the hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) failed to say that the same Mr. Baker also informed the Select Committee this morning that it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that, by the mid-1990s, 50 per cent. of coal would be imported.

Mr. Dobson: I am glad that my hon. Friend gives us the benefit of a more balanced presentation of the evidence given to the Select Committee this morning. Anyone who considers the industry at present—I am sure that that includes the hon. Member for Sherwood—must feel gloomy about its prospects unless something is done—[HON. MEMBERS: "Does Stewart feel that?"] I give him the benefit of the doubt.

In Committee, the Minister said that he would try to let us have some information, on a rough and ready basis, on where the money had been spent in the past. Having been in touch with his office this morning, I gather that that information may be rough but it is not ready.

Mr. Hayes: Before my hon. Friend moves from the issue of redundancy, does he agree that British Coal is using blackmail in relation to pit closures? In the list of closures that my hon. Friend gave, he mentioned Sherwood pit in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). Last Sunday, the miners at that pit had a meeting and agreed on the closure of the pit before 1933, the date on which British Coal had decided. The miners decided that the pit should be closed early so that they would qualify for certain redundancy payments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) mentioned £30,000 redundancy payments, but the chappies working at Sherwood pit are not old enough and have not put in the necessary service to enjoy such payments. British Coal is using blackmail by saying that £10,000 will be knocked off redundancy payments, which is why those miners made the decision that the pit should be closed before 1993. If that is not blackmail, I do not know what is. The Secretary of State has gone—he could not care less.

Mr. Dobson: I was about to come to the point that my hon. Friend made so eloquently in relation to experiences within the Nottingham coalfield. We believe that the existing clause is unsatisfactory, which is why we tried to amend it in Committee. We discovered that the Ministers, who are by nature conservative, have a constricted view of what the restructuring fund can be spent on.

The Bill supplements the funds that are made available under the Coal Industry Act 1987. Schedule 2 lists eligible expenditure, and we looked closely at item 6 of that list, which is:

"Expenditure on the promotion of new employment in coal mining areas".

The item does not say that the money cannot be spent on new employment related to the coal industry, but the Ministers have decided on that interpretation. We considered two examples of ways in which the restructuring fund could be spent to help the mining industry.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) drew attention to the closures of large coal mines in south Wales and the fact that, as a result, the anthracite field had virtually closed. He inquired about the possibility of the restructuring fund being invested in the opening of new, small, properly regulated and safe anthracite mines in the coalfield that would provide new mining jobs. The Minister replied that such a scheme would not qualify under the Act.

We raised another possibility. Go-ahead local authorities on the edge of some mining districts are presently considering the possibility of developing combined heat and power plants, one of the combinations being that of burning coal and refuse in small power stations. The financing of those projects is borderline, and with a little bit of money from here and there, it might be possible to develop them.

But the Minister ruled out the possibility of using any of the restructuring fund to help finance such sensible projects. Therefore, we believe that Ministers' interpretation of the Act is wrong. Even if their interpretation is correct, the obvious thing to do is to make changes through the Bill, which they refuse to do.

I remind the Minister that this grant is called restructuring grant. "Restructuring" suggests changing and adjusting something and helping it, in a sort of Darwinian way, to survive. The Government interpret restructuring in the coalfields to mean closures. The money is available only if it facilitates closing coal mines and putting miners out of work. So calling the grant restructuring grant does violence to the English language.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I have recently corresponded with the chief executive of British Coal

Enterprise, asking for information about the number of jobs created in the Wakefield metropolitan district council area, where 40,000 jobs in mining have disappeared in the past few years. The only figure that BCE could give me was 100. If the Government really want to restructure so as to bring employment to redundant mineworkers, they must leave it to local authorities to join forces with private developers to create job opportunities.

In the past, we have been assured that there will be no compulsory redundancies. That promise has been broken. There will be mass compulsory redundancies if the Government do not follow the lead offered by my hon. Friend and show that they intend to bring other jobs to these areas. The promises made by the Government during the passage of this Bill and in previous statements will otherwise be shown to have been futile and misleading. I ask my hon. Friend to press home this point to the Government.

Mr. Dobson: I entirely agree.

It turns out that the Minister can interpret restructuring grant to mean money that can be spent on helping to build a new factory or shop which might be heated by gas, or to build a hypermarket or filling station, but the Government believe that any money that helped to restructure the coal mining industry and extend its future would be out of order.

We have also expressed important doubts about the way in which everything to do with redundancy money, under this Bill and former legislation, is left to the discretion of British Coal. The people in charge there are unfit to exercise that discretion. We have pointed out that they use redundancy pay not only as an inducement; they invert its purpose and use its possible removal as a threat, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) said.

From time to time Ministers deny that this happens, but British Coal's recent public actions give the lie to Ministers' protestations that British Coal has behaved honourably. Recently, British Coal formally told mining unions that the £10,000 maximum top-up pay—it tails down to a great deal less than that for miners who have not worked in the industry for a long time—would cease with effect from 31 March this year. The sole object of that exercise was to bring pressure to bear on miners to accept the accelerated pit closure programme that the Government want to push through in the remaining months of this year.

They are hoping to close eight to 10 more pits in the remainder of January, February and March using the following procedure: announce a closure, then tell miners that, if they accept it now, they will receive up to £10,000 extra—but if they resist, £10,000 less. A miner would have to be a saint not to accept closure in those circumstances.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): My hon. Friend is probably aware that, although the scheme ends on 31 March, British Coal has agreed that any colliery that accepts closure before that date will not be required to work 12 weeks' notice, which would inevitably take it beyond 31 March. So miners are being allowed to waive their period of notice to facilitate the ending of the scheme.

Mr. Dobson: No other business in Britain which is in trouble can act like British Coal. The easiest and cheapest course of action for British Coal to take at any moment in relation to any colliery is to shut it down. No one else in British business can say without fear or favour that, if he shuts down a plant, it will inevitably cost him less and save him a lot of money. The scheme operated now is a positive incentive to close pits as soon as possible.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is this not all due to the fact that we did not have an election last October or November? The Government are desperate because there will be less to privatise, if, God forbid, they are re-elected. This is a political ploy to pare the industry down as much as possible, and quickly. We should have had an election last October to settle the matter. The Government are burying the coal industry.

Mr. Dobson: The only saving grace in this circumstance is that, as the weeks and months go by, the number of Conservative Members who will develop a more acute interest in redundancy pay grows and grows.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): The hon. Gentleman said that miners who are offered an extra £10,000 to vote in favour of their pits closing would have to be saints not to accept. Does he agree that they need saintliness less than a touch of arithmetic? I am sure that most miners in my home county of Nottinghamshire earning about £20,000 a year would readily realise that, if they worked only another six months—from March to September—they would earn that £10,000, and if the pit continued in operation for two more years, they would be £40,000 better off.

Mr. Dobson: The felicific calculus suggested by the hon. Gentleman appears not to apply to the facts, which are that British Coal says that it will give men a bit more money if they go quickly and quietly and ask no questions. That works, and it is a technique which has been used to close down the industry.

The Government and the people they have put in charge of British Coal are determined to push ahead with the Rothschild-scale closures. We say that they will involve 10,0000 redundancies in the next financial year and 33,000 in 1993-94 if they go ahead. Probably, the Government will exceed even our estimates.

All this is being done to enable the newly privatised generating companies first to burn gas and secondly to import coal. And for whose benefit? It is certainly not being done for the benefit of electricity consumers. The hon. Member for Sherwood will agree that, while the price of British coal has fallen by 3 per cent. over the past five years, the price of electricity to dometic consumers has risen by 40 per cent. Any cost reductions achieved by the coal industry have not been passed on to the electricity customers.

The electricity produced by gas-fired power stations will be dearer than that being produced by coal-fired stations, because the former have to finance the building of the plant as well as buy the gas to run it. The coal-fired stations have paid off their capital charges and the plants are basically free. It is absurd to shift to that position, especially as some of the gas-burning contracts relate a proportion of future price to the world cost of oil.

We all know what can happen to oil. Perhaps the generators and the electricity companies will catch a cold and will expect electricity consumers to wipe their noses. We shall have to wipe their noses in it, because if they incur such costs they will have to bear them.

[Mr. Dobson]

This year, Britain will import 20 million tonnes of coal. The public pay for that cheaper coal, because the only reason for coal being imported is that British pits are being closed. British taxpayers are being asked to find an extra £1,500 million to pay for closures to facilitate the importation of coal. It is cheap coal for the generating companies, but apparently it brings no benefits whatever to the electricity consumer.

The Government are closing the cheapest, most efficient and safest mining industry in Europe. It is twice as efficient as the German mining industry. God knows, there are not many industries in Britain that we can say that about. That is why a European Commissioner has expressed concern at this loony Government closing the most efficient part of Europe's mining industry. That is why the Commission thinks that the policy is short-sighted, and that it would be right to pay some sort of premium for European security of supply.

The Secretary of State has said in the past that he agrees with the idea of a premium for security of supply. He thought that there would be a general election last year and has almost ceased functioning, except as a sort of election publicity co-ordinator for the Government. He is not doing anything to try to make sure that the generating companies pay some sort of premium for security of supply. Contrary to the advice that he was given by Rothschild, he is not getting involved in the negotiations to make sure that such a premium is provided. Unless he does become involved, the premium will never be paid. There is no way in which British Coal can lever it out of the generating companies, and the generating companies will not volunteer to pay it. There must be participation by the Secretary of State, particularly while he is a 40 per cent. shareholder in the two purchaser companies.

That brings me to Mr. Malcolm Edwards who, as far as I know, is still the commercial director of the British Coal Corporation. No socialist he, but he made the terrible mistake of taking the Secretary of State at his word. He heard the Secretary of State say that he wanted a viable British coal industry, the largest possible coal industry that the market could support. Being a simple-minded sort of fellow, Mr. Edwards set about trying to achieve that. Now the Government propose to sack him, and all because he takes the Secretary of State seriously.

Mr. Edwards should have thought, "Oh no, it is just a cynical two-faced move by the Secretary of State." If he had taken that view, which was taken by the rest of the board of British Coal, his job would have been safe. Instead, he thought that the Secretary of State meant what he said about restraining the decline in the industry—a move which would benefit the industry and might even save the taxpayer a great deal of money on restructuring.

The restructuring grant increase is £1,500 million. The Rothschild report says that, at any level of production from the British coalfield, an additional 10 million tonnes would cost £30 million. That is just 2 per cent. of the restructuring grant, and it would increase output and guarantee sales. An increase in output of 10 million tonnes would transform the industry, and that is why the Government are pursuing the wrong policies.

There is an alternative course that would be good for the industry, the miners, the coalfield communities and the balance of trade. It would husband our precious gas reserves and make a contribution to European energy self-sufficiency. Instead of that, the chairman of British Coal has told the generators that there will be 40 million tonnes, of which 20 million tonnes will be from opencast mining. That leaves just 20 million tonnes of deep-mined British coal.

The other particularly objectionable aspect of the Bill is the proposal to repeal the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. That is a health and safety measure and was introduced when you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, had a rather different function. In theory, if Parliament's earlier decisions are to be taken seriously, the Act could not be repealed, because relaxing the law on safety is contrary to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), a constituency which I always think of as Rowley Regis and Tipton, will have more to say about that if he speaks in the debate.

I emphasise that no fewer than two previous Secretaries of State for Energy have solemnly told either the House or a Committee that the Coal Mines Regulation Act affects safety and promised not to repeal it. The right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), when he was Secretary of State for Energy, promised that it would not be repealed without the agreement of the miners. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) said, the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), when he was Secretary of State for Energy, said that there would be no change in safety legislation in this Parliament. Those pledges should have been honoured, but the Bill deliberately and explicitly dishonours them.

The proposal to repeal the Act does not have the agreement of the miners. Some foolish people say that the number of hours worked does not affect safety. I hope that we shall not be troubled in the debate by any such people. It is said that the Act has not been adhered to. That is true, but it has always been in the background as a safety mechanism for miners when they were negotiating with management. Miners have always been able to say that they could refuse to work for more than seven and a half hours. Anyone negotiating about hours with an Act such as that behind him has his hand significantly strengthened, and can get extra pay and other concessions in return for working longer hours.

The Secretary of State has chosen to break the pledges made by two of his predecessors, and has given an even vaguer pledge than the one that they gave. *[Interruption.]* He said:

> "The 1908 Act will not cease to operate in the British mining industry until it is replaced by an alternative which will be arrived at either through a European directive or as a result of proposals in the House. I have no intention of producing such proposals at the moment."

Earlier in the debate, he said:

> "I have no other intentions at the moment".

He said that he would rely on the European directive but added:

> "If the directive is not satisfactory and is not agreed, the 1908 Act will stay and we shall then consider what to do". —[*Official Report*, 14 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 1250, 1248, 1261.]

I am not sure what the right hon. Gentleman meant by the phrase,

> "If the directive . . . is not agreed".

Not agreed by whom? In the European context that directive is subject to qualified majority voting, so the British Government cannot say no to it. There is no question of their agreeing to it—if the rest of the

Community votes for it, it is through and they will have to implement it. But we are told that the Government are resisting the proposition.

Mr. Haynes: Does my hon. Friend realise that the abolition of the 1908 Act is a straight twist by the Government? There are two of us in the Chamber hoping to participate in the debate who worked for the former coal owners under the 1908 Act. That Act had to be introduced because of those swine, the coal owners. When it came to the men's safety the coal owners were wicked —there is no doubt about that.

The nationalisation of the mining industry was the saviour, because the attitude to safety changed. The safety of the work force underground, rather than profit, became the number one priority. But now the Government are planning the privatisation of the coal industry, and they are taking us back to the days of the coal owners, when profit was number one, and blow the men—that is their attitude. That is what the Government want to do, and we must oppose it and stop it.

Mr. Dobson: I am confident that I have the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) on this matter. I commend his mastery of understatement in merely describing the previous coal owners as swine.

We should remember that, when a reduction in the number of hours worked below ground by six-year-old children was being contemplated, that great Tory landowner and coal owner, Lord Londonderry, told the House that, if children did not work 12 hours a day at the age of six, they would never learn to be proper colliers. That was the authentic voice of the Tories on mine safety.

The real irony of the Government's decision to rely on the European directive instead of the 1908 Act is that they oppose the European directive root and branch. If that excellent and accurate correspondent of the Press Association, Chris Moncrieff, is to be believed, in Maastricht the Prime Minister

"vowed that he will not budge from his determination to remove from the treaty EC demands for a maximum 48-hour working week and curbs on Sunday employment."

That is what the right hon. Gentleman said, and that is what we shall probably get.

We do not believe that the European directive will be a satisfactory way of governing miners' working hours and conditions.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Why not?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Member for Ashby——

Mr. Ashby: Who?

Mr. Dobson: I am sorry; I always get the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) muddled up with Ashby de la Zouch, which I believe is in his part of the world.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman is a lawyer. If he operates in the Inns of Court, most of which are in my constituency, I believe that he will realise that the likelihood of his suffering a major industrial accident such as those faced by miners down the pit every day is fairly small. The European directive will apply to lawyers, merchant bankers, shop workers and God knows who. It will apply to people who, by and large, are not involved in especially perilous operations and do not work in perilous places.

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that working down a mine is a peculiarly dangerous thing to do in a peculiarly dangerous place, he needs his head examined. I shall give way to him so that he can demonstrate that fact.

Mr. Ashby: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has obviously never been down a mine. I know that there is not a single mine in his constituency—there is not one to be found in London—and I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman has ever been down a mine. If he has, he will have found that mining practices have changed considerably in the past 150 years, since the days when six-year-old children went down mines.

Can the hon. Gentleman stop being a little Englander and accept the fact that people in the rest of the continent of Europe have just as much experience of working practices and are just as likely to find the right hours as we are? What is so special about here? Why should the European directive not represent the proper practices that we ought to follow? If the hon. Gentleman examines other European practices, he will find that we have learnt a great deal from Europe.

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do we have to listen to this? When did the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West ever have a shovel in his hand? He is a blasted solicitor. What does he know about mining?

Mr. Dobson: There are two points to be made. First——

Mr. Ashby: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been wrongly described as a solicitor. I am a barrister.

Mr. Dobson: I believe that Jack Cade was advised that we should first "kill all the lawyers", and I am beginning to have some sympathy with him.

The European directive is a general measure that will apply to people in all forms of employment. It does not deal specifically with the hazardous circumstances involved in working down a mine.

I am not a little Englander in this respect—the present safety regime in British mines is far better than that in mines anywhere else in Europe or in the world. If Ministers were proud of the record of British industry, they would say in the negotiations on the directive, "Why do you not add to your directive and try to make the mines in Germany, France and Spain as safe as those in Britain?", instead of accepting reductions in mine safety imposed on us from outside. That is what they would do if they had any patriotism and pride, but they do not. The Government are interested only in reducing the safety record—reducing the cost of safety in British mines so that they will be easier to sell off to international mining companies. That is what we have come to.

Mr. Ashby: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not.

The industry is being shabbily treated. It is being run down by the Tories, who want to reduce it to a small nugget of highly profitable pits that they can sell off to their friends afterwards. They want to sell off the land and

[Mr. Dobson]

the other assets to their profiteering estate agent friends, just as they have done with all the other privatised industries.

We believe that there is a sound future for a substantial British mining industry. As soon as that collection of economic halfwits who sit on the Treasury Bench finally have the courage to call a general election, we shall go to the country, get the support of the coalfield communities and of the people in the rest of the country, and we shall ensure that we secure a large British mining industry for the benefit not only of the coalfield communities but of the whole country and, as the European Commission would confirm, for the benefit of all of the people of western Europe.

5.59 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I spoke on Second Reading, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will know, but was not able to serve on the Committee, partly because I had already been asked to serve on the Local Government Finance Bill Committee, and partly because the minority parties also wanted to be represented. According to my inquiries—I will apologise if I am wrong—the Liberal Democrats did not want to be ignored on the subject of this important Bill, and took a place on the Committee—a place that I should have been happy to occupy, even on a part-time basis. Yet the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) had the nerve not to attend one single sitting. On his own behalf and on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Gentleman should apologise to the House now. I give way to him.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I will certainly explain why I did not attend. There were four sittings. Initially, I asked the Committee of Selection not to appoint me because I knew in advance that I would be unavailable for three of them. While the fourth sitting was taking place, I was giving evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee that was considering the London Underground Bill.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: That was an inadequate explanation, if I may say so. The constraints of the House require us to be careful with our language, but I believe that the Liberal Democrats owe us all an apology.

Mr. Haynes: Let me agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said, except for one thing. He said that he would have liked that position on the Committee. He could not have had it because it belonged to the Opposition, not the Government's supporters.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I agree and apologise. The hon. Gentleman will probably not agree with anything else that I say, but at least we have agreed on something—perhaps for the first time.

Mr. Hardy: Get on with it; this is a serious debate.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I agree that it is a serious debate—a very serious debate.

It is not often that the Labour party votes against a Bill that provides finance for British Coal, yet, on this occasion, they have opposed the Bill, solely for the sake of opposition, on Second Reading and throughout. The peg on which they hang their argument is safety and the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Safety is important.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Of course safety is important. No Conservative Member would vote for the Bill if he thought for a moment that he would be putting the safety of anyone underground at risk by doing so. I should certainly not support the Bill if I thought that that was a possibility.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Let us forget our political differences for a moment. Will the hon. Gentleman take it from me, as a miner of 23 years' service, that, by removing the protection afforded by the 1908 Act, the Bill will cause miners to die and to be crippled or seriously injured? That is my genuine view, based on my 23 years' experience as a miner.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I cannot challenge the experience of the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), and I accept that he holds that opinion honourably and sincerely. I have to tell him, however, that he is wrong. I do not believe that to be the case in the modern mining context—but perhaps the hon. Gentleman wants to follow the absurd example of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who treated us to an account of the conduct of a coal baron of God knows how many generations ago in dealing with six-year-old children, highlighting the general absurdity of the case advanced from the Labour Front Bench. I am prepared to take criticism from the hon. Member for Clydesdale because he is an ex-miner, but the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras gets more and more absurd.

On Second Reading, I was accused by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) of voting for the return of Victorian conditions in the mines. I utterly reject that accusation; nothing could be more absurd.

The outburst that we had today from the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) was fairly characteristic. We had exactly the same thing in Nottingham a few weeks ago when we held a conference for hon. Members on both sides of the House who are interested in the future of British Coal. In the interests of publicity, and for media purposes alone, Labour Members told us how dreadful everything would be. Much the same images were painted as were painted by the hon. Member for Ashfield today of what would happen if the Bill were passed and the 1908 Act repealed.

I do not think that I shall be contradicted if I say that, when it comes to safety, British Coal's mining engineers probably rank among the best in the world—they may even be better than those in the rest of the world—and that British Coal operates one of the safest deep-mine industries in the world. I do not believe that British Coal would use a technology unless an improvement in operational safety was associated with it.

I am not an expert, but I simply do not believe that British Coal is lying when it says that it is confident that the modern roof-bolting system now being used to varying degrees in more than half the corporation's mines is raising operational standards as well as production efficiency. That is British Coal's view, and I am not in a position to challenge it. I have no evidence on the basis of which to challenge it—only the emotional outbursts of Labour

Members. Contrary to the impression given to the House on Second Reading, the Health and Safety Executive says that its confidence in the system has increased as experience of the system has grown.

Mr. Lofthouse: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that British Coal is not operating the safety practice for protecting main roadways? That is not my view; it is the view given by the chief inspector of mines to the Select Committee on Energy. Will the hon. Gentleman take his word as authoritative?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Of course I accept that the chief inspector is an authority. Perhaps I have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman's point. Is he suggesting that the inspectorate of mines is allowing a practice to continue that it has the power to stop? That is an absurd suggestion. The inspectorate would be in default of its legal duty if it were doing that. I cannot believe that that is the point that the hon. Gentleman sought to make.

On Second Reading, I left the Chamber briefly and while I was away a Labour Member—perhaps he is present and will confirm that it was him—referred to the terrible tragedy at Allerton Bywater.

Mr. Lofthouse: It was me.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: If it was the hon. Gentleman, I shall happily give way if he wants to intervene to say that I have his story wrong. He sought to place responsibility for that terrible tragedy to a man and his family on the use of rock bolts. I have made inquiries, and I understand that the accident did not result from the use of a rock bolt to secure the roof at the mine but rather from the misuse of that rock bolt. Let me tell the House exactly what I understand happened. The rock bolt was used as an anchor point for a pull lift—in clear contravention of operational rules. A fall occurred, and a miner died. That is a tragedy that we all understand. If what has been said is true, the hon. Member who used this case as an example of reasons for not using rock bolts was being less than fair to the House.

Mr. Lofthouse: This is the first time I have been accused of being less than fair to the House. I was quoting the coroner's report, which associated the death with the roof bolt. If the hon. Gentleman had any experience of mining, he would know that arch girders provide the greatest safety.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I do not think I have implied that the new system was not in use when that accident occurred. The point that I am making is that it was not used properly. The people concerned were in breach of the operational rules. The hon. Gentleman seems to be implying that, if the older system were used, there would never be any accidents. He knows that in the last couple of months incorrect practices resulted in the loss of life even though the old system was in use. Accidents are tragic, but if people do not abide by the rules there will be accidents, whatever system is in use. That must be understood.

I want to take a few minutes to read from an article which should be enlightening even to people who are not interested in coal. It was written by a David Goodhart and appeared in the *Financial Times* on Friday 3 January. Throughout these debates we have heard only about pit closures. Hon. Members have given the impression that this industry has no future. The *Financial Times* article is very dear to the hearts of my colleagues in Nottinghamshire and the surrounding counties. It refers to Asfordby, which represents the future of British Coal—and that is what this Bill is concerned with.

Mr. Ashton: A one-pit future.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: It is not a one-pit future. With 20:20 vision, hindsight is very easy, but if only some of the things that are now happening at Asfordby had been accepted more readily a few years ago, we might well have been having a very different debate today.

Mr. Hood: The hon. Gentleman says that, with hindsight, things are easy. He should bear in mind the fact that all mining legislation has been the result of hindsight. Over the years, mining accidents have given rise to legislation. The Government are now tampering with legislation that was put in place for the protection of miners.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is making a point, but I cannot follow it.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Let the hon. Gentleman read the *Official Report* tomorrow.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am sure that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) will read the *Official Report* tomorrow.

I believe that, already, expenditure at Asfordby has amounted to about £300 million. That facility will not come into operation until next year, but it already has a full complement of men—about 400. The article to which I have referred points out that, because of the new technology, Asfordby, unlike any other pit, seems almost empty of people. The future of British coal lies in a high-tech industry employing small numbers of people and producing coal at a competitive price.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): On the question of pricing, the hon. Gentleman is correct. But that is the problem. I should like to inform him of an exercise that is being carried out by Doug Bulmer, the president of the British Association of Colliery Management. The chairman of British Coal was asked whether every colliery would remain open if it were to produce at 130p per gigajoule. The chairman said that on that matter he could not give Mr. Bulmer an assurance.

The other question, which was put to every colliery manager in Great Britain, related to forward planning, forecasts, costs and delivery. The managers were asked what would be the level of production in the year 2000. Apparently, in the year 2000 only five collieries would be able to produce at a cost of 130p per gigajoule. Let the hon Gentleman look at the Rothschild and BACUM figures —14 and five.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman will have to come to terms with the fact that there is an energy market to be supplied. The amount of coal that is used is very much a question that is in the hands of British Coal as it negotiates with the current generating authorities. Some people ask how much coal will be dug or how many pits will be open by the year 2000. That is like asking how long is a piece of string. We do not know how big a slice of the cake British Coal will be able to secure. Nobody can say that by the year 2000 there will be five pits, 14 pits—or any number of pits. However, I firmly believe in the ability of

[Mr. Brandon-Bravo]

British Coal to win a big slice of the energy cake. That —and not some Government decision—is what will determine how many pits stay open.

Mr. Allen McKay: The electricity industry says that it will buy its coal from abroad unless British Coal can produce at 130p per gigajoule. A colliery manager who is actually planning and investing was asked how many pits would be producing at 130p per gigajoule. The answer was five.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo *indicated dissent.*

Mr. McKay: The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) need not shake his head. The people to whom I am referring actually work the collieries.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman is trying to guess what the market price will be in X years' time and what proportion of the market will be accounted for by coal. It is simply impossible to make those judgments. It seems that I have much more faith in the future of coal than does the hon. Gentleman.

Let us not constantly try to talk down the coal industry. Asfordby expects to produce not much less than 2 million tonnes of coal a year with only 400 men. That is an incredible target. If it is achieved, the production costs will be not much more than half the current figure, and the undertaking will be able to compete with most of our opencast coal facilities. It seems an almost impossible target, but the management people believe that they can achieve it. People should stop indulging in doom and gloom and, instead, looks to the future.

I am very glad that in my area miners belong to the Union of Democratic Mineworkers under Roy Lynk. Miners in Nottinghamshire and in the surrounding area want to work towards the future. But the six-day week, the 7·5 hour shift and the other things that make Asforby possible would be impossible if things were left to the National Union of Mineworkers. If it was up to the NUM, we would still be working under arrangements made years ago.

There is nothing in the Bill for the industry to fear. It simply puts the 1908 Act on hold until it is replaced. Nothing in the Bill is detrimental to the industry or to the safety of the men whom we send underground. Therefore, I have no hesitation in supporting the Bill.

6.20 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): The House may have noticed that so far I have not participated in our debates on this Bill. It is more than 40 years since I worked in a coal mine and, unlike the Minister, I was prepared to listen to the expertise of my hon. Friends who have experience of the industry. I intervene to raise only one matter about which I confess that I share the puzzlement of my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie).

The Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908 related to the hours of work in the coal mining industry. We have heard some discussion about whether it was concerned with health and safety matters. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker —none better—and anyone who has looked at the research into the causes of accidents will also know that probably the greatest cause of accidents is fatigue, but that is a side issue in this debate. That Act related to hours of work, and I am prepared to settle for that.

Clause 2 purports to repeal an Act that is concerned with hours of work. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian, I have wondered why the Secretary of State for Energy is introducing a Bill which relates to hours of work, because that is a matter for his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. The Secretary of State for Energy is concerned with the structure of the coal mining industry, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has just referred. Clause 1 is certainly within the bailiwick of the Secretary of State for Energy, and I am prepared to leave aside its merits for the moment. But, turning again to clause 2, why is the Secretary of State for Employment getting his right hon. Friend at the Department of Energy to deal with a matter that is within his province?

That issue caused me to ask myself how the Secretary of State for Employment would have set about achieving the proposal if it had been his, as we would have expected. I can think of two possibilities. The first is that section 15 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 empowers the Secretary of State—in practice, the Secretary of State for Employment—by regulation to repeal or modify any of the existing statutory provisions. Under section 53, "the existing statutory provisions" means those listed in schedule 1, which includes the Mines and Quarries Act 1954. It is true that schedule 1 does not specifically include the 1908 Act, but section 187 of the 1954 Act provides that the provisions of the 1908 Act should have effect as if they were included in the 1954 Act.

I apologise for inflicting that complicated history on the House, but, as you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the 1908 Act contains only one enforcement provision—a fine of up to £2—so that, without the 1954 Act, the provisions are an empty shell. That is why Parliament decided in 1954 that the provisions of the 1908 Act should be taken on board the 1954 Act because, without that, it was virtually unenforceable.

I return to my original question, which I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian. Since the Secretary of State for Employment has the power under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 effectively to repeal the 1908 Act, since he is the Minister responsible for such matters and since Parliament clearly contemplated that he would follow that procedure, why is the repeal being effected by a Bill about the financing of the coal industry which has been introduced by the Secretary of State for Energy? I know that it is not within your power to confirm what I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you and I can recollect the history of this matter.

Mr. Ashby: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Archer: Yes, but I was about to answer my question.

Mr. Ashby: Perhaps I can answer the question for the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Is it not the case that the 1908 Act is a specific Act that thus requires a specific repeal, whereas the other Act is more concerned with general hours? We are talking about a specific Act that requires repealing if the directive is ever to come into effect. Although I accept that the right hon. and learned

Gentleman is right about the effects of worker exhaustion, does he not agree that the Germans and the French, who have excellent practices and the same sort of problems and safety record underground as we have, are also aware that the number of hours worked must be limited because of worker exhaustion and, given that the French and the Germans will be just as aware of those facts, will not the provisions be incorporated in the directive?

Mr. Archer: That is rather a lot of questions and, although I am trying to be brief, I shall try to answer two of them. The first is the question whether, if the Secretary of State for Employment had sought to repeal the 1908 Act, he would have needed to use a Bill. For the reasons that I have just given, I believe that he could have achieved his purpose by using the powers conferred on him under the 1974 Act. However, for the purpose of this argument, I am prepared to assume that he could introduce a Bill, but why was that Bill not introduced by the Secretary of State for Energy? *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) will permit me to continue, I shall come to his second point about Europe in a moment.

The answer that occurred to me is that, if the Secretary of State for Employment had been proposing to achieve that, as I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will remember better than anybody, section 1(2) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 stated that those powers were conferred

"with a view to enabling the enactment . . . to be progressively replaced by a system of regulations . . . designed to maintain or improve the standards of health, safety and welfare established by or under those enactments."

It is within my personal recollection that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, made that point perfectly clear in our debates on that legislation. Those are the reasons that that power was given. If the Secretary of State failed to meet that condition, I imagine that the courts would hold that he could not exercise the power. So he could not use the obvious power that was conferred under the 1974 Act. So, by different paths, the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West and I have arrived at the same conclusion.

The other possibility is that the Secretary of State might well have introduced a Bill, but everybody would then have asked, "Why did you not use the power under the 1974 Act?" The hon. Gentleman might be ready with an explanation, but I assume that the explanation that would have jumped most quickly to the minds of those concerned is, "Because, in this case, it was not being replaced by any provision that even maintains, much less enhances, the existing standards." In fact, the Secretary of State gave the game away on Second Reading when he said that the provisions of the 1908 Act were too inflexible in modern conditions. That can only mean that they wanted to treat employees in a way that would not have been permissible under the 1908 Act.

I come now to the second question posed by the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West. The Secretary of State told the House on Second Reading that it was all right because the 1908 Act was to be replaced by the provisions of the proposed EC directive on the organisation of working time.

There are two comments to be made on that. First, the directive never says that it should replace existing statutory standards. It does not require existing legislation to be repealed. It provides for minimum standards, and it says that there shall be at least some legislation to bring standards up to that minimum if they are not already there. It is clear from the directive that the EC was not contemplating particularly work in coal mines; it was discussing working hours across the board. There was nothing in the directive specific to coal mining and the problems of fatigue and all the other difficulties associated with it.

Secondly, it is clear that the directive does not provide standards equivalent to those in the 1908 Act. On the hours of work, except for night workers, it simply proposes that a worker should have at least 11 consecutive hours of rest in any period of 24 hours, so a person can work 13 hours and still comply with the directive.

If the Secretary of State for Employment or even the Secretary of State for Energy wished to alter the working arrangements in coal mines, surely the proper course was to consult those most concerned to secure agreement about hours of work which, among other things, would have ensured that safety was not endangered by fatigue. Everyone might have agreed that it was better to have a different provision from that in the 1908 Act and the Secretary of State could have brought forward a Bill on agreed terms.

But to repeal the provisions unilaterally and to announce blandly that they are being replaced by a directive—if and when the directive is concluded—providing for lower standards is cheating. As we have been reminded, the Secretary of State for Employment does not believe in the directive. He is one of the ancient Britons on the Government Benches who fear that the Europeans are soft on employment conditions and that they are encouraging the natives to get above themselves. So he could not come to the House himself and say, "It is all right to repeal the 1908 Act, since the EC Commission will look after us." But I am surprised that the Secretary of State for Energy agreed to do his dirty work for him. The Secretary of State for Energy has dirty work enough of his own. I hope that the House will reject the Third Reading.

6.32 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I support and welcome the Third Reading of this important Bill. It guarantees the doubling of restructuring grants to British Coal from £1,500 million to £3,000 million in the period up to 1996. The effect will be to enable British Coal to continue the vital restructuring of the industry and allow, where necessary, generous redundancy terms. It shows a continuing commitment by the Government, who have invested £2 million every working day for 12 years in the coal industry—more than all the other Governments since 1945 put together.

It also ensures that British Coal is on a solid financial footing by writing off the debts and burdens of its past in a massive £5 billion capital restructuring. Largely as a result of the Government's commitments, the coal industry has undergone a more dramatic and remarkable transformation in the past decade than perhaps any other industry, and without a single compulsory redundancy. Taking these measures together, British Coal's financial results for 1990-91 showed the first bottom-line profit for 13 years.

During the Christmas recess, on six successive days, I visited collieries in my constituency and saw the practical results of the investments being operated by management and miners who have increased productivity by 110 per

[Mr. Andy Stewart]

cent. and reduced prices to power generating companies by 40 per cent. in real terms. While I was there, nobody questioned the need for the improvements because they are the road towards guaranteeing a lasting future with British Coal. Nevertheless, while the miners have been meeting every challenge placed before them, their product market has been shrinking because of uncompetitive alternatives, particularly gas, which by 1994 will have replaced 30 million tonnes of coal.

I described the crazy economics of that on Second Reading. I trust as a result that the electricity regulator, Stephen Littlejohn, is now investigating the absurd situation and the possible removal of 12 GW of viable coal-fired stations as a result of the generators' dash for gas.

The miners of Sherwood are angry and resentful at what has happened, particularly since their efforts are helping to finance the new gas-generating stations. One miner summed up the feelings of his colleagues when he said, "We have been kicked in the teeth so many times by politicians of all parties that our dental bills are almost the same as the fossil fuel levy."

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend is not normally controversial. When he said that both parties had kicked the miners in the teeth, he may have been trying to calm things. I can remember only one incident when the Labour party really kicked the miners in the teeth. That was when they all went home early one Thursday night and the Killingholme Generating Stations (Ancillary Powers) Bill 1991 got its Second Reading. Was my hon. Friend serious in his remarks? Perhaps he would outline other occasions when that lot kicked the miners in the teeth.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right. The miners in Nottinghamshire remember the scandal of the Labour party going home early, with the result that, at 8.10 pm, only 49 Labour Members voted against the Bill. Further, the Nottinghamshire miners noticed that it was a Labour-controlled Humberside county council which passed the planning consent for the new gas-fired stations in Humberside to replace the use of 2·5 million tonnes of coal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We should get back to the Third Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Stewart: There is more. Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you not like to hear what I meant when I said that all parties had kicked the miners in the teeth?

Mr. Allen McKay: Let us nail the facts. I was the pairing Whip on the Killingholme Generating Stations (Ancillary Powers) Bill. It was Conservative Members who wanted to pair to get away. Had I refused the pairing arrangement, there would have been a full contingent in the House. It made no difference to the numbers.

Mr. Stewart: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have been here a long time and you will know that a private Bill is not whipped business.

The frustration of both management and men which I found during my visits to the Sherwood collieries was due to uncertainty about the British Coal market share after April 1993. The new contracts will be around 55 million tonnes and must be settled soon. Sherwood's miners will meet head on the challenge for maximum tonnage. Already plans are laid in every pit to continue reducing unit costs through investment and productivity, and by 1993 will match the current so-called world price for coal.

In December, the Nottinghamshire miners recorded a best-ever production of 6·25 tonnes per man shift, which demonstrates beyond doubt that they can deliver the goods to our generators at prices beneficial to the generators and to domestic and industrial customers. Therefore, the generators do not need to import coal and face the uncertainty of price and the danger of possible international coal cartels.

Britain has 200 years of workable coal reserves and miners prepared to deliver it at given prices. That is a guaranteed partnership which no coal supplier from abroad can provide. If we want to back a sure winner, that team is a certainty.

Mr. Ashton: Is it not a fact that the hon. Gentleman has advised the Union of Democratic Mineworkers to buy into the pits when they are privatised after the next election if, God forbid, the Tories get in? He has advised them to take part and buy in as part of the privatisation measure. What will he say to the UDM if they do so, say at the end of this year, but in 1993, after they have spent their money, the contracts are awarded to coal at a much lower price from other countries? They will lose their cash and see their pits shut as a result of coal imports when he advised them to speculate before the orders were made.

Mr. Stewart: That intervention surprises me. The hon. Gentleman knows that the UDM has its own financial advisers who are paid to give it such advice. I have merely said to the UDM miners that if they wish to have a stake in their industry, good luck to them. It is their future. The future of the coal industry is what it is all about.

Clause 2 repeals the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. Its repeal will be suspended until the Act is superseded by and EC directive. The measure has brought allegations that safety in our coalfields will be jeopardised. Let me reassure the doubting Thomases that nothing is further from the truth. In Nottinghamshire, safe working practices are paramount and take precedence over all else. That was widely in evidence during my visits. From the time when the miners arrive in the car park, they are subjected to visual and verbal reminders to make each day a safe day. That has resulted in a welcome reduction in injuries year on year. That reduction will continue because no one is resting on his laurels. Coal may be king, but safety is life. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.42 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I am tempted to be drawn by one or two distractions in the speech of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart). I may deal with them later. I do not intend to take too long. I apologise for not being present at the beginning of the debate. I had some bad news. Someone tried to break into my flat so I had to run over and speak to the police. I apologise for being late as a result.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the present shadow Secretary of State for Energy who will be Secretary of State for Energy in not too long, said that the Rothschild report was at the root of the debate tonight. I remind the House, if it needs reminding, that the Rothschild report talked about 13 or

14 pits. It is my strongly held view that the target is a maximum, not a minimum. Indeed, we are seeing evidence of that in the internal strife at British Coal.

I have heard brief references to Mr. Malcolm Edwards, whose contract is not to be renewed. I have to tell Mr. Edwards that I will be surprised if he is surprised at that news. I knew when the new chairman of British Coal came to power and when his contract was renewed last year for only another 12 months, that that would be his last 12 months. If he did not know that, many of us suspected it and have been proved right.

Mr. Malcolm Edwards is not a supporter of the Labour party. I do not know whether it is true, but I am informed that he is a card-carrying member of the Conservative party. I am reliably assured that he fell foul of his present bosses because he was confused about where his loyalties lay. Were his loyalties with his political party—bearing in mind the wonderful briefs which Conservative Back-Bench members have received from that source—or with British Coal? British Coal is fighting in the middle. The new chairman was brought in for a specific purpose.

I remind the House that when the new chairman came to power, he replaced a chairman whose salary was £98,000. He immediately went on to a salary of £220,000. On 23 February the Prime Minister was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) whether he would like to comment on the more than doubling of the chairman's salary. The Prime Minister replied that the new chairman must be well worth that money if that was what he was being paid. That was strange because it was probably the Prime Minister who agreed that his salary should be doubled.

The new chairman is a financier, not a miner. I have met him on several occasions. He is a cordial and pleasant man, but he is a financier. He has come in to do a job —to prepare the coal industry for privatisation. He has told the Government that the industry cannot be privatised in its present form. He has said that private capital will not invest in the industry unless it is considerably contracted.

I remember at my first meeting with the chairman challenging him to defend the statement that he would run the industry down to 30 pits. He knocked the ball back over the net and did not answer the question directly. The estimate of 30 pits was a mistake. The reporter who heard the rumour must have thought that the chairman said 30 when he probably said 13. That is the position and that is what the Bill is all about.

I shall speak for a few minutes more in the hope that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) comes back into the Chamber. Some of his comments tonight convinced me, if I needed convincing, that he does not know a thing about the coal industry. I do not know whether it is common knowledge, but it is knowledge that I have acquired in the past few days, that Mr. Edwards, who as I said is not a supporter of the Labour party, is a long-serving member of the board of British Coal and has supported the running down of the industry over a considerable period. He has probably been on the board long enough to see 200,000 mining jobs lost.

Now that Mr. Edward's own job is going, he is not acting as responsibly as he said miners should. He criticised miners for opposing any threat to their jobs. I am told that he is suing British Coal. I can remember a meeting with the Coal Board at which the National Union of Mineworkers was criticised. I was chairman of a miners welfare and social club. British Coal spent more than a quarter of a million pounds on removing me as the chairman of the trustees. That was not an act taken to improve the productivity of the coal industry. It was a political decision to get rid of a chap who was a member of the union, whom the board did not want involved in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

We hear all these noises from Nottinghamshire about how everyone is working together wonderfully. I am in Nottinghamshire regularly. I was there only last weekend. As I always did during the 20-odd years that I lived there I enjoyed myself socially with the miners. I have to tell the House that the miners I know in Nottinghamshire—they work at all the pits in the constituency of the hon. Member for Sherwood—do not share his view that they have been treated wonderfully.

At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Member for Sherwood praised the Government and said what a wonderful job they were doing and that miners should be thankful that they were losing their jobs. They should be thankful that they were getting a little blood money for redundancy. If one applies that theory to the position that some hon. Members will be in after the general election, I do not think that when the hon. Member for Sherwood loses his seat—after all, he will get £30,000 lump sum—he will be sending a wee thank-you note to the Labour candidate who just removed him. Let us get rid of the idea that what is happening in the industry is good for miners. It will do no favours for the miners, for the industry, for our economy or for our country. The British coal industry has a proud record of supporting our economy. It has been run down disastrously by a Government with an economic policy which only they can understand.

Last Friday, I attended the birthday party of one of my constituents, Mrs. Mary Forgie. You may ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what that has to do with the Bill. It has this to do with it. Mary Forgie was 100 last Friday and in her early life she was a miner. As a young girl she worked in the pits. She had nine children, and her five sons all worked in the mines. She was born in the reign of Queen Victoria, and has lived through the reigns of four kings and through 40 years of the reign of the present monarch, Queen Elizabeth. She has seen quite a lot. She saw the Victorian days that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) told us were so good for us. She has seen the industrial revolution and wars, and she saw the coal industry when it employed women and children to work seven days a week, 12 and 14 hours a day.

Tragically, at her time in life she has to witness a reversal in the industry, as the Government try to take it and the people employed in it back to those dark Victorian days.

It is nonsense for anyone, whether a solicitor from Leicester or from wherever, to stand in the House and say that, by taking away the protection for miners' working hours, we will be doing them good. I shall repeat what I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Nottingham, South—by taking away protection the Bill will kill miners, it will disable and cripple them.

As one of my hon. Friends said, each miner depends on his workmate for his own safety. It is important for each miner to be alert to what is happening in the working environment. I shall give two examples from my own experience. I was an engineer in a pit and was working overtime on the night shift. I had come out early at 9 o'clock at night and at 7 o'clock the following morning I

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

was working on a breakdown at a coal face, with a fellow fitter, Gibby Dobbie. Because we were working overtime, most miners at other parts of the coal face had gone home. There was a roof collapse and I was buried. Thankfully, my head was trapped in the air pocket of a trepanner but had it not been for my colleague's alertness I might not have been here to complain about this legislation.

The other example is when I was trapped by the foot by a three-ton piece of machinery. Had it not been for the alertness of the person with me, I might have lost a foot, or worse. I depended on the alertness of my workmates, and I could give hundreds of similar examples.

I was a union official in a mining village. Perhaps Conservative Members do not understand that that means one tends to become a sort of parish priest, dealing with all the problems. People come at all times of the day and night. When men fall out with their wives or whatever, they go to the secretary to ask for help. They have come to me to ask for shelter when their house was burning down.

When I was a union secretary, there were six fatalities at the pit where I worked. Most of the fatalities were during overtime, when men were working outwith their normal shift and when they were more fatigued. I had the responsibility—perhaps some of my colleagues have also had that experience—of telling a parent, a mother or a child that their son, husband or father was not coming home.

We are talking about changing legislation. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South did not appreciate my remarks about hindsight. Every part of our mining legislation was made from disasters, like the ones I experienced. For God's sake, we all know the problems, we know about gas explosions and the need to inspect roadways for gas.

People advising the Government about changing the legislation are not considering what is good for the work force. During a recent meeting with the Secretary of State for Energy and his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, we talked of our fears about privatisation. The Secretary of State was fair and open-minded—as he always is—when we met him. He has his views, which are different from ours, but he is very polite. He told us that the industry has to get rid of what he called "historical liabilities", to prepare for privatisation. That term covers a range of things—financial liabilities and liabilities under the Act to protect the worker from the employer. If those liabilities are not relaxed and if some of them are not eliminated, the financial advisers do not believe that there will be any inducement for private industry to come in and invest. Therefore, they are moving in that direction, and the Bill is a step in that direction. There will be other Bills and other measures to get rid of what the Government term "historical liabilities".

I am certain that many of my colleagues and the hon. Member for Sherwood, who represents a lot of mining families—at present—are aware that one of the liabilities is concessionary fuel. Although they keep denying it, we know that the industry is getting rid of that liability. We shall see what happens.

It is also apt for us to discuss the position of the pension scheme. Ironically, the scheme has done a little better in the past few years because of the Government's inadequacies. Because of their mishandling of the economy and the high interest rates, the pension scheme and its investments have brought it more income. However, during the majority of its years the scheme has been in deficit—it is a deficit-funded scheme and that is another historical liability. When I met the Secretary of State, as a member of the miners' parliamentary group, I told him that I hoped that the Government were not thinking in any way, shape or form of using the £8 billion in the miners' pension scheme as a way to attract private capital.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman may recall, although he was not here at the time, that until the Coal Industry Act 1987, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers was not allowed to sit on the board of trustees. At that time, his union blocked every sensible investment decision that the pension fund managers wanted to make. That is why there is an accumulating surplus of £1,500 million.

Mr. Hood: Let us kill that one right now. The NUM took a correct and principled stand by opposing investment in South Africa. The trustees would not support investment there. They were right to do so and I applaud them for doing that now. The hon. Gentleman's comment is a load of nonsense.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) can use his influence to persuade his colleagues in the Union of Democratic Mineworkers to make public the financial control and administration of the Nottinghamshire workmen's compensation scheme. There are no published accounts, and anyone who has knowledge of that scheme knows that UDM officials are paid tax-free benefits from the scheme as a means of giving them free handouts. The hon. Gentleman may want to talk to Lynk and his cohorts about how much he rakes off of the money paid into the fund by the Government.

Mr. Andy Stewart: The hon. Gentleman would not repeat that outside.

Mr. Hood: We shall see.

The Bill is disastrous. It is designed for financiers and for those who seek to use the mining industry to make money. It does not consider the safety of the industry or the well-being of mining communities. For that reason, we will oppose the Bill and for that reason we shall win a lot of seats in the east midlands, and one of those seats will be Sherwood.

7.1 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): One advantage of having been a Member of the House for many years is that one has had an opportunity on a number of occasions to listen to arguments about problems facing the coal industry and our economy. The Opposition have tried to paint themselves today as almost philanthropic friends of the coal miner. More than a quarter of a century ago, I occupied the position of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and my first task was to wind up for the Opposition in the Second reading debate on the Coal Industry Bill 1965. It was probably the Bill that tore the heart out of the British coal industry. The number of pits that were to be closed as a result of that Bill was, as predicted by the then Minister of Power, the late Lord Lee, a minimum of 200.

Second Reading was a moving occasion because in those days there were many more former miners in the House. Lord Lee said:

"there are pits . . . about 200"

which it would probably be necessary to close

"over the next five years . . . This is about the same number as in the past five years, but the Board intends, with the Government's full support, to speed up the process by effecting more than half of these closures within . . . two years . . . Within the next five years, the Coal Board aims to close all those collieries which fail to cover their running costs and are unlikely to do so in a foreseeable period of time."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1965; Vol.721, c.784.]

Those colliery closures took place and, sadly, many others followed. The problem for the British coal industry has always been, and remains, that although it is by far the most mechanised and efficient in Europe——

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I remember those days because I was a young miner at the time and I worked in one of the pits about which the hon. Gentleman spoke. Most of those pits were what we called "taty" pits—small pits—and the idea was to close the small pits and to merge them with the big super-pits. That happened in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. I went to one of the super-pits and worked the coal that I had worked from the colliery that I had just left. The idea was to close down the small pits and to make them into super-pits which would produce more coal.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has raised that matter, because it takes me to my next point.

The British coal industry is the most mechanised industry in Europe and one of the largest. The level of mechanisation reminds me of another super-pit—Bevercotes. It reminds me of the ROLF—the remotely operated longwall face. It also reminds me of the Collins miner which the late Lord Robens believed would be able to rip coal out of the narrowest seam. The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) is corect to say that there was a belief that somehow or somewhere there was an industry that would be the core and the foundation for the whole business. Sadly, Bevercotes did not live up to expectations, and ROLF and the Collins miner were never quite enough. One reason is that, although our coal industry may be the most mechanised and efficient in Europe, it produces deep-mined coal. Deep-mined coal will never be able to compete on all fours unless it is 100 per cent. efficient with the opencast coal of other countries. Unfortunately, against that background, we must recognise that we are part of a four-fuel economy.

I remember the 1960s, when the Labour Government produced the document setting out Britain's energy strategy. One paragraph is engraved on my mind because it predicted that there would always be a plentiful and cheap supply of middle east oil. Against that background, the closures took place. I go further. Energy forecasting is not an exact science; it is an art or guesswork. It was not long ago that we were told that gas was too precious to burn and that it would be the feedstock for the chemical industry. We were told that even coal would be too precious. Now we are talking about gas-firing power stations. We live in a changing world.

I am saddened and amazed to learn that the Opposition have decided to vote against the Bill on Third Reading tonight. All coal industry Bills—and this is no exception—have made additional financial provision for the industry "Restructuring" is a word that could have been used in 1965 as much as it can be used in 1992. The industry requires all the assistance that it can get to find ultimately the core business which can be the foundation stone of its future.

Opposition Members may believe that, if they were in government, they would be able to transform the industry and make it grow again. I have not heard a word from Opposition Front-Bench Members this afternoon about the size of the industry which they envisage. I have heard a great deal of criticism about what we are doing but I have yet to hear Opposition Members say what they envisage the size of the industry will be. As much as anyone, they recognise that there are variable components in the equation of gas, coal, nuclear and oil.

The Bill aims, once again, to give the industry an opportunity to resolve its problems itself. It may not be possible. I cannot tell whether anything to do with the Rothschilds will be taken account of or not. All I know is that the industry has been racked with problems ever since I came to the House in 1964 and long before that. In the so-called 13 wasted years before that, the Tories had kept the pits open; it was a Labour Government that started to close them. So I do not recognise in the arguments of Opposition Members this afternoon any guarantees to the miners that their jobs are secure.

Sadly, closures and restructuring are not new to the industry. The Bill should be given a Third Reading because it at least gives the industry, in the current context, an opportunity to be successful.

7.10 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson). I note what he has said, and I am familiar with many of the times that he has referred to, but I think that he will agree with me that, when mines were closed in the period that he referred to, the situation was well described by my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) just now. Many were small mines. At that time, there was very little unemployment and there were very few redundancies among miners, even though the pits were being closed. There were transfer arrangements, and new housing estates were built to enable these men to transfer to other pits. The hon. Member for New Forest will surely agree with me that it is a different ball game now.

The hon. Member said that he could not understand why Opposition Members opposed the Bill. I suppose that, if money is available for miners in these circumstances, even though we do not agree that they should lose their jobs, it might be difficult to understand; but having spent a lifetime in the mining industry, I will never vote for a Bill that can threaten the safety of coal miners.

Since nationalisation, the British coal industry has had a very proud record on safety. In recent years, I am sad to say, there has been evidence that the record will to a great extent be lost if we are not very careful. It certainly worries me no end if we start tinkering with mining safety laws and if we are to face, which God forbid, privatisation of the coal industry.

One must look at the history of the past few years to appreciate the situation and the policy that is taking shape now in British Coal. I well remember in 1981 standing at the tape machine down the corridor. I heard someone

[Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse]

behind me say, "By, that's good news." The voice belonged to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), and she was pointing to the item which said that Harold Evans had been made editor of the *Sunday Times*. I turned and said to the right hon. Lady, "There's better news there," because the tape was announcing that the problems of the miners in 1981 had been settled.

The right hon. Member for Finchley said to me, "Yes, they've got themselves in such a mess." What she did not say was that there would be preparations over the next two or three years to take the miners out, yet that is what happened. From 1984, it was the policy of the right hon. Lady and her Cabinet to run down the coal industry, and we have seen it run down rapidly ever since.

For many years, I have been privileged to be a member of the Select Committee on Energy. We have taken much evidence on the coal industry over the years and, as witnesses, we have had many chairmen of British Coal and many Secretaries of State for Energy. In our reports, we have repeatedly warned of the consequences for the energy requirements of our country of running down our coal industry to the extent that we could not meet the demand.

The very last report was printed on 10 July last year, and I want to read two or three lines of its conclusions, because, if Select Committee reports mean anything, the Government surely ought to give consideration to them. I heard someone on television last night, with regard to the Maxwell brothers, say that he thought that Select Committees were now redundant. I do not believe that is the case, but I wonder sometimes: many hours are spent listening to expert evidence and the all-party membership makes an honest endeavour to produce constructive reports, but Governments tend not to take a great deal of notice of them.

This is what the report said barely six months ago:

"The main conclusion of this part of our Report is that a long-term view needs to be taken of the value of having a substantial indigenous coal industry offering secure supplies at stable prices, and of coal's place among other fuels in providing for the country's long-term energy needs . . . Above all, if a significant proportion of the UK's coal reserves were abandoned, which we hope will not happen, resulting in a major reduction of long-term energy security, the Government should understand that the country would see this not as a commercial decision but a largely irreversible decision of historic significance for the UK."

I have no doubt that the Government read that and replied to it, but the reply has been very miserable and negative. That is the view of all members of the Committee. Correspondence is taking place between the Clerk of the Committee and the Department of Energy at this time making these very points.

What worries me now is the attitude of British Coal. There are great worries that British Coal is taking part in an exercise to negotiate for contracts after the 1993 contracts come to an end, and the suggestion is that there may be some confusion. The international coal report, just out on Monday of this week, refers to the situation of Malcolm Edwards. Like other people, I have no great beef about Malcolm Edwards and nothing against the chap. I do not warm to him, because he once told the Select Committee on Energy that he could not wait for the day when the coal industry was privatised. Nevertheless, he has been the commercial director of British Coal for many years, and he has vast experience.

The report discusses Malcom Edwards under the headline "British Coal Ditches Edwards":

"Some of the stuff put about by the British Coal press office at the beginning of this week discrediting Malcolm has disgusted many of us at Hobart House. Even outsiders who have never worked for the company have come to us and complained about this sort of character assassination",

a senior British Coal executive is quoted as saying.

I had the opportunity to put questions to the Secretary of State and Mr. John Baker, the chief executive of National Power, this morning. This report suggests that Edwards was being moved over or ditched, call it what you will, within only a few short months of being given a two-year contract by the Secretary of State himself, because he has not been prepared to go 100 per cent. along the Government's line on running down the coal industry.

The position is that, if the coal industry was not going to be run down to the extent that it is suggested it may be, there would be no need for clause 1 of the Bill. Clause 1 is preparing the way for the rundown of the industry and paying off all these thousands of men.

Discussions have gone on with the chairman of British Coal. He has appeared before the Select Committee twice. I do not want to be offensive about the man, but I do not know why he came before us at all. I accept that it may have been difficult for him the first time, but on each occasion every member of the Committee came out totally exhausted having attempted to get any answers from that man.

I understand that the chairman of British Coal, along with Dr. Moses and Mr. Hurley, who will replace Mr. Edwards, have come to some cosy agreement. They have agreed that the contracts for the supply of coal to the power stations should stand at 40 million tonnes. They anticipate that that is the amount of coal that can be mined competitively to meet the ready market. If there is such a cosy arrangement and Edwards has had to go because he is not part of it, it means that we shall end up with the coal industry anticipated by the Rothschild report.

Mr. Baker, the chief executive of National Power, told the Energy Select Committee this morning that he did not rule out the possibility that, by the mid-1990s, 50 per cent. of its coal needs would be met by imports. He told us, in all honesty, that the ports are already being prepared for that. If that happens, it will mean that British Coal will run down its operations to the extent that it will produce about 25 million tonnes a year.

Once we cannot meet the demands from within our shores, how long will the imported coal remain cheap? That is what I would like to ask Mr. Edwards. We will then be in the hands of our competitors. It would be absolutely irresponsible to sterilise the billions of tonnes of coal that are available to us. If the cosy agreement goes ahead, that coal will never be mined.

Everyone seems hellbent on suggesting that we do not need coal because we have gas. The Secretary of State has told the Energy Select Committee that, within the next 10 years, all new capacity for the generation of electricity will be supplied by gas. I believe that such electricity generation would be a shocking waste of gas. However, I accept that the Secretary of State retracted that claim this morning.

Mr. Barron: But such generation would require the permission of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Lofthouse: Yes, my hon. Friend is right.

The supply of gas will not last for ever, but it appears that the Government are willing to run down the coal industry and to leave the country at the mercy of our competitors. When the gas runs out, we will be totally dependent upon foreign coal. That is what clause 1 and the money is all about.

Some people have said that 30,000 quid is all right, but many miners will not get that, because they are not old enough. What is £30,000 to the young men who have moved from their mother pit—that is the name given to the first pit that one goes down as a lad—to two or three other pits? I know some miners who moved to Selby and they were told, "This is it." Selby is considered the jewel in the crown and those men were told that, if they got a job there, it would be a job for life. Many young men were encouraged, and rightly so, to buy themselves the decent homes to which they are entitled. They mortgaged themselves pretty well up to the hilt because they based their repayments on what they thought their income would be.

If the Rothschild recommendations are put into operation, two of the Selby fields, the jewel in the crown, will close. The young miners at that pit are sick in the guts and worried stiff. What is £30,000 to those men who are mortgaged up to the hilt? It means nothing.

The mining communities have been savaged, but they have received little financial assistance to attract alternative industry.

Mr. Hardy: They have received nothing from RECHAR.

Mr. Lofthouse: The RECHAR issue is a scandal. The European Commission, which allocates the money, has identified the areas where it should go. Why should the Government want to be involved? I do not want to accuse the Government of playing politics with that money.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: The money from RECHAR is designed to go to mining areas, which are traditionally full of Labour supporters who return Labour Members. That is why the Government do not want the money to go to those areas. If that money was supposed to go to Westminster council or Wandsworth, it would be there tomorrow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate hon. Members' anxiety about this matter, but the RECHAR proposals are outside the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Lofthouse: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but RECHAR would create jobs for the men who will be made redundant as a result of clause 1, and I believe that it is reasonable to discuss it. However, I shall say no more about it.

It is a pity that the money from RECHAR has been left in Europe when it could be used in our mining communities. Many miners are suspicious about this matter. They think that the money is not forthcoming because the Government do not expect to attract any votes in the mining areas.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): That is nonsense.

Mr. Lofthouse: Well, that is what the miners think.

I appreciate that other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall conclude shortly.

I understood from the Secretary of State this morning that the licences given to the regional electricity generators mean that they must at all times generate electricity at the least possible cost. We are informed by British Coal that electricity can be generated from coal at a cost of 2·3p per kWh. The cost of electricity generation from new gas-fired stations is far in excess of that figure. If that is so, what will happen to all the plans for new gas-fired electricity stations? What will OFFER—the Office of Electricity Regulation—do to ensure that the terms and conditions of those licences are fulfilled? Will the electricity generators be in breach of the licences given to them as a result of electricity privatisation if they continue to produce electricity from gas at a price far in excess of that which could be produced from coal?

7.28 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse). I spent many happy years on the Energy Select Committee with him, and I always defer to him on issues pertaining to the coal industry. However, he lost his way a little this evening when he spoke about the Rothschild report. Like the media, he selected the worst case scenario. The report describes other much more optimistic scenarios than those that he mentioned.

The Bill is extremely important for British Coal and its work force. It deals principally with the future size of that work force and with safety aspects of miners' working hours. The United Kingdom coal industry is vital in this country, currently supplying a third of the national energy needs. Some 96 million tonnes of coal are produced, of which British Coal produces 72 million tonnes. The future size of British Coal will depend on three criteria. First, the United Kingdom total demand for energy in the future, particularly for electricity; secondly, coal's share of that energy market; and, thirdly, British Coal's share of the coal market.

Electricity is easily the most important customer, accounting for some 80 per cent. of British Coal's market, and it will remain so for the foreseeable future. The key issue for British Coal is the renegotiation of the contracts with the two generators, PowerGen and National Power, which need to be replaced by March 1993. Those contract negotiations are crucial to the United Kingdom coal industry's future, irrespective of its ownership at that time.

For British coal to be confident of achieving its objectives, it will need to continue to drive down its costs more than it has achieved so far. In British Coal's favour is its continuing success in increasing productivity in its deep mine sector. The outlook per man shift has increased by more than 100 per cent. in the past six years and, under the Government since 1979, the average annual productivity has trebled to more than 6·5 per cent. a year. By any standards, that is a remarkable achievement, and one would hope that the Opposition would occasionally mark that achievement in a proper manner.

British Coal believes that there is still considerable potential for greater efficiency in its deep mine sector. For example, it intends to increase from 35 per cent. to 70 per cent. the proportion of coal faces fully equipped with heavy duty equipment. That increases face output by 60 per cent. It also intends to accelerate the use of retreat mining techniques, which will increase labour productivity by a further 26 per cent. British Coal has said:

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

"Altogether we are confident that by the various measures we have put in hand we can increase labour productivity by a further 50 per cent. over the next few years."

That is marvellous news. It demonstrates the real commitment of the management and work force to keep as much of their current market share as possible. How much more helpful it would be if Opposition Members supported British Coal's positive approach, rather than continually sounding the death knell of the industry with their Jeremiah-like pronouncements.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): May I remind the hon. Gentleman that many Opposition Members not only applaud the miners for their achievements in the past few years but actually live, drink and eat with them in their communities. We recognise what miners have done over the years.

The hon. Gentleman also said that retreat technology had just come in. That system has existed for at least 20 or 30 years. The problem has nothing to do with miners and everything to do with management. They have never practised the technique and would not make the investment or commitment themselves to retreat mining systems until recently. However, it has always been there and was a profitable way of extracting coal.

Mr. Moss: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for endorsing the achievement of mineworkers in the past decade. Furthermore, I agree with him that the retreat mining technique has been in place for 20 or 30 years, but management now say that, to achieve greater productivity, they will now make the investment that the hon. Gentleman rightly says is necessary.

There are two real fears for British Coal in the run-up to the negotiations on contracts: first, the creeping increase in the planned and constructed combined cycle gas plant; secondly, the threat of coal imports from abroad, particularly the United States and Australia. As the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford said, only some 200 million tonnes of coal is currently traded internationally. The best estimate of the likely size of the coal-fired generating market in this country is some 60 million to 70 million tonnes. Any attempts to purchase significant quantities of that total on the world markets would inevitably raise prices. That fact will not be lost on PowerGen and National Power in their negotiations with British Coal.

Other advantages on British Coal's side of the negotiations, of which notice must be taken, are, first, the fact that the generating capacity of PowerGen and National Power is almost totally coal burn. Some combined cycle is planned for the near future, but in the next few years they must purchase their coal and negotiate the best price for it. The product is on their doorstep and is priced in sterling. Therefore, they have a good hedge against movements on the overseas currency market, because coal, like most other commodities, is priced in dollars. Secondly, British Coal could give those generators a guarantee of supplies at a fixed price related to United Kingdom inflation rates.

Mr. Ashton: When people increase productivity in that way, they simply work themselves out of a job. Is it not a problem of under-consumption, where people cannot consume as much as miners can produce? The more miners produce and the harder they work, the sooner the pits shut.

Mr. Moss: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman espouses that view.

Mr. Ashton: It is true.

Mr. Moss: It is not true. When President Bush visited Japan recently, he argued that American car producers should be protected from the greater productivity of the Japanese car industry. The only way in a capitalist economy is to be highly productive, producing goods at the lowest possible price for the consumer.

Clause 1 of the Bill deals with grant aid to British Coal. I welcome the increase in restructuring grant from £1,500 million to £2,500 million. It will enable British Coal to continue the vital restructuring work and allow, where necessary, generous redundancy terms to continue to be offered. The clause shows the Government's continuing commitment to provide generous grant support to British Coal. The money is in addition to the considerable financial support given to British Coal in the past 10 years. The Government put British Coal on a solid financial footing by writing off its debts with a massive £5 billion capital reconstruction programme. That programme also enabled British Coal last year to make a profit of £78 million, which was the first bottom-line profit for 13 years.

Furthermore, the Government have invested more than than £25 billion in the past decade—some £2 million each working day—in the coal industry. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said that the restructuring grant was too big or grotesque, but the £25 billion that the Government have put into the coal industry is £2·5 billion a year. That £2·5 billion could have been used in subsidies under the old system, but it is now being provided to restructure and pay out generous benefits to miners.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: When the hon. Gentleman talks about all the money that the Coal Board has put in over the years, he fails to mention that it has made 100,000 miners redundant with that money. If the amount is added up, the hon. Gentleman may find that the saving is the same amount.

Mr. Moss: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman, because most of the money put into British Coal was to underwrite debts and for investment. It was used for both purposes.

The hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford also said that RECHAR moneys were not going to mining areas because there were no votes in it. A Government who, in the past 10 years, have paid £25 billion and more to mining areas cannot be accused of not putting money in because there are no votes in it for them.

Clause 2 refers to the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908, which governs the hours of work underground. Due to its impracticality, the 1908 Act is widely disregarded in the industry by both mineworkers and management. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras more or less admitted that, when he spoke of the bargaining position that is adopted in relation to the Act in order to negotiate extra pay for hours worked above the statutory 7·5. The repeal will not take effect immediately. The Minister assured us that the Act's provisions would continue to apply until the Secretary of State implemented the repeal if and when the Act was substituted by an EC

directive. There will be no gap between the 1908 Act and the introduction of regulations to comply with the directive.

The crucial factor is whether the 1908 Act has any bearing on safety. If it is agreed within the industry that it is never implemented directly, it must be that other measures within the health and safety ambit are responsible for the excellent safety record of British Coal in the past decade. In the past 10 years, under this Government, Britain's mines have become safer than ever before. Increased Government investment has brought increased safety for British Coal's work force. In 1978-79, there were 72 British fatalities in British Coal's deep mines. In 1990, that number had been reduced to just 11. The safety of those who work in the industry is of paramount importance.

The repeal of the 1908 Act and its replacement with an EC directive will reinforce the position of safety as the primary consideration for working practice. In addition, the Department of Energy has kept in close touch with the Health and Safety Executive in producing levels of productivity and maintaining the high earnings of the work force while reducing excessive overtime.

The Bill gives British Coal the necessary financial support to continue its restructuring in a way that does not ignore miners' needs and interests. The commitment of resources gives British Coal every flexibility to take proper decisions at the correct time and to avoid costly delays and increased interest charges on borrowings. The Bill is vital for the health of the coal industry and will, I am sure, receive the wholehearted support of Conservative Members.

7.44 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak tonight and particularly to follow the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), as I disagree almost totally with everything that he said, especially about the industry's safety record in recent years. The one factor that he did not take into consideration was the massive reduction in the industry's manpower, which has fallen by about 80 per cent. For him to talk about the magnificent effort that has been made to achieve those results is nothing other than a sham. I ask all hon. Members with a feel for the coal mining industry to vote against the Bill as it is nothing more than a sham.

The Bill is an attempt to use huge tranches of money for nothing other than clearing the industry's liabilities and fattening it up for ultimate privatisation. It returns us to an era which people in the coal mining districts of Britain had thought had disappeared long ago. To explain my reasoning for that conclusion I shall refer to the closure——

Mr. Ashby: I have been busy working out the safety figures and the hon. Gentleman is wrong in his assertion. The fatality figures in 1947 and 1950, when they were at their worst, are 476 and 688 respectively, which works out at about one in 1,600 employees in the old figures. That statistic is now down to one in 5,000. In terms of the total number of employees in the industry, the number of fatalities is almost 500 per cent. better than it was 30 or 40 years ago—it has been steadily improving.

Mr. Meale: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has made a good case for the nationalisation of the coal industry. I do not want to dwell on the figures too much, but when he makes his calculations he should consider the different methods used in the coal mining industry to establish the number of accidents and fatalities. If he wishes, he may leave the Chamber now and go to the Library to get the reports for the past 15 years issued by the Health and Safety Executive which warn about the rundown of the mining inspectorate. Mining inspectors are now so thin on the ground that it is almost impossible to get them to go under ground, sometimes even after fatalities have occurred in mines.

Only yesterday the closure was announced of the last coal mine in my constituency, Sherwood colliery. It was a profitable pit where the work force of men and women of every political and social persuasion had pulled together to make it profitable. The closure will result in a massive loss of jobs in a community that already has one of the fastest rising unemployment levels per capita. Those jobs will be lost not because the coal mine was unprofitable but because British Coal blackmailed the work force into voting for the pit's closure after an agreement had been reached with the trade unions that the closure would not occur until mid-1993. British Coal blackmailed the work force with one threat: it said that unless the employees voted for the pit's closure before March, they would lose the £10,000 per head redundancy payments.

It is incredible that Conservative Members should say that the Government and the Bill support the coal mining industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) intimated, the measure is a method of obtaining cash to allow the industry to clear its liabilities so that it can be fattened up. We who represent and live in coal mining districts, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) said, talk to miners and their families, understand the position. Miners know when a pit is ready for closure and when there is doubt about its productivity level because the first thing to happen is that the Government give British Coal—the National Coal Board as it used to be—a lot of money to start buying equipment to put down the mine before they close it. That is what the Government are seeking to do: they want to fatten up the industry before they privatise it. One or two hon. Members are shaking their heads, but Sherwood pit was profitable, which proves without a shadow of doubt that what I have said about Government action is true.

Some people ask what will happen to those miners who wish to stay in the industry. Ministers, officials in the Department and British Coal say that those people will have a future and a chance. The miners voted three to one in favour of taking redundancy because they were blackmailed by Government policy and by British Coal. If a miner says that he wants to continue working in the coalfields in Nottinghamshire because he believes that they have a future and that the Government believe in coal, his only chance of being allowed to do so is if British Coal manages to blackmail other miners at other pits under legislation such as this to get others to vacate their jobs at other collieries to allow miners who want to continue to move in.

Already the mines in Nottinghamshire are 40 per cent. overmanned. Many of these miners have already lived through massive changes. Miners in my constituency have moved from Scotland to the north-east, to Yorkshire and then to Nottinghamshire. Others have come from Wales. The largest group of miners in my area comes from the same part of the country as I come from—the north-east.

[Mr. Meale]

Legislation of this sort cannot help the coal industry. Conservative Members say that the Government have done a great deal for the industry. I point out to them that in 1984 34,000 people were employed by the industry in Nottinghamshire; that number has fallen to about 13,000, and there will be more redundancies after yesterday's announcement. If this is the sort of support that the Government can offer, I hope that they never give it to the people in my locality because it will wipe them off the face of the map.

Legislation like this offers little succour to the people of my area where the following collieries have either closed or been run down: Mansfield, Rufford, Budworth, Clipston, Sherwood, Warsop and Ollerton. These mines have either been wiped out or had their work forces scattered throughout the country, discarded by the policies of the Government.

Tonight we are being asked again to believe that the Government see a future for coal. They see no future for it; their actions of the past few years show that. Ever since the 1984-85 strike, the Government have set out vindictively to attack the industry, to wipe it out, and to switch to alternative methods of energy production, such as gas.

This House must wake up. Some Conservative Members occasionally vote against the Government on measures to privatise the ports—measures which affect miners in places such as the north-east and Yorkshire. I ask them to stand four square with us now, before a general election takes place, and to tell their party that enough is enough for the coal mining areas of Britain. Those areas have turned the industry around; their pits are now profitable.

I do not want to be asked any more by Tory Members where we were on the night of such and such a Bill. I was here on the night of the important privatisation vote and I noted that Conservative Members had disappeared from the face of the earth. Some of them were in private parties drinking champagne and eating salmon at the expense of the entrepreneurs, who thus encouraged them to vote through their legislation——

Mr. Ashby: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meale: I will not. The hon. Gentleman has intervened about 20 times already tonight.

With the Government forcing through legislation such as this, coal has no future. It is all very well for Tory Members to smile—many of them are solicitors and barristers and textile owners. Some of them, however, represent coal-mining areas or constituents who travel to work in pits outside their constituencies, and if they vote for this Bill they are voting against the interests of their own constituents.

7.55 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am happy to rejoin the debate. I think that the record shows that my Committee attendance and attendance in debates of this sort have been good over the years. I regret that I was not able to take part in the short 10-hour Committee stage of this Bill. During two of the Committee's sittings I was giving evidence before a Committee of the House of Lords on behalf of my constituents, and the clash of times was unpredictable. I tried to extricate myself from the problem when I saw the clash coming. In any case, I apologise for my absence, not to the Tories but to the Labour party, because there would have been a place for another Labour Member on the Committee.

I am not defensive about this and the experience of the Committee would not have changed my position. On the other hand, I fear I would not have made a decisive difference; there was no vote in which my vote would have won the day for the forces of light and progress. Nevetheless, it would have been good to join in the detailed debate, especially that on the 1908 legislation and the repeal of that Act at which the Government are aiming.

As I said on Second Reading, I was brought up in a coal mining area—in south Wales—from the age of eight onwards. I first went down a mine in my teens, since when I have felt a large measure of solidarity with the industry.

There are two main challenges for the industry. In the short term, we must ensure that the industry is competitive. In the long term, we must make sure that it is environmentally acceptable compared with its competitors.

One of the difficulties that underlies the debate is that the Government have had no long-term plan for coal. But, as many hon. Members said on Second Reading, there is now a hidden agenda. It is no good lurching from secret report to leaked report to released report to consultative report suggesting that the industry can survive with 14, 12, 10 or six pits—or with any enormously reduced number of pits that is in prospect. Whole areas of the country have been deprived of mining altogether—for example, Kent in the south-east, and Wales, which is down to a trinity of mines. Large parts of the east midlands have lost many pits, as has Scotland.

In short, the Government have had no policy. I share with the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) the feeling that the people who live in the mining communities of Britain have felt betrayed because there has been no strategic plan either for them or their industry—and that has been the major weakness.

To preserve the industry we need to ensure that it has an ever cleaner future. We have the technology to do that; this country's technology for clean coal is probably the best in the world, so there is no reason why we should not be as commercially competitive as other countries.

The Government have failed to encourage the future of the industry by the twin lack of investment resources and the political will. Of course there must be competition. Of course the industry must financially hold its own. But it must do so within a plan for energy in which it can justify its existence against other energy sources.

The Government appear to have no better arguments on their working hours proposals now than they had on Second Reading. Since Second Reading arguments about the merits of the Bill have not changed. There has been no amendment of the Bill and no suggestion that the Government's arguments are more justified. The contrary is the case, because immediately after Second Reading the Social Affairs Commissioner of the European Community said that the purpose of the Community proposals was to strengthen protection for people at work and not to replace adequate protection by an inferior system. That was made clear from Brussels a day or two after our debate in November.

An Act which was passed at the beginning of the century and which stipulates a seven-and-a-half hour day

for underground workers should not be replaced until there is a secure alternative. On Second Reading the Secretary of State admitted, and it has been conceded since, that no better alternative has yet been negotiated. The Government seem to be following a 'legislate first, think later' policy.

Anyone who has been down a coal mine will know that coal mining requires the best safety strategy. The offshore oil industry is in the same category. Such protection is most needed when people are suffering from tiredness at the end of a shift. It is important to make sure that they have the protection for which experience has shown we should legislate.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), a former Solicitor-General, said that legally there is no current argument for change. I would add that there is no current argument for a change in the context of our obligations within the Community. It is a con to argue that we have to give in now. We can wait, and if we do not it can only mean that the Government want to prepare the way for a privatisation that they have not yet announced.

The Bill allows more money to be given to communities that will suffer from a reduction in jobs. That, too, can wait because the amount presently allowed is sufficient. The Government will not play their partnership role in the Community by taking RECHAR money. That is ridiculous and sad. The money has been allocated by a partnership of which Britain is a member. It is a fund on which countries can draw and Britain, unlike Spain, Germany, France and Belgium, is not deriving any benefit from it. Why should we join a club if occasionally we cannot take out as well as put in, especially when it is needed? The Government's commitment to these people, let alone the industry, is questionable.

One of our amendments would have raised the issue that such matters could properly be debated and decided within the regions and nations of Britain—Scotland, Wales and England. If it was left to the Scots and the Welsh to legislate for the coal industry in their countries, there would be a different result. We would probably hear a political voice that better understood and was more sympathetic to and representative of the industry and its communities.

There is a danger that the Government will bring to the coal industry the consequences that another announcement in the past few days has brought to the steel industry in Scotland. There will be privatisation and then a washing of hands when the industry in key parts of the country is closed. I am afraid that we shall have to return to this issue. Perhaps the Government will get the legislation through in this Session, but it will not be the last word.

After the election, people who work in different sectors of the energy industry will expect a far more intelligent and strategic plan for their industry. As part of that, coal must be retained as a national asset and resource. We should be proud of it and allow it to be exploited as part of the energy industry as a whole. Of course we will want to open up the industry rather than have a public monopoly replaced by a private one to allow for competition. Only real denationalisation is acceptable, but I anticipate that the Government will not go down that road either.

Whatever the ownership of the industry, it must have a proper and secure future. It is possible to clean up the technology, for coal should be a reserve upon which we may need to continue to draw. In social terms, it is desirable to be able to encourage the continuance of the industry in certain parts of the country. All these arguments appear in this place to be falling on deaf ears. They certainly do not fall on deaf ears in the coalfield communities because people there know that the Government have no strategic plan for them or their industry. Sadly, it seems that this Government want such people to be thrown even more on the mercy of competition without protection, and that is unsatisfactory. The Opposition parties will be united in voting against Third Reading tonight.

8.6 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I have listened to the debate with some amazement. I am not surprised that Labour will oppose the Bill, because the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who led for the Opposition, does not have a mine in his constituency and has probably never been down one. I do not think that he understands the problems that face a mining community, especially one in which mines are being run down and people have to face redundancy. The miners should understand and be told in firm terms why the Opposition oppose the Bill. I shall certainly tell them.

Let us examine Labour's record on collieries. In 1965, there were 483 collieries and in 1980 there were 211. About 250 pits disappeared under the Labour Government, and the miners did not have the benefit of the redundancy terms that we have offered. They did not have the opportunity of proper compensation to cover the loss of the job and to enable them to look for other work. Voting against the Bill will deny redundant miners that right to proper compensation. Miners should know that they will not get Labour's support for proper recompense.

A loss of jobs is seen as inevitable when we look realistically at the mining industry and at the future market for coal. In 1965, about 184 million tonnes of coal were consumed. In 1990, consumption was 108 million tonnes. There is less demand for coal because there has been an increase in other forms of energy. There is no point in supporting mines which produce coal that is not required. That is the economics of the madhouse. Perhaps we would expect the Labour party to pursue those economics, but no legitimate Government facing the situation realistically could support them.

It is all very well for Labour Members to talk as they do, and attack the Government, but the Labour party closed pits when it was in power; it cut the numbers of pits by half in the 1960s and 1970s. Apparently, that was nothing more than a realistic approach to the market place.

I represent the south Leicestershire coalfield, where, as I have frequently said in this House, mining has declined. Indeed, deep mining has been reduced to zero—nigh on every mine in my constituency has now been closed. That has happened in the natural course of events, with the exhaustion of the pits. There is no more coal that could properly be extracted by deep-mining methods, and the miners have accepted that.

However, the miners could look forward to the fact that not one of them would be forced to lose his job. Other jobs were available and so, rightly, were adequate—indeed, generous—redundancy terms. The miners accepted those terms. I have spoken to many of them; they were grateful and considered the terms generous.

[Mr. David Ashby]

The miners made good use of the redundancy money. Many of them have set up their own businesses, and many have prospered. I could tell Labour Members in confidence the names of many of those who have done so.

British Coal Enterprise Ltd., too, put large amounts of money into the area, to support new industries so that work and new jobs would be available to people who had lost their jobs. All that was very welcome, and it represented a realistic approach to regenerating the area. The generous redundancy terms and the regeneration of the area helped to turn it around, so that people could find alternative employment. It helped people who were losing their jobs and those who, having taken their redundancy money, wanted to go their own way, to start businesses of their own and join enterprise Britain. That was a most successful approach.

The Bill does no more than that. It is virtually a criminal act for the Labour party to deny that opportunity to miners in north-west Leicestershire and elsewhere, who face the closure of their pits as the whole industry is rationalised. I condemn the Labour party for that. It is quite wrong to deny that opportunity to others.

We have only to look at the figures that I mentioned in an earlier intervention to realise that the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulations Act 1908 will not affect the number of accidents in coal mines. The statistics are against the idea.

In 1960, there were 316 fatalities in a work force of about 694,000—one in 1,700. At that time, productivity was 310 tonnes per man year—1·42 tonnes per man shift. In 1970, there were 92 fatalities—one in 3,000. That figure is still too high. By then, productivity had almost doubled, at 2·24 tonnes per man shift—471 tonnes per man year. In 1980, there were 39 fatalities—one in 5,000. That is a far more acceptable figure. Productivity had risen to 3·32 tonnes per man shift—479 tonnes per man year.

Then came the dramatic change. Nineteen-eighty was the time when new methods and machinery were coming in. No longer did the man at the pit face have his pickaxe in his hand and work by the sweat of his brow—to use a phrase so often used by Labour Members. By 1990, there were 11 fatalities—one in 5,000. Productivity had doubled to 4·7 tonnes per man shift—1,181 tonnes per man year. That was an enormous and dramatic change.

Over the past 30 years, we have seen productivity more than trebled and the number of fatalities halved. It is important to remember that all that took place while the 1908 Act was in force. One would have thought that such a dramatic increase in productivity would be reflected in the number of accidents, if accidents are caused by a person overworking and exhausted under ground. But over the same period, there was a dramatic reduction in accidents, so the figures do not bear out the Labour party's argument.

The 1908 Act is a piece of restrictive legislation. That is why the Labour party wants to keep it. Labour Members always bury their heads in the sand; they cannot move with the times and cannot bear any change, so they bring up every argument they possibly can to deny and denounce that change. They do not want to see increased productivity or flexibility, or any improvement in the way in which industries are run.

That is the picture that we have seen for years. The enormous increases in productivity have taken place in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party. That means that it does not care about the coal industry—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes, it is true. Labour Members may laugh and try not to listen, but a coal industry doing well means high productivity and an industry that makes profits—an industry of which we can be proud.

Let us look at the financial position—the bottom line of profit or loss in the industry. In 1980, the industry was losing £159 million, but by 1990 there was a bottom-line profit of £78 million—a turnround in the industry. I should have thought that those figures would make the people who work in the industry proud of it.

I remember that in 1983 miners came to ask me about privatisation and I spelled it out to them—*[Interruption.]* I shall continue, despite the interjections from Opposition Members. I told the miners that privatisation would mean pit closures, that it would mean getting British Coal into shape, and that there would be no question of privatisation until the coal industry was in the sort of shape that would make people want to invest in it. I asked them whether they would want to invest in an industry which, in those days, was losing £485 million a year. They said no. I asked, "Are you proud to be part of that industry? Do you think that it is a good thing to be a member of an industry that is being subsidised at a rate of £2 million or £3 million per annum?" They said, "No, it does not make us proud." I told them that the Conservative party and the Government were determined to bring the coal industry into shape and to make it a highly productive, profit-making industry of which they could be proud.

All the steps that the Government have taken over the years, in the teeth of opposition, have been taken to make the coal industry a good industry of which we can be proud. We are now reaching the stage at which we can be proud of the industry. That is what the Bill is all about: it is part of a continuing process that has been taking place over a number of years to put the industry in good shape, and there is a lot more to do.

What does the Labour party want for the industry? Labour Members say that they want to maintain the coal industry at about its present size. It is almost impossible to meet that target in an industry that has declined as the coal industry has declined over the years. The figures speak for themselves. In 1970, consumption stood at 150 million tonnes: it is now 108 million tonnes. That has happened naturally, and the Labour party simply cannot do what it seeks to do. With the increasing use of gas to generate power, there is bound to be a reduction in the use of coal by the power generators.

As we have seen, the increased use of gas and, indeed, nuclear energy, has improved the environment, and any reversal of the process can only be at the expense of the environment. That may well be unacceptable not only to Britain but to other countries in Europe and elsewhere in the world, which also have a say in the state of our environment. The world is not our world; it is one world, and the environment concerns everyone.

The Labour party's protectionist policy would also be unworkable. Throughout my time in the House, the Opposition have fought tooth and nail to restrict coal imports. But as long as the United Kingdom remains part of the European Community and is a signatory to the general agreement on tariffs and trade, Labour simply cannot succeed in that.

Labour's plans would mean higher electricity prices because, in pursuing them, a Labour Government would

be dismantling the competitive market, damaging British industry and hurting the most vulnerable part of our society, perhaps at a time when it is at its most vulnerable.

All in all, Labour's plans for coal are damaging to industry and the environment and would be impossible to implement, despite all the histrionics that we see from Labour Members. Moreover, it would be illegal to put those plans into effect unless we left the Common Market and turned our back on the GATT talks. In spite of all that, Labour persists in its opposition to the Bill, denying people the right to generous redundancy terms when the closure of the mines is inevitable.

The Opposition should stop being little Englanders. They talk about embracing Europe, yet they seem to believe that those who work in the mines of Germany and northern France are not subject to the same safety regulations as British miners. They believe that European miners do not have almost exactly the same terms of employment as ours, that European mines do not have the same safety record as we have, and that European countries do not care about their workers.

All that is tripe and nonsense. Membership of the European Community has taught us a great deal, and we have learnt a great deal. We have changed our practices, and there have been enormous improvements in Britain, as a result of our membership of the European Community. I have every faith that they know as much over there about the safety of coal mines as we do, and that they know enough about appropriate hours of work to produce a directive acceptable to us all. We shall look at that directive; we are a party to the negotiation of that directive. Why on earth should our miners work different hours from those in Germany or be subject to different rules from those in France?

The reason why there is some worry about the directive is that it may require shorter rather than longer hours. That would undoubtedly be for safety reasons, and I certainly feel that I could go along with the view of those civilised and sensible countries of Europe and that the directive that is finally worked out will be acceptable to us all. Why should we be any different from the rest? The Bill does no more than to ensure that we are not, and that is why it has my support.

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the Third Reading debate does not have to finish at 10 o'clock, and will you send a message to the Government Whips saying so? The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) spoke for 20 minutes. Opposition Members propose to stay here until we have made our speeches, and filibustering such as that in which the hon. Gentleman engaged will not stop us speaking. The bloke who has just spoken had better tell those on his own Front Bench and his own Whips, when we are here after 10 o'clock, that it is because of him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): There is a 10 o'clock business motion, on which the question will be put if the debate continues. It will be for the House to decide whether to accept the motion.

8.27 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) that I shall be brief.

We have heard a considerable amount about restructuring from Conservative Members but, sadly, as we discovered in the Committee and have heard today, the Bill has little to do with restructuring as most people understand that word. It is about closing down the coal mining industry, not about its revival, regeneration or future.

In Committee, the Under-Secretary accepted that there was nothing in the present Bill or in earlier legislation to prevent moneys being used under the Coal Industry Acts to create new employment in the coal industry. The schedule to the Coal Industry Act 1987 is not restrictive in that respect. I should be surprised, however, if a penny of the money provided under the 1987 Act or the Bill will go to creating new jobs in the coal industry. The Bill is about creating new jobs, if new jobs are created, in other areas of industry. In my part of the world, such jobs have often been created in the service industries—in supermarkets and do-it-yourself shops and other consumer activities. Little of the money has gone into manufacturing and none has gone into trying to develop other areas of production and other mines that can produce more coal.

Part of the problem has been that, to put it mildly, the Government have had no commitment to the mining industry, and British Coal, taking its cue from the Government, has had little imagination and has suffered low morale on the subject of the industry's future development.

We have heard about Europe and about what is likely to happen in 1992. The Department of Trade and Industry has undertaken publicity campaigns about opportunities arising in Europe as a result of the removal of barriers. However, very little is said about the opportunities for coal. We hear very little about the fact that the German coal industry will be drastically reduced in size—sadly for the German miners. The European Commission is taking on the German Government and the German coal industry because of artificially high prices. By the end of the 1990s, the German Government and the European Commission may reach agreement that the size of that industry should be reduced drastically; or, at the end of the day, the Commission and the Court may take action. In any case, Britain will have potentially the largest and most productive coal industry in the whole of the European Community. But, as I have said, we hear very little about the market opportunities in Europe.

We constantly hear the objections. We are told that gas is now the main fuel and that it is much cheaper than coal. In some cases it is cheaper, but in others it is not. Indeed, there is very little difference between the prices of the two types of fuel. Of course it must be accepted that, in terms of the construction of power stations, the current technology gives gas a slight edge. However, that may not always be so. Anyway, does Europe want to rely heavily on gas?

We know that almost two thirds of the gas that is used in Germany comes from Siberia, and there are plans to increase the production and sale of Siberian gas. But what about the existing and potential political problems arising from such heavy reliance on the import of gas from what is now Russia and used to be the Soviet Union? Gas is not the complete answer. There have to be two, three or four fuels. Clearly, gas will be the No. 1 fuel, but that does not mean that we should be so defeatist as not to regard coal as a close competitor.

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

We are told that coal is terribly damaging to the environment, but such problems can be solved. Whatever is burned—whether coal or anything else—produces CO_2. A leading expert on the environment has said that the real danger of global warming, the real danger to the ozone layer, comes from the three Cs. Not one of them is coal; they are cows, cars and chainsaws, which, apparently, cause the greatest damage in terms of carbon dioxide, global warming and the ozone layer.

Of course there are difficulties, but why should we concentrate on them? Problems arise in all sorts of ways, but, with the necessary will and belief, they are not insurmountable. It must be realised that we cannot rely on a single fuel, whether gas, oil or anything else. There is a place for the coal industry. We accept, of course, that we will never again have an industry the size of that of the pre-1950 days. However, the market is there, as are the technology and the skills; what we need is the will. But if there is further deterioration the skills will disappear.

I want to refer briefly to the west Wales anthracite coalfield. This is a classic example of the way in which British Coal and the Government have used no imagination in the development of markets. Anthracite is to be found almost exclusively in my constituency and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). There is only one pit left. However, the headquarters, where all the decisions are taken, is in Nottingham. I have nothing against Nottingham, which is a very nice city, has a very good university, and no doubt contributes to the economy of Britain. But why on earth should the fate and the future of the west Wales anthracite coalfield be decided in Nottingham? There is no anthracite anywhere else—none in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, the Midlands. Poland is the closest place where it can be found.

I went to see the previous chairman of British Coal and asked him why he would not set up a small mines division. In the new market-oriented society, it could be called a company. Whatever it was called, it could be allowed, as part of British Coal, to develop the west Wales anthracite coalfield. Because of the geology, the mines are small. But the former chairman thought that I was talking complete nonsense. Why should we not have a small company? Why should this operation in Wales be run from Nottingham? It is quite right that we should seek inward investment from Japan and other places all over the world, but we should look to the possibilities of developing this asset in west Wales. Development could be gradual; I am not suggesting anything very dramatic. Local people could be provided with an economic centre.

Then there is the question of opencast mining. In this case, the south Wales headquarters is not very far from my constituency. Why should opencast operations be put into one division? Here I am referring to anthracite. Why should decisions in respect of opencast operations be made in one area, and decisions in respect of deep-mined or drift-mined coal be made in another—Nottingham? Why should we not have one anthracite division for the whole of west Wales?

By that means, a balance could be maintained between opencast operations and drift-mining operations. At present 80 per cent. of the coal is produced through opencast operations—with all the environmental problems that that entails—and only 20 per cent. through drift-mining or deep-mining operations. The division that I suggest could have its headquarters in my constituency or in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen. That would be the rational thing to do.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Restructuring.

Mr. Davies: It would indeed be restructuring. Anyway, the economy of that little area would benefit, and new technology and scientific bases could be developed. We could have research into new uses for anthracite. Constituencies like mine require such involvement and investment.

Neither the Government nor British Coal has the answer. That being the case, my plea is directed to my Front-Bench colleagues. In a few months' time my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) will become Secretary of State for Energy. I put him and my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on notice that the Department of Energy will have on its doorstep a deputation lobbying for a separate anthracite division or company within British Coal to deal with both opencast mining and drift mining and to take advantage of the new technology. My area needs economic development, and we should not be looking constantly for outside investment. We all know that, in the event of recession in other parts of the world, inward investment disappears. I am sure that my hon. Friend is listening, and I am confident that my suggestion will be acted upon.

8.38 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall make a short speech, as it is almost too much to hope that Conservative Members will in any way criticise the foolish and short-sighted policies being pursued by the Government. It would be foolish to hope that supporters of the Government will recognise that current policies are contrary to the national interest. However, as a perennial optimist I hope that some Conservative Members will agree that the Government are acting irresponsibly by changing firm policies announced in the present Parliament by the Secretary of State for Energy—and doing so without offering explanation, excuse or reason. Ministers simply take the view that, if they ignore these charges, they will go away.

In November 1988, the Secretary of State for Energy gave me an assurance that, during this Parliament, there would be no privatisation, and no preparation for privatisation, of the coal industry. He gave my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) an assurance that during this Parliament there would be no change in legislation on mining safety. The Government know that those commitments were clearly given, but they have not offered a single word of regret, remorse or explanation for their dramatic shift in policy. When the Secretary of State for Energy in 1988 gave those commitments, he gave them to the House and the country, and if they are to be withdrawn or changed, the House and the country are entitled to explanations. There is no good explanation.

That is not the only reason why I am deeply disturbed about the industry. I am concerned because other things have happened that have led people to lose faith in the Government and in British Coal. To illustrate the need for

more funds to be given so that British Coal can remedy the injustices that have already occurred, I shall refer to the outrageous experiences of one redundant miner. I refer to my constituent, Mr. L. Marsh. British Coal has claimed that everyone who has left the industry has become redundant voluntarily. They have, but British Coal has been unscrupulous in seeking to ensure that people volunteer for redundancy.

Many of my constituents and many people in the mining areas generally have served as regulars in the armed forces. There is an established pattern. Mr. Marsh served in the Royal Air Force for a long time, until he reached the age when he could draw his pension. He then worked for British Coal for a considerable time, until his place of work closed and he was offered redundancy. When he was counselled, he was advised that his redundancy payment from British Coal would be in addition to the pension that he received from the Royal Air Force. On the grounds of that assurance, Mr. Marsh accepted redundancy. After his redundancy, he learned that the advice that he had been given by British Coal was wrong and that he would draw his redundancy payment less his Royal Air Force pension.

If, like many of his contemporaries, Mr. Marsh had gone down the pit at 16, his pension from British Coal would have been much higher than the amount that he currently receives. The fact that Mr. Marsh served his country and gave good service to the Royal Air Force and to British Coal has cost him a lot of money. Mr. Marsh is a bitter man and, as his Member of Parliament, I am bitter about the fact that, when I took up this matter with Ministers and with British Coal, they did not reply to the fact that my constituent had been wrongly advised. British Coal has a moral responsibility to put things right in Mr. Marsh's case. I hope that it will begin to do so following my speech. I have had to make these representations because Mr. Clarke of British Coal and Ministers should have recognised that that responsibility exists. It does exist, and I hope that it will be exercised.

Hon. Members will be aware that I represent in this House the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, but I also represent Silverwood colliery. When I read the leaked Rothschild report and saw that Silverwood was not one of the 14 collieries that had been identified as likely to survive, I was astonished. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) knows, there is rivalry between Maltby colliery in his constituency and Silverwood in mine, but he and other hon. Members may also be aware that for a long time Silverwood has been one of this country's most profitable collieries. The explanation for its exclusion can only be that, when Rothschild examined the industry, Silverwood was not making very much money because it was investing in opening up new faces. Shortly after the leak of the Rothschild report, Silverwood again began to make a lot of money—because its investment had come to fruition.

Before Christmas, Silverwood colliery produced its millionth tonne of coal. It produced 1 million tonnes of coal once before—in the mid-1980s—*[Interruption.]* That is not very many years ago. I am talking about what has happened while the Government have been in office. Just before the last election, Silverwood produced 1 million tonnes of coal with 1,500 men on its books. Last year it produced 1 million tonnes of coal again, but with 800 men on its books. That enormous increase in productivity is astonishing. One would have thought that British Coal would be overjoyed, but that achievement received only a passing reference in *Coal News*.

Silverwood colliery has recently smashed further records. The latest output per man shift figures are astonishing—53 tonnes of coal per man shift at the face, with the overall output per man shift at the colliery being almost 10 tonnes. Those figures should put British Coal firmly on the slate.

If the Government and the electricity industry recognised that coal from heavy duty faces can pour out to ensure that Britain remains self-sufficient in energy, thus avoiding the enormous balance of payments deficits that will apply if the contraction of the industry continues for much longer, they would congratulate rather than threaten Silverwood. Silverwood has not been included in the list of 14. That list of 14 has not been increased to a list of 15.

I am not involved in the arrangements to protect Mr. Edwards, but if some of British Coal's board members are to be removed, I would suggest certain gentlemen other than Mr. Edwards, who has been committed to achieving a viable coal industry while some of his colleagues seem committed to the cause of privatisation whatever the future size of the industry, provided only that a few profitable pits remain and that they make a lot of money. I should prefer the national interest to be served. I have far more respect for people like Mr. Lawson, the manager at Silverwood, and for Granville Richardson, the union secretary at Silverwood, who rejoice in the success of their pit because they believe that they are serving not only themselves but their country.

That endeavour and success is not properly appreciated by British Coal, although it was appreciated at the pit. Although I share many of my constituents' aspirations, I do not share their taste in music. The colliery tannoy plays records, and on the day that it passed its millionth tonne of coal everyone at Silverwood colliery was singing a popular record that had been made by a lady called Tina Turner. I do not recognise the record myself——

Mr. Lofthouse: Sing it.

Mr. Hardy: I should not dream of singing it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Everybody at the colliery was singing Tina Turner's record, "Simply the Best", because they believed that they were the best. British Coal should have recognised that they were the best. It should not be left to a bunch of merchant bankers or a crowd of short-sighted politicians——

Mr. Ashton: Merchant what?

Mr. Hardy: Merchant bankers—*[Interruption.]* I said "merchant bankers", Mr. Deputy Speaker, and "merchant bankers" was what I meant. The miners at Silverwood should not be left to sing "Simply the Best" alone, because we should all recognise that they have achieved coal production figures which are among the best in Europe.

The 1908 legislation was enacted because of experience in the industry. If I had had the chance to speak in our last coal debate just before Christmas, I should have said that that day marked the anniversary of a disaster at a colliery called Warren Vale, in my constituency. That small colliery suffered three separate disasters and that date just before Christmas marked the anniversary of the largest. Of the 73 people who were employed below ground at Warren Vale, 53 were killed in that disaster. Such disasters led to

[Mr. Hardy]

the 1908 Act. If the legislation had been due simply to economics, the coal owners would have welcomed it instead of approaching it reluctantly.

Many people, including Ministers, say that that legislation is no longer relevant and that it is ignored. However, the fact that it still exists means that a man who is tired and who has gone to work to protect his own and his colleagues' bonuses will not be forced to stay at his place of work in a state of exhaustion or lack of alertness. He has a degree of protection that the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, which has made an enormous contribution to achieving safety in the mining industry, recognises as necessary.

Conservative Members have said that the Bill is necessary if our legislation is to match European provisions. What is the reality in Europe? In Spain, the hours of work are governed by statute, and I understand that they are seven and three quarter hours plus winding time. In Germany, where they are also regulated, they are seven and a half hours. There is no mining industry in Europe which forces its men to work the hours desired by the Department of Energy and the top brass in Hobart house, who never seem to face the same threat of redundancy as those in the mining areas. What we are told about the European pattern is fallacious. The Minister may comment on it in his reply to the debate.

The mining industry in Britain has achieved, at a bitter price to the mining community, enormous improvements in productivity. If the rest of British industry had achieved the rates of productivity at Silverwood and many other collieries, including some which have closed recently, the country's economic condition would be a great deal better.

We do not hear Conservative Members questioning support for nuclear power. There was a statement this afternoon on environmentally sensitive areas. We do not hear Conservative Members talking about the support given to some millionaire landowners to bribe them to serve the environment. Some of us have been serving the environment without any need for bribery.

The coal industry is being singled out. The South Yorkshire area headquarters used to be in my constituency. Then it was moved to Doncaster. When I wanted to talk to somone there this morning, I had to telephone Allerton Bywater, to the west of Leeds, which is not even in my former county. That is the effect of Government policy.

Those who want to see pits closed may seek to draw comfort from the fact that they can pay some money to miners to accept redundancy, but Conservative Members must understand that, although that may help to cushion individual miners, it is putting an almost intolerable burden on local authorities and the communities which have to face the waste of environmental dereliction and the destruction of the employment base.

8.51 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Unlike the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), I propose to be brief, because other hon. Members wish to speak; not least among them is my neighbour, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), who has been getting increasingly restive throughout the debate.

I have sat through the debate and I still find it difficult to understand the Opposition's objection to clause 2. They say that safety will be compromised. I listened to the Minister's opening remarks and he made it clear that clause 2 will not come into effect until the EC directive is in place. There is no suggestion that the 1908 Act gives greater protection than the EC directive. Therefore, for the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to talk about children going down the mines, and for the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) to talk about women going down the pits is unrealistic. It is scaremongering, and I reject it.

When the Bill becomes law, and the restructuring under clause 1 has taken place, it will mean that, during the tenure of office of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the taxpayer will have paid £7,000 million to the industry. I yield to no one in my respect and affection for his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), but no previous Secretary of State has achieved the record of my right hon. Friend.

The industry should be on a solid, commercial footing after the implementation of the Bill and should be able to go out and win contracts. The transformation has been achieved without a single compulsory redundancy over the past 12 years. No comparable industry can claim such a record. At the same time, unit costs have been cut by 40 per cent. in real terms.

The Government are committed to a profitable coal industry. One would not think so when listening to some Opposition Members. Half as many mines have been closed under this Government as during the 11 years of office of the last two Labour Governments. The Government are being realistic about the size of the industry which will be profitable.

The restructuring, coupled with the productivity of the coal miners and of British Coal itself, will bring unit costs down to a level where prices are comparable with those of other fuels, including fuels from abroad. The delivered price of coal to power stations, with security of supply, should enable generators to sign up with British Coal for longer-term contracts from March 1993. I hope that generators will sign for five years rather than three years, because it may not be possible to guarantee long-term supplies of gas. Important coal is certainly not free from exchange rate fluctuations. Against those anxieties, thanks to the Bill and other Government measures, British Coal can deliver virtually on the doorstep of the power stations and it can offer fixed long-term contracts priced in sterling.

I hope that the generators will not take a short-term view. I hope that they will see the Bill as an earnest of the Government's intention to have a viable, long-term coal industry. The generators should weigh the arguments carefully if they are considering rejection of renewal of contracts. I am not asking that they make decisions based on other than commercial common sense. I am asking that they consider that a revitalised coal industry, such as we now have, is at risk of disappearing if they take a short-term view.

The Bill is the key to the industry's long-term future. Opposition Members may use it as an opportunity to indulge in scaremongering although in their hearts I believe that they welcome it. The Opposition obscure the fact that the Rothschild report is not Government policy. They suggest that it is a ramp for privatisation. There is no British Coal or Government plan to reduce pits to a certain number. All that Rothschild did was to speculate how

many pits might be viable, given various options and scenarios. Until the renegotiation of the contract with the generators has taken place, it is impossible for Rothschild, British Coal, the Government or the Opposition to say how many pits we will have at the end of the century. The contracts, not the Bill, are the key to the number of pits.

That is a fact of commercial and industrial life. Rather than rubbishing the Bill and spreading disaster and gloom among British Coal's potential customers Opposition Members would do better spending their time urging the generators to renew their contracts and praising the coal miners for their significant advances in productivity over the years. Above all, we should all join in a commitment to a viable, long-term future for the industry. That is what the Bill seeks to bring about.

8.58 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Throughout the debate, Conservative Members have referred again and again in somewhat theatrical performances to their amazement that Opposition Members should vote against the Bill. Certainly, when I examined the Bill I found parts that I would support and parts that I would not. The parts that I would not support are the reason why I shall vote against it. There are other parts that I wish to examine in depth.

For example, the Bill says that £3,000 million will be spent between now and 1996. That is open-ended in the sense that it is not clear what the money will be used for. I suspect that some of it will be used for redundancy payments. I support that but I would rather that jobs did not disappear so that there was no need for redundancy payments. Some of the money may also be used to prepare for privatisation. Several of my hon. Friends mentioned that this evening and I suspect that it is part of the Government's proposals.

My hon. Friends and some Conservative Members have said that if the Conservatives formed the next Government they would privatise the mining industry. I warn my hon. Friends that there is something of a fallacy in that because in some areas the industry is either already privatised or well on the way to privatisation. I notice that one of my colleagues from Northumberland, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has entered the Chamber. He will confirm what I am saying. There is a mine in his constituency in which some of my constituents work. British Coal closed it down and it was sold off lock, stock and barrel, including the equipment. It was then opened as a private mine. I do not know whether he is aware, but I am certainly aware, that just before Christmas the employees were laid off because the company could not sell the coal. So there is no great advantage in it being a private mine.

I have in my constituency mining engineering workshops. They have become a private business in the sense that they take outside contracts. I am not sure of the exact position but the workshops have negotiated to manufacture a coal washing and preparation plant for Poland. I understand that the target for this financial year is for the workshops to obtain £1 million worth of private contracts. That is already scheduled.

The connection between the workshops and British Coal is to be broken. For example, the workshops use British Coal's mainframe computer at present. In two or three years the workshops will have their own computer. They will be free-standing. That is preparation for a sell-off. The workshops will be sold off as a unit with no problems. The contracts will be there. The installation of new facilities and machinery in the workshops will allow someone to buy them out overnight.

I am more worried about the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. My knowledge of the stock exchange and conditions of working there is extremely limited. My knowledge of working in a City bank is extremely limited. My knowledge of working in the law courts is extremely limited. But my experience of working in the mining industry covers a period of 39 years. It goes back to before nationalisation.

I have seen the whole pattern right from the days of private ownership. The coal company in my area was probably one of the best in the country but it was still terrible. I experienced the whole programme of nationalisation right through to the present day. I stood at the mine where I worked in 1947 when a board was put up saying, "This mine is now owned by the British people." That was never quite true. The mine was owned by certain people in Britain but not the British people. The people who were in charge under private ownership were also in charge on 2 January 1947. All that happened was that the name remained on the door but the title changed.

So my experience of the mining industry is extensive. I claim some knowledge particularly of safety and discipline in the mining industry. My training was in electrical engineering. Before I came to the House I achieved the position of engineer. My principal role was to ensure safety on the electrical engineering side. I refuse to give dates because I shall give my age away.

It involved an extensive period, from a time when electrical equipment in mines was primitive—in the sense that it was not up to the quality and safety standards expected these days. At that time there were problems because of the risk of explosion which was a danger to workers but things have improved over the years.

Historically, the National Coal Board—as it was—should be congratulated because it put a tremendous amount of investment into improving safety in mining, especially in the electrical side—the discipline in which I was involved. It raised the standard in Britain, which compares with anywhere else in the world.

Part of the problem is the question of the length of the working day and how tired workers are. How is safety affected when people are under stress and have to deal with electrical equipment, perhaps having to repair it and put it back together in the mine? I was never keen on working overtime, and when I was responsible for other people, I was not keen to encourage them to work overtime, especially on electrical equipment.

For example, one Sunday morning there was a breakdown—an electrical fault on the 3,300 volt high tension electrical system. Craftsmen who had been at work for some time and were virtually completing their shift had to begin to re-arrange an electrical circuit. In the process one man was electrocuted. Fortunately, although we thought that he was dead, he was not, but he lost three fingers and about six months at work and was never the same man again when it came to dealing with electrical equipment.

That is a simple example of what can happen in a mine. Mining is particular and peculiar. Once one goes down the shaft, the working conditions are different from those anywhere else. It is not like the stock exchange, a City

[Mr. Jack Thompson]

bank or the law courts. It is quite distinct. Therefore, one must recognise that the stresses and strains and the length of shift are important.

Just after I came to the House there was a debate which went through the night—thank heaven that does not happen too often these days. There was a vote at about 4 o'clock in the morning. I came back into the Chamber where two Conservative Members were sitting on the Bench below the Gangway with their feet stretched out. They looked exhausted, which I could understand. One asked me, "Are you enjoying this?" My response was, "Well, 4 o'clock in the morning is like 4 o'clock in the afternoon to me because I have worked shifts for 30-odd years." I asked him whether he had ever been awake at 4 o'clock in the morning before. I remember that he opened one eye and said, "Yes, twice, at a party." That was the difference between his experience of life and mine.

I know that when people are working with electrical equipment in a mine at 4 o'clock in the morning they must have their wits about them. They may work on a piece of equipment and repair it. Perhaps they are putting the door back on a switch, but if the gap around the door is not the right dimension for safety there can be an explosion. That has happened. That is why the length of shift is important.

I advocate that no one, especially electrical craftsmen, should have to work more than the seven and a quarter or eight hour shift. I confess that on one occasion I worked 24 hours because it was an emergency. The 1908 Act allows for emergencies. On many occasions I have worked more than seven and a quarter hours because of an emergency. The problem that I and everyone else in my discipline faced was that we became so tired that we could not cope properly with the work. Safety is the most important consideration when deciding the length of shift.

With my experience in the mining industry, I cannot advocate that the length of shifts should be extended. I worked at the Ellington colliery which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). He may have been down there on a couple of occasions. It is six miles out under the North sea. There is a long journey out and a long journey back—let alone the working time. If there is an accident, such as a man breaking his leg, at the far end of the workings, it is at least two or three hours before the accident victim can get to the surface and then to the hospital. Such factors should be recognised when we talk about the length of the working shift in a mine.

Some miners may be soaking wet the moment that they get down to the mine and they may be soaking wet for the whole shift. Miners can work in an area where there is so much dust and discharge from the blasting that they work in clouds of dust and cannot see more than one foot in front of their face. Such circumstances demand a limit on the working shift, and that is why seven and a quarter hours has been the limit since the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908 was introduced. That figure could, in my view, be adjusted to seven and a half hours or to seven, but it should not be altered as proposed in the Bill. The provision in the Bill is open-ended. If the Bill had specifically laid down arrangements for working shifts in the mines, that would be another matter; it does not. The Bill is so open-ended that I cannot support it.

There are 19 private mines in north-east England—in Northumberland, in Durham and in Cumbria. Some are in my constituency. I have a copy of recent correspondence to the National Union of Mineworkers. British Coal suggests:

"The new form of Licence for small mines will come into general use early in 1992. It remains the Corporation's intention to omit any requirement as to the terms and conditions to be applied by Licensees in respect of their employees."

In other words, a worker in a private mine has no protection.

Hon. Members should take the opportunity to visit a private mine, if they are allowed in, to see the working conditions there. Anyone who visits a British Coal mine and who then visits a private mine will be horrified by the conditions there, yet there is now an opportunity to withdraw any protection from private mines.

An interesting document was sent to me, I do not know whether deliberately or by accident, from the Centre for Policy Studies. I am, of course, not a member of the CPS, but I checked through to make sure. The founders of the CPS are the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and Lord Joseph. The patron happens to be the Prime Minister.

The letter offered me the opportunity to attend a conference on 25 February, and the subject of the conference is:

"Competitive Coal: how to privatise coal and compete with imports."

The talk will be given by Colin Robinson and Allen Sykes. The speakers include Neil Clarke, the chairman of British Coal Corporation, who will be there to defend the interests of the corporation, the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore), Colin Robinson, Crispian Hotson, and Allen Sykes, the co-author of "Competitive Coal". The conference is being held in central London to point out the value of privatising the coal industry.

It is important for me to quote from the document which says:

"Decline in employment need not be greater than in the recent past"

if the mines are privatised. We have lost 100,000 miners and we do not have 100,000 left to lose. The document also says:

"the new and generous redundancy terms must be maintained."

The document deals with private mines and says:

"Existing private miners should be encouraged by removing all restrictions on private mining".

There is a registration fee of £125. That did not put me off, but it would put off any miners who were planning to go to the conference, assuming that they were supporters of the Centre for Policy Studies. Is that not clear evidence of what the whole of this Act is for? The idea of privatising the mining industry is what worries us. I would have been interested in attending the meeting—although I would not be prepared to give them £125, not even £5 or 5p—as an indication of the way things will go under the legislation before us now.

9.14 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): We have had a fascinating debate. On the Opposition side, we have had all the fire and passion of people who care for the industry, because they have worked in it and know it backwards, while on the Government side we have had a cynical attitude, often filibustering waffle, from lawyers who have

the cheek to talk about productivity when it takes a year to get a case to the Old Bailey and we could almost have dug a mine by then. The difference between the two parties has never been more apparent in my long time in the House than it has been tonight. We on this side of the House are talking about jobs and about the experience of our constituents, sold down the river with promises from the Government who have consistently told miners that if they work harder and get the price of coal down they will have nothing to fear. What a load of rubbish it has turned out to be.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) talked about Sherwood colliery closing yesterday, not because it is losing money but because it is not making as much money as the others. What we have in the mining industry today is the game of musical chairs, where the music is playing faster and faster, every week a chair is taken away and there are not enough to go round. There is an atmosphere of total fear in the mining industry because miners are competing not against a price or fixed target but against the pits down the road; and no matter how hard they work or what they do, there is no guarantee that next week they will have a job.

Those on the Government Benches are different. The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) spoke for 20 minutes about productivity—this from a lawyer. With the money that they earn at the Old Bailey, lawyers have a vested interest in going slow, yet they talk about miners and productivity. I will tell hon. Members about it because I have worked on it, as have many of my friends on the shop floor. We have discovered that the more people produce, the faster they put themselves out of work. That is why we had vested interests and restrictive practices in the first place, right through the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s: people remembered the 1930s. If a man thinks, when the boss sets him a task, that it is his last task and that after that there is no more, he will go slow.

However, they have got round the problem in the mining industry by offering £10,000 not to have restrictive practices, encouraging people to grasp the money as fast as they can and put themselves out of work as quickly as possible, because the last thing that they want as they look to a general election is any problem in the mining industry. We have seen it to some extent with the farmers and over-consumption: farmers are being paid £70,000 to watch the grass grow. But the farmers are happy. We never see any empty farms. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) is a farmer. He knows all about subsidies, all about productivity and consumption, but he says one thing for his mining constituents and a very different thing for his farming constituents. He tries to vote both ways. He will soon find out which way they will vote in May.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) is sponsored by NACODS, and he and I have spoken to them; members of NACODS are the foremen, and they should know about productivity and safety. They tell us that what happens now is that the manager says to five or six men that 20 yards have to be dug or the roof lifted or perhaps there is difficult terrain. He says that he wants it done by Monday morning and they negotiate a price: five of them can have two thousand quid if they do it by Monday or perhaps Tuesday morning. The manager more or less tells them to forget about overtime rates or double time for Sundays. He does not say, "Forget about safety." But he does say that they can forget about limited hours down the pit, and shift length, which is what the Bill changes. It has been said already that when people are tired they make mistakes, accidents happen and the situation becomes dangerous.

If the industry is privatised after the election, those who spend money buying the pits will expect them to be worked seven days a week, 24 hours a day. It will not be just the miners who are working all the time, but everyone who lives nearby. I have 45 parish councils and I am certain that the hon. Members for Sherwood and for Newark (Mr. Alexander), whose constituency is next to mine, have a similar number. They should be ready for the consequences when the pits start working seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The noise from the lorries and from the tannoys at the pits, as well as the smoke from those pits, will make life horrendous for those living nearby.

Once coal is imported from the new ports, including that at Killingholme, it will be delivered by lorry because that will be cheaper. Therefore, the environment of Nottinghamshire will be destroyed. That will knock thousands and thousands of pounds off the value of homes in the little villages through which the lorries will take short cuts. Those villagers will be Conservative voters. Imported coal will not just cause the closure of pits and put miners out of work; it will destroy the environment of rural areas.

There are two power stations in my constituency. There used to be three, but one is now in the constituency of the hon. Member for Newark as a result of boundary changes. Those power stations will use imported coal. The Government have allowed the import of foreign coal because it has less sulphur content and therefore will not spread acid rain across Europe. If those power stations had been converted into desulphurisation plants, it would have created hundreds of jobs for engineers and so on.

In March 1987, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) told me that the West Burton B power station would be built. That power station would have created 2,500 jobs for construction workers, 800 jobs for those running the power station and would have kept five pits open. The right hon. Gentleman made that promise in March solely to save the seat of the hon. Member for Sherwood at the June 1987 election. Three months after the election, that promised power station vanished and was forgotten. Since then the Government have sold off the electricity industry and the power stations, which have now decided to buy foreign coal.

I will not mention RECHAR, because it has already been mentioned by a number of my hon. Friends. When the Common Market offers big grants to our farmers, the Conservatives grab the money with both hands to give it to their friends. When the Common Market offers big grants to the mining areas to make up for the shortfall in jobs, the Government say, "Oh, no. If the Common Market are going to give us that money, it should go in the general pot." The Common Market has made that cash available for the mining areas, but they have not got it.

Mr. Andy Stewart: That is not true.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, it is. The hon. Gentleman knows that, because of the big power stations at Bassetlaw and in other parts of Nottinghamshire, the region never got any rate support grant. The Government claimed that the rates that we received from the power stations meant that we were above the level eligible for support. Despite all the muck and filth caused by the power stations, we never got a

[Mr. Ashton]

penny for it. When the business rate was introduced, all the money went to London and we got nothing from the poll tax or from revenue support. We still cannot get the RECHAR money. The Government have robbed Nottinghamshire blind of that money.

Mr. Andy Stewart: The hon. Member is an honourable man. I have received a letter from Commissioner Millan in response to my invitation to come to London to meet the Conservative coal group to explain why he would not give us the money. He wrote back to say that it was not a problem of additionality, because that had been agreed. The problem was about how the money should be targeted. So the extra money for the pits has been agreed but Brussels will not give us our money.

Mr. Ashton: It is because the Government are not targeting it. They want it to go into the pot for general use.

Mr. Stewart: That is not the argument.

Mr. Ashton: It is the argument. My constituency received grants under a Labour Government. People who brought jobs to Bassetlaw received 40 per cent. of the cost of the buildings and 30 per cent. of the cost of the machinery, and the scheme was successful. Within weeks of a Conservative Government coming to office, those grants were taken away and we did not get a penny. The money goes to Corby because it has a Tory Member Parliament and it goes to other places, but it does not come to mining areas in Nottinghamshire, and the hon. Member for Sherwood had never shouted for it either.

Mr. Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashton: No, I shall not give way again. All you are doing—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ashton: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for how I am speaking. Many hon. Members wish to intervene and I am very angry. We are all neighbours, but the hon. Member for Sherwood is simply advising the Union of Democratic Mineworkers to go down a blind alley and invest its money in privatised pits.

Mr. Haynes: It is a serious matter and the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) is laughing.

Mr. Ashton: The hon. Member for Sherwood is advising the UDM to invest its funds in privatised pits if the Tories get back in and privatise the industry. Once they have done so, by 1993, PowerGen and National Power will be giving out contracts for coal. British miners could never compete with 12-year-old kids in Colombia digging coal. They cannot compete with Poland's dumping of coal, or with South Africa. It is nonsense to talk of productivity, extra machinery and extra sweat when there is unfair competition.

Farmers do not have unfair competition. The Government do not let food in from outside the Common Market. The hon. Member for Sherwood is a farmer and he knows that that is true. He speaks with a forked tongue when he advises the UDM to invest in the coal industry. A year after the election, the UDM, if it is foolish enough to invest its money, will have to tell its miners, "We're sorry, lads, you've got to take a pay cut because we cannot get our coal down to Polish and South African prices".

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman talked earlier about that very point and I explained it to him. Let us get the record straight. The new contracts will be issued in April 1993 and the privatisation of the coal industry will not be until after that date.

Mr. Ashton: Who says so?

Mr. Stewart: I do.

Mr. Ashton: The first thing that a Conservative Government would put in the Queen's Speech would be the privatisation of the coal industry. The hon. Gentleman knows why they would privatise the industry. It would not be for the coal, because that is worth only 3p a tonne under the ground. They would sell it off for the land. They would sell thousands of acres at rock bottom prices next to the railways, roads and canals, and those who bought it would not care tuppence for the coal. The hon. Gentleman knows that. That is the profit in the coal mining industry.

9.27 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling a Staffordshire Member to participate in this friendly debate between the neighbours of Nottinghamshire.

I am pleased to be able to follow the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) and to be on his side in a number of arguments, for he is a persuasive and powerful speaker and always speaks with great passion, which I admire. We could do with a bit more passion in this place sometimes. However, able and persuasive as the hon. Gentleman is, he should be doing a damned sight more to persuade Bruce Millan to give us back our money, for Mr. Millan is a former member of the Labour party.

Conservative Members entirely share Labour's belief that that money is necessary for parts of our country that have suffered difficulties as a result of the contraction of the coal industry. We share that view but believe that Opposition Members should try to bring pressure to bear not on the British Government, who have done everything they have been called on to do, but on Bruce Millan, who was a Minister of the Crown and knows exactly how procedures for public financing operate in this country. He is simply playing a miserable game of party politics.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) is not here at present, but she has an important interest in the Cannock Chase district council region, as do some of my constituents—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is she?"] I do not know where the hon. Lady is or whether she intends to participate in the debate. She has an interest, as does Cannock Chase district council—which partly covers my constituency—in ensuring that we receive the RECHAR moneys to help the Lea Hall miners, some of whom are my constituents.

I think that the outside world will take a dim view of the way in which Opposition Members are attacking the Government and, perhaps, the way in which some Conservative Members then counter-attack the Labour party. Hon. Members should be united in ensuring that the European bureaucrats give us back our money. My hon.

Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) made it perfectly plain that Ministers have done their bit and that Bruce Millan has accepted that.

I do not wish to spend all night considering RECHAR, which is not within the scope of the Bill. I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson). As a child, I lived in Hamburg, and I always associate Wansbeck with a suburb of Hamburg; perhaps one day I shall find the other Wansbeck that the hon. Gentleman represents.

I listened with great interest to what the hon. Gentleman said, and I am sure that all hon. Members salute the contribution that he has made to raising technical standards, thus placing the British coal industry among the front runners in the world, if not the very best in the world. The hon. Gentleman said that he started in the private sector of the coal industry, and I am sure that he is looking forward with me to being able to end his active days, before a long and happy retirement, with the coal industry back in private hands.

How right the hon. Gentleman was when he said that the mine at which he worked was not owned by the British people. The mines that are today owned by British Coal are not owned by the British people, but after the next election they will be, because the mines will be in private hands again.

I was privileged to be called in the debate on Second Reading. I have reread my speech, which I thought was good at the time, and wish to repeat only one part of it.

I am sorry that the Bill does not extend further, perhaps to encourage the present private sector of the coal industry by lifting still further the limits on opencast mining and on the number of miners allowed to work underground in private pits.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck talked about private mines, and encouraged us to visit them. The problem with private mines is simply that they are allowed to employ so few people that it is impossible to make them as viable as the much larger pits operated by British Coal. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the private sector is more viable than at present.

Such debates as this tend to have a predictable pattern. It is astonishing that the Labour party, which judges so much of our national life by the amount of public money spent, comes to the House and says that it will vote against a Government measure that commits a further massive slug of public money to the coal industry. The British people, particularly those in the mining industry, will view the Labour party's attitude with amazement. It is interested only in input, not output, and since 1979 the Government have made brilliant progress within the coal industry, according to every principle that the Labour party holds dear.

Every hon. Member with a mining constituency knows full well that the miners he represents have enjoyed the benefits of massive investment in safer and more productive equipment—money invested on the taxpayers' behalf by this Government. *[Interruption.]* I think that I heard the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) mutter from a sedentary position that he believes that. He is right about that, if about nothing else. I certainly believe strongly what I am saying, and I believe that the Labour party is making a big mistake by voting against a measure such as this, which will contribute yet more public money to the coal industry.

Asfordby pit, which is intended to be fully operational by the end of next year, is now in its £290 million development stage. It is an example of the Government investing money to make the British coal industry not only more profitable but safer. The roof-bolting technique is employed in that pit. It is a key technique that I have discussed with constituents, and it is making an enormous contribution to rendering the coal industry more productive.

British Coal hopes that each miner at the pit will produce 18 tonnes of coal per shift compared with the United Kingdom average of five. The costs of production would be rather more than half British Coal's average of £1·75 per gigawatt, and the coal at that price will compete even with some opencast coal.

This is a good example of the £7·5 billion investment made by the Government to enable the British coal industry to be viable and productive. As the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) said, it is fair to point out that both management and employees have responded in good measure. Let us not forget that productivity increased by 2·5 per cent. under the last Labour Government—that is all. Since 1985 alone, it has increased by 100 per cent. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about closures?"] But the miners have accepted those closures, and this Bill represents part of the process by which that productivity increase has been brought about, to the benefit of everyone working in the industry.

In the light of all this, the miners are recognising, as I said on Second Reading, that it is the Conservative party, not the Labour party, which is the miners' friend.

The redundancy terms in the industry are, as my hon. Friend for Newark (Mr. Alexander) said, among the most generous in Europe—and not one compulsory redundancy has been made.

British Coal Enterprise has been funded by the Government to the tune of £70 million, and it has attracted £500 million in private money and created 70,000 new job opportunities—a considerable achievement.

I should like to draw attention to three fundamental socialist contradictions in the Labour party's stance——

Mr. Andy Stewart: Only three?

Mr. Howarth: Time does not permit me to enumerate more of them.

We debated the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, and I was able to serve on the Committee that scrutinised the Bill. Labour Members, who claim that they want British Coal to be successful and who talk much about how they represent the industry, wanted in that Committee to impose ever more burdens on the industry.

The Labour party's second contradiction is to be found in its attitude to opencast coal. Labour Members say that they want to promote a successful and prosperous industy. They know that opencast coal has made an enormous contribution to keeping down the cost of coal in general, but at every point they oppose it.

Mr. Illsley: That is not true.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman says that it is not true. Perhaps he will catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, and explain that contradiction. I am pleased to hear that he does not take that view, but everywhere I go I find that the Labour party opposes opencast mining.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No, because some other hon. Members did not give way, and I know that some of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends want to speak.

The third contradiction is that Labour's plans for coal conflict directly with its policies on the environment. The Opposition tell the mining unions that they are pledged to force the generators to burn coal at the current level irrespective of the cost and will seek to deter them from using gas for power generation and phase out nuclear power. They know that such policies would massively increase harmful carbon and sulphur dioxide emissions.

They tell the environmental lobby, which knows and tells Labour about such emissions, that Labour is a green party committed to the demanding target of stabilising carbon dioxide emissions at their 1990 level by the year 2000. It would be almost impossible for Labour to achieve that target without gas and nuclear power, especially in view of its commitment to maintain the least environmentally friendly fuel. Labour is a party of contradictions, and at some point it will have to explain them to the electorate.

I shall conclude on a point of unanimity, because there is nothing to be gained from engaging in a permanent slanging match. All those who have spoken in the debate, whatever their prospective, have a profound and sincere interest in the coal industry. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) spoke of record productivity at Silverwood, and I am delighted to report the record productivity of Littleton colliery just outside my constituency. It recently managed to reverse a loss of £2·3 million, and the miners brought the pit back to profit. That is a great success.

On Second Reading, I spoke about the risk that the generators were running in opting for an import policy. Because of the time factor, I shall not repeat what I said about the dangers that the generators face. They must be aware that their best interests lie in ensuring a stable supply of quality British coal supplied by highly productive British miners.

9.42 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): There is much to say and too little time in which to say it. Suffice it to say to start with that the Bill clearly illustrates the Government's myopia. They are quite incapable of lateral thinking. It has rightly been said of the Government that they know the price of everything and the value of nothing. The problem is that they know only the price today and do not look at the cost tomorrow. They have not put the Bill in a world context.

Coal was king until 1960, at which time gas took over, but early in the next century coal will take over from gas. What preparations have the Government made for that? They have steadily reduced coal production, while in the rest of the world it is steadily increasing. That poses a tremendous threat to our economy, which has deliberately been put in peril by the Government's actions.

The Bill is based purely on short-term economics, and that is unfair to future generations. It does not look to future jobs in coal areas or to future customers for energy. We must bear in mind the fact that the more coal mines we keep open the more we substitute home-produced coal for imports and provide diverse energy resources. That will also mean that we will not be held hostage by one or two fuels or by foreign powers. At the time of the Gulf crisis, we saw how that could happen.

We can see that, unless we start to form European Community policies into a properly channelled energy policy, we shall be in trouble. Because of our regular reliance on outside energy resources, Japanese investment throughout the world will overtake us again, and sink us.

It has been calculated, not unreasonably, that, by the end of the revolution of which the Bill is part, the Government will have shoved down coal production in this country to what it was in 1700. If that is not a retrograde step, I do not know what is. How have they done it? The Government did a clever thing in getting Rothschild to prepare a special report for them, so that they could act upon it.

Why did they choose Rothschild? I asked my friends what skills Rothschild had in mining. Where is its long history in the mining of coal? Nowhere. Why did the Government not ask British Mining Consultants, for example, to write the report? British Mining Consultants knows about coal. Rothschild, perhaps, knows about money—although I would rather have asked William Hill to examine the coal industry than Rothschild, considering how the report turned out.

The Government have done no real research into the use of coal—into clean coal technology, clean coal extraction or coal preservation. I shall take that back, because a very little has been done, in conjunction with the European Community—but not enough has been done to make the research worth while.

Some of the money should hve been put into such research straight away. The Government should be looking for a 20-year profit, and commissioning research that will take us at least 20 years on. Instead, they are saying that they want instant thrills.

In my constituency, the result of that attitude is that they insist on opencast mining at Upton, where every last grubby piece of coal has to be taken away before we can restore the site and make it decent to live with, whereas Aketon, where there is 30 years' of coal left, was closed last year. That was profitable coal, and coal on which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) can confirm, huge sums of money had been spent buying machinery that is now rotting on the site because the Government closed the pit immediately after it was installed. That is a disgrace.

The Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908 is to be repealed. In 1908, Herbert Gladstone debated with that arch-Tory, F. E. Smith. Smith had a good deal more wit about him than some of the Tory speeches that we have heard today. Nevertheless, he spoke in exactly the same tone—money, money, money, and grubbing, grubbing, grubbing all the way. He never talked about people. Gladstone, who represented Yorkshire at that time, had values based more upon humanity.

It is a shame that the Government have told deliberate lies about directives in order to get us to agree to repeal the 1908 Act. I shall not quote, because of the shortage of time, but the Government statement says that we have to repeal the Act because of the directive. Surely at least one member of the Cabinet must know about directives, and therefore must know that that claim is false and that the directive cannot work in such a way. Indeed, the treaty of Rome explicitly states that directives must not lead to less

safe legislation than that which already exists. As Gladstone showed in the original debate, the 1908 Act was about health and safety at work.

It is no good Conservative Members saying, as they have said, that, because the pits are mechanised, there are no longer the problems that used to exist when people used picks and shovels. When people are dog tired, there are worse accidents when there is mechanisation down the pit. Those accidents can be very serious indeed.

A good friend of mine, Steve Kemp, who is the NUM treasurer at Stillingfleet, tells me that they have had to get a new filing cabinet in especially for the compensation claims that are outstanding—some 450, which is a record in his experience—even though Stillingfleet is supposed to be one of the safest pits in the country. Steve Kemp tells me that there is a very simple reason for that, which is that people are not observing the provisions of the 1908 Act. They are doing 30 hours' overtime, and that is leading to tremendous accidents.

We must work, within Europe, towards achieving the ends outlined in the treaty of Rome. We must start to obey European legislation, which the Government are curiously loth to do. They keep telling us that they observe European legislation better than any other country in the Community—but it ain't true. We have been had up before the European Court at Luxembourg more often than any other country for offences under article 119, which deals with equal treatment for women.

The same is true of RECHAR—récharbonisation. We should have that money; it is quite clear. Let me tell the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) that we must demonstrate additionality. Because a number of countries were not demonstrating additionality, notice was given three years ago that it should be shown, and that it should be shown in the areas for which the money was intended. In the case of coal, that cannot possibly be. The money has simply gone into the national Exchequer and, as my hon. Friend said, to support the poll tax in Westminster, where people have never had sight of a coal tip. The Government must stop cheating. At least the Secretary of State for the Environment has admitted to the mistakes of the Cabinet, and it is now up to the Minister responsible for coal to fight his corner. He may not wish to do so publicly tonight, but I certainly expect him to do it in future.

I urge all my hon. Friends to join me in voting against the Bill, because it is a thoroughly bad Bill with thoroughly bad intentions.

9.52 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I shall try to be brief, because I know that hon. Members want to be away home. I know that we all expected a 10 o'clock vote but, unfortunately, some Conservative Members started filibustering.

We should look to see where all the investment to which hon. Members have referred is going. Some of it is going to close down mines, make miners redundant and put them on the dole. There is no doubt that the rest of it is going into the pits that will be left for privatisation. The Government are going to invest all that money in those pits to make them attractive to their friends in the City or to whoever may want to buy them. It has even been said that companies in South Africa are interested in buying British coal mines. No doubt we shall see that happening as time goes on.

Coal mined in Britain has declined to 35 million tonnes, whereas there has been an increase of 15 million tonnes in the opencast coal produced. We have heard what opencast mining does to the environment. I know what happens in my beautiful county of Northumberland; the place is dug up, and there are holes all over the place. It is an absolute disgrace, and the Government alone are responsible for that environmental destruction.

By the end of this year, 20 million tonnes of foreign coal are to be imported into Britain. That too is the responsibility of the Government. Rothschild said that he hoped that, by the end of 1993-94, there would be 20 mines left in Britain. He went further, saying that he hoped that only 14 or 15 might be left for privatisation. That is where the investment is going—it is going into the pits that are left. Rothschild suggests that, even in the north-east, which many years ago was the bedrock of the coal industry, there should be only one coal mine.

In the context of safety, I want to turn briefly to the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. Much has been said about this subject. Many of my colleagues have worked in coal mines, and they and I have spoken with experience and with passion. From Conservative Members we have heard very little passionate comment about safety. They know absolutely nothing about mining safety. They think that a mine is a factory that can be turned on and off with a switch. People who have worked in the bowels of the earth know that a mine is the most unfriendly place imaginable. In such conditions, miners need their colleagues to help them to ensure that, at the end of a shift, they can come out unharmed. Longer hours will make miners more vulnerable to accidents. Indeed, most accidents happen towards the end of a shift.

Some whippersnapper drummed up by the Government has said that, if miners were to work shifts of nine or 10 hours, there could be a productivity increase of 39 per cent. That is typical of people who sit with a pen in one hand and a calculator in the other. Having worked in the mines for 27 years, including 14 years at the coal face, I know that, after six hours underground, a miner is not a pretty sight. It is ridiculous to think of expecting a miner to work another two or three hours, with the possibility of two additional hours' overtime.

Let us remember the conditions in which miners work. I am thinking of the dust, the water and the noise. We have heard nothing about noise, yet it is a very serious problem. In the confined space of a pit, the noise of a machine is deafening. Indeed, I received compensation for deafness caused by my 27 years in the pits. Yet under this legislation, miners would be expected to work longer hours.

We may expect tough European Community legislation. I want Conservative Members to realise what is at stake for the British miner, and I want the British miner to understand what the Government intend to impose on him. Let hon. Members consider these figures: six 10-hour shifts per week, with three weeks on and one week off; four 12-hour shifts per week, with three weeks on and one week off; six 10-hour shifts per week, with two weeks on and one week off. I am willing to bet that, when a miner has worked 10 hours a day for three weeks, the pit manager—it will be a private pit—will ask him to work during what should be his week off.

That is what is in store for the miner. There will be no week off: he will be working all the time, and there will be

[Mr. Ronnie Campbell]

more accidents. If the Conservatives are returned to power —God forbid—we shall be here to point the finger at them.

9.58 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The Opposition do not need to apologise for delaying the House with a Division when we are discussing an industry that is part and parcel of the fabric of the societies that we represent. It is not only a question of jobs or economics; the coal industry is part of the character and social make-up of our societies.

I bring to the Minister's attention the fear of my community that, unless the attitude and approach of both British Coal and the Government change, there will no longer be deep mining in south Wales. That is incredible in a community that is synonymous with mining and in a society with a background centred on mining. I repeat that unless attitudes change, south Wales will no longer have a deep mining industry.

That is best illustrated by the problems faced by the one and only pit that I now represent. I vividly recall——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Coal Industry Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Rowlands: I vividly recall a meeting just before the 1987 election with the then Secretary of State for Energy, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), who told a group of Welsh Members of parliament that the restructuring of the Welsh coalfield was virtually over, although one or two pits might close in the future because their reserves were exhausted. Four years and one Parliament later, the four pits that used to exist in my constituency have been reduced to one.

Deep worry and concern ran through my community this Christmas at the thought that even that one pit might be jeopardised. Those fears were due to British Coal's announcement of changes to its redundancy terms. When the Minister replies, perhaps he will tell the House whether he knew at any point during the Bill's passage through the House—after all, it is about giving money for redundancies—that British Coal would change the terms on a whim and without notice just before Christmas. The announcement that the £10,000 supplement would be withdrawn led to worry and concern that a ploy that had been used before would lead to the premature closure of the Taff Merthyr colliery. I hope that we have managed to stabilise the position and to demonstrate that that is not the case.

What has happened at the Taff Merthyr colliery is an example of the way in which the industry has been affected by the pathetic and myopic attitudes of British Coal and the Government. A tapestry in an office at Taff Merthyr marks the fact that that colliery has the most successful production record of recent years. Last year that pit made more than £4 million profit. This year, because it is now a one-face pit, and has had problems, it could lose about half that amount. What is really worrying is the unbelievably short-sighted attitude towards the industry that has emerged in the past two or three years and the belief that if a pit does not balance on a weekly or monthly basis, it will face closure. No RTZ, Shell or any other major mining company treats its extractive industry or mineral development in such a myopic and short-term fashion.

In addition, the senior management of British Coal are indifferent and distant. The National Coal Board used to be very much part of our community. The people who managed the pits were accessible to those who worked in the industry because they understood the impact that their decisions might have. However, the industry is now managed at its most senior level by people who come, who close and who go. That has been the pattern.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) gave an account of the way in which the west Wales anthracite coalfield is now run from Nottingham. We are not even allowed to keep the records of our industry in south Wales. British Coal is now moving all the industry's records to an office in the middle of England. Those records are important not only for compensation or mining subsidence claims, but because they are part of the heritage of the south Wales mining communities.

Pleas made to the Minister—I have written to him about this—and to the Secretary of State for Wales by everybody in south Wales who is interested in the industry have been totally ignored. The management of the industry have gone, so now they are taking away our heritage and our records. It is little wonder that growing bitterness and resentment are felt about modern management. There is no reason why Taff Merthyr or the anthracite coalfield of west Wales could not be developed. There is no reason why we should be facing the total closure of the industry.

The Act of Parliament which established the National Coal Board, now British Coal, placed upon the board a statutory duty to win coal. There is coal to be won. There are reserves in south Wales which could create jobs and provide vital energy sources. The Government and the present management of British Coal are not fulfilling that statutory duty. I hope and pray that soon we will have a change of Government and with it a change of policy.

10.5 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The House has probably witnessed the last debate on the future of the British coal industry before the general election. At all levels within the industry, many people believe that the election will be as important for the future of the industry as was the general election of 1945. It will effectively decide whether the country will keep that national asset or whether it will be run down rapidly after the election, having been turned over to people with economic reasons to dispose of it for short-term gain.

Many of the speeches have dwelt on how the industry has been mismanaged for a long time. My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) talked about the workshops. I have a constituency interest as well. The thousands of jobs connected with mine support services will disappear if pit closures continue at the same rate as over the past five years, because there will be nobody for them to service.

We have heard how the industry has been treated in south Wales. The immediate prospects are not good. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) talked about pre-election fixes. I was with him when we

were told by the CEGB that West Burton B power station would be built and would keep jobs in the midland coalfields. Before the last general election, my hon. Friend rightly predicted what would happen. I hope that people working in the midlands coalfields will remember when the general election takes place what happened a few months later.

The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) seemed to believe what he was saying. I do not know the medical term, but his is a sad case.

One thing he said will be interesting to many people in his constituency. When we discussed the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, I thought that there would be co-operation between the parties to sort out the problems. The hon. Gentleman said that our pressure for amendments created an even greater burden on the coal industry. We wanted to stop British Coal being the judge and jury on what happens when it creates damage to thousands of homes, including many in his constituency. The people whose property has been damaged will be interested to know that he believes that it is a burden on the coal industry to put right that damage.

No doubt his constituents will also be pleased to hear that the hon. Member believes that opencast coal mining can make an enormous contribution. I thought that his constituents, like people in neighbouring constituencies, do not like the idea of the countryside being ripped up by opencast mining to produce coal for him and some of his hon. Friends.

The Bill is extraordinary. Under clause 2, we are asked to allow the Secretary of State to repeal a safety and health measure when he chooses, although he is putting nothing in its place.

The Secretary of State for Energy tells us that the EC directive on working time will take the place of the 1908 Act. The Secretary of State for Employment tells us that the EC directive on working time is unacceptable. Presumably he means that it is unacceptable for everyone except mineworkers. But the EC directive is not mentioned in the Bill and has not been debated in the House in relation to the coal industry. It has not been discussed with the two sides of the industry, despite repeated recommendations to that effect from the Select Committee and elsewhere. The Government ask us to carry the measure through without any consultation with people inside the industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) pointed out that he was given a promise from the Dispatch Box in 1988 by the then Secretary of State. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) said that we were being asked to repeal the 1908 Act without maintaining the current protection for the British coal industry.

We could never agree without consultation and agreement to any changes to legislation that was introduced on safety and health grounds. That is the only way to ensure that people who work in a dangerous environment have confidence in the regulations that protect them. It is a great pity that the Secretary of State has ratted on promises made in the House by previous Secretaries of State.

In Committee, we moved amendments to prevent British Coal from abusing the new colliery review procedure that was introduced when the massive closure programme began in 1984-85 and caused such social disruption. In July 1989, a complaint was made to the independent review body by the National Union of Mineworkers that British Coal was undermining the review by making enhanced redundancy payments until set dates, after which the payments were drastically reduced.

The complaint referred specifically to events surrounding the closure of Barnburgh colliery in South Yorkshire. British Coal management had set deadlines for the ending of redundancy payments. It wrote to the work force saying that, if workers did not accept redundancy and stop the appeal procedure, their payments would be prejudiced. The case went to the independent review body which consisted at that time of three eminent QCs. It was chaired by Anthony Diamond, QC, and its report concluded:

"It follows from this that we take the view that the apparent change in dates affecting the eligibility to enhanced redundancy did interfere with the IRB procedure. If this were to occur again it would undermine our function as an Independent Review Body and thus put the whole review procedure in jeopardy. Should a similar situation occcur again we can see no reason why British Coal should not suspend the operation of the scheme during the period between the IRB reference and decision for the colliery concerned."

The amendments that we tabled in Committee were not supported by Conservative Members, who keep telling us that they are the friends of the miners. Those amendments would have ensured that any work force could put their pit into the review procedure without risking any part of their redundancy payments. I moved those amendments on 3 December last year. I accused the British Coal Corporation of using the restructuring grants to blackmail miners into closing pits by threatening their redundancy payments.

The Minister assured us that our amendments were not necessary. Within two weeks, British Coal told the mining unions that, with effect from 31 March 1992, it would stop the top-up payments of up to £10,000 to miners who were made redundant. That is the truth of the matter. British Coal will now announce colliery closures and use the threat of stopping top-up payments to bludgeon every miner into accepting immediate closure. It has already done so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) explained, it happened just this week at Sherwood colliery in his constituency. Practically overnight, 800 jobs disappeared out of that economy. The men charged into a ballot and voted three to one to close a coal mine that should have closed in 14 months' time.

The Secretary of State has failed to address the implications of those actions of British Coal. They are clearly designed to put pressure on the work force at a threatened colliery to take the enhanced payments rather than put the pit into the review procedure. We are not arguing for less generous redundancy terms: we are arguing that they should not be used to pressure mineworkers into leaving the industry. It cannot be argued that there is not enough money to continue to pay the top-up, especially in view of the phenomenal amount of money made available under clause 1. It can only be in order to do the Government's bidding—that is what we believe it is about—and to reduce the industry for privatisation.

The Government are riding roughshod over agreed procedures, with one aim in mind. I and my hon. Friends not only believe that but know it. That aim is to deliver the Rothschild report scenario to the British coal mining industry. In Committee and elsewhere, the Minister has

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

told us that the Rothschild report does not paint a picture of the future of the industry. He says that its size will be determined by the size of the contracts negotiated with the generators.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), in a good speech, described what was happening inside the British coal industry to the only person, in my knowledge, who has had many years' experience of negotiating contracts with generators—the current commercial director, Malcolm Edwards. Everyone knows what is happening to him. I noticed that those Conservative Members who know what is happening inside British Coal went very quiet and became subdued because of what is happening to him.

Malcolm Edwards does not agree with the Rothschild scenario, so he must go, whether he carries a Tory party card in his pocket or not, and whether he has been politically loyal to them or not. They do not want the industry to remain the size that it is now, and he is getting in their way.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, Mr. Edwards took the Secretary of State for Energy at his word when he said at the Dispatch Box that he wanted big contracts for the British coal industry. We know that that is not true. I wonder why the Government are paying Rothschilds for advice if they believe that it is up to the market and not to them, as they are saying. However, I agree that the generators will be the major determinants of the future of the industry.

Conservative Members who have spoken in the debate should realise, including the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] —I shall comment on that in a minute. Unfortunately, the best that I could say about the speech of the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) is that it was entertaining.

As regards the Nottinghamshire trio—the hon. Members for Newark (Mr. Alexander), for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart)—they will be known as the Three Stooges of the debate. We do not believe for one minute that they think that the Government, if they remain in office, will keep coal mining at anything like the level that it is at now.

The hon. Member for New Forest used the argument about the 1960s and how many pits closed then.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Under a Labour Government.

Mr. Barron: Yes, under a Labour Government.

The British Coal industry—the great national asset that my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) said had such a good record in supporting the British economy, as it certainly has—has fought world wars for the British economy. That industry did well. In the 1960s, it closed down because people decided that the middle east was a better bet. Oil was brought into this country by different Governments and that closed it down.

The industry did not deserve it. The industry has closed down because of nuclear power, although that is not the best thing that ever happened to us, as we are finding out in the cost of our electricity bills every quarter. However, under a Labour Government, it has never closed down because of foreign coal coming into the country to replace British coal, and every Conservative Member will be defeated because of that. It has never closed down because of competing coal from elsewhere.

The Government will have to answer to the nation for that, if we ever again face the scenario of increases in world energy prices. Conservative Members will answer for that, and some will answer long before then. That is the truth of the matter. Conservative Members should not make accusations that we have ever sold out the coal industry to foreign coal coming into the country, because we have not. I shall stand the rest of the criticism, as we all must do.

I agree with the Rothschild report that the Government —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".] Yes—I agree that the Government must play a role in getting the contracts between generators and British Coal sorted out. I am pleased to say that British Coal believes that the Government should do so. The director of public relations sent a paper to me just after Christmas, which was quoted earlier. I do not know which quote was used, because I had to leave the Chamber for a short while. The director says:

> "We need the support of Government to ensure that the dominant position of the generators is properly regulated rather than abused, and that the outcome of the contract negotiations is decided on genuine and not spurious economic grounds."

Will the Government take the advice of the Rothschild report? Will they support the British coal industry in ensuring that we get the biggest contracts possible, or will they continue to pay lip service to their commitment to the industry while everything else they do undermines its future?

Coal has been backed out of the market by an uneconomic alternative. The electricity industry acknowledges that new gas burn is more expensive than electricity from coal-fired stations. The Secretary of State carries on giving permission for more gas-fired power stations. If all those stations come on stream, more than half the electricity market will be pre-empted by the costly fuels of gas and nuclear.

The Government's actions speak far louder than their words. They are not only prepared to see the continual contraction of the industry: they actively promote it. Not only will they not support the British coal industry, but they do not appear to want anyone else to support it.

From a press report that I read in the *Yorkshire Post* just after Christmas, it seems that the Secretary of State has written to the European Energy Commissioner complaining that the Commissioner has said that the British coal industry should not carry on with its closure programme because its coal is the cheapest deep-mined coal in the European Community. According to the press report, the Secretary of State said that the Commission should close a few of the German coal mines, which are far more expensive. I suppose that we have to give him nine out of 10 for consistency. He wants to close not only pits in this country, but pits in west Germany as well.

The Secretary of State misses the mark. We have not had an advocate in government who promotes the sale of British coal in Europe or even wider. The tragedy is that our industry is the most competitive European deep-mined coal producer, yet it has no one in the Government to sell its wares abroad. I am pleased to say that that will alter in a few weeks' time.

It is about time that the Government gave us some straight answers about their plans for the industry's future.

No one believes that the Government or British Coal do not know how many jobs they will get rid of from the British coal industry. They must know, because they need to put a figure on the money specified in clause 1. It is about time that they called a halt to the mounting uncertainty in the industry caused by their actions and the actions of senior management.

Many Conservative Members should have some sympathy with the uncertainty and job insecurity that mineworkers face because quite a few of them, perhaps 100 —even *The Daily Telegraph* talks of at least 60—will be made redundant in the not too distant future. It could have happened to some of them last June, as they must know. It could have happened in October, and it may happen in April, May or June this year. They will be made redundant whenever their senior management—those hon. Members sit smiling—the decision-maker and the man who is running the campaign decide that they have the bottle to call the election. Those hon. Members know that the country will give them their cards.

We do not support getting rid of the 1908 Act when we do not know what will take its place. If it is right that Germany and other European Community coal industries have limits on their hours of work which are about the same as ours are now, it is right that we should have such limits. Consultation should take place to fix the hours in the different industry which we shall have at the turn of the century. We do not disagree with that, but we do not accept the lack of consultation.

We will not accept any further reduction in our great national asset, the British coal industry. As the European Commission and everyone else says, the reductions have gone on for far too long, and the cuts are too deep. The industry should be saved. For the sake of the coal industry, when the general election comes, Labour Members will move to the Government Benches, and our great national asset will serve this country as it has done for more than 150 years.

10.24 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I rise to answer one or two points raised in this debate, which has been characterised by a number of flights of fancy on the Opposition Benches, one of which we have just heard from the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). We have also had a number of moments of reality, one of which was supplied by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson), who made an interesting speech illustrated by recollections of the House some 25 years ago.

It is true to say that, when one reads debates of that time and earlier, certain issues are continually repeated. The coal industry has been under pressure and in some difficulty ever since coal production peaked in 1913. Every year since then the industry has faced market contractions and has had to fight for market share. As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest pointed out, there have been periods of comparative stability and periods of decline, and one of the most marked periods of decline was between 1964 and 1970 when, under a Labour Government, nearly 280 pits shut.

The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) intervened in my hon. Friend's speech to point out that they were small pits and therefore it did not really matter; but that was not much consolation to the 170,000 miners who were not redeployed into larger pits and who all lost their jobs during those years of Labour government, despite all the good intentions. The difference is that the generous redundancy payments now available were not available to pay men displaced during those years.

A central part of this Bill is to retain and extend the restructuring grants essential to keep those redundancy payments and to make them available. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) was absolutely right to express amazement that the Labour party will this evening vote against a Bill that seeks to underpin and continue the availability of redundancy payments which are acknowledged to be among the most generous in British industry, and also to keep in being grants available to transfer miners to other collieries, and money for retraining, for employment advice and for the activities of British Coal Enterprise.

Labour will vote against all those things this evening. That is a direct threat to the level of redundancy payments available, and to the retraining and advice centres which we have set up. Miners should be aware of that and realise what they could face if ever there was to be a future Labour Government who were able to end the grants and provisions that we are continuing this evening.

From the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) we had the usual bluster. He has in the past, I know, promised to maintain the size of the coal industry at its present level, and earlier this evening he spoke against imports, as did his hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley. What he did not say was how he would do this, given the Labour party's new-found enthusiasm for the single market in Europe later this year and for the GATT provisions. How is the Labour party to keep out imports? This is surely another example of Labour coal policy being long on promises and short on substance.

Mr. Dobson: The Minister should perhaps be aware that the European Energy Commissioner has made it clear to British MEPs that, within GATT and within the treaty of Rome, it is possible for Britain to stop coal imports.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No such assurances have been given, and all the advice that we have received is that that is flatly contradictory to the treaty of Rome and the GATT provisions.

A much more impressive contribution was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart). He does a far better job of representing coal mining constituents by facing up to and meeting the inescapable difficulties faced by the coal industry. Those difficulties would persist whether the industry was in private hands or publicly owned under a Labour or Conservative Government.

We do not run down the British coal industry by relishing the most gloomy predictions about the future. We know that the size of the industry will be set not by blueprints produced in Whitehall or anywhere else, but by the success of that industry.

We know that the coal market of the future may well be smaller than that of the past. However, it will still be important and it can be supplied by British Coal. That market will not be protected by phoney reference prices, impossible import bans or by closing down alternative means of electricity generation. It will be protected by

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

making British Coal even more productive and efficient. It will then be able to fight for, and win, a larger share of the British energy market.

We will maintain and even improve on the safety record of the coal industry. My hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) rightly said that the safety record of the industry is one of which we can be proud. The Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908 is not relevant to the maintenance or improvement of that record.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) asked why my Department rather than the Department of Employment is responsible for the repeal of the 1908 Act. That Act is not relevant to the safety provisions included in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. That is not just our opinion but that of the Health and Safety Commission. In Committee we knew that, according to the Health and Safety Executive, safety underground did not depend upon keeping the 1908 Act on the statute book. We have had the same opinion from the HSC. The House is aware that there is a substantial trade union representation on the commission.

The chairman of the commission has written to me and I shall place a copy of his letter in the Library. He said that hours of work are an industrial relations matter to be regulated by agreement between the employers and the trade unions. He also said:

"taking account of all relevant factors, the Bill's proposals are unlikely to lead to a reduction in standards of health and safety."

Mr. Archer: Is the hon. Gentleman therefore saying that the hours of work are not a matter for the Secretary of State for Employment?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I was answering the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point about why it was that the repeal of the 1908 Act was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

The letter from the HSC also explained why the repeal of the 1908 Act will not be to the detriment of health and safety underground. It is our view, and certainly that of the HSC, that excessive hours worked in any industry can, in certain situations, lead to reduced safety standards. That is why the Health and Safety Executive will be alert to any excessive working hours underground or anywhere else. That reinforces our view that the maintenance of safety underground should not rely on an outmoded Edwardian Act of Parliament. It should rely on tailormade legislation which is designed to ensure safety and which is independently enforced by the HSE.

Labour policy as enumerated this evening is, on the other hand, curious. It was recognised in the Standing Committee that the 1908 Act was not being observed, and there are many quotes in the *Official Report* to that effect. Labour knows that enforcement of that Act would jeopardise the earnings and future of certain collieries, yet it still wants to keep it on the statute book. That is a curious attitude to legislation, and it should be known by a more general and wider audience.

The Labour party believes that laws are made not necessarily to be obeyed but rather to be negotiating tools for trade unions or any other group. The 1908 Act is obsolete. It has been overtaken by events, changed circumstances and other legislation. That is why we shall repeal it when we bring forward alternative measures, and it will be done without putting safety underground at risk. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 209.

Division No. 38] **[10.35 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*

Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Cldr Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*

Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Neillist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Ways and Means

STAMP DUTY (RELIEF)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the following provisions shall have effect for the period beginning 16th January 1992 and ending 31 days after the earliest of the dates mentioned in section 50(2) of the Finance Act 1973—

(1) In relation to instruments to which this Resolution applies, section 55 of the Finance Act 1963 (rate of stamp duty on conveyance or transfer on sale) and section 4 of the Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 (equivalent provision for Northern Ireland) shall have effect as if—

(a) each reference to £30,000 in subsection (1) of each of those sections were to £250,000, and

(b) the reference to £300 in subsection (2) of each of those sections were to £2,500.

(2) This Resolution applies to—

(a) instruments executed on or after 20th December 1991 and before 16th January 1992 and not stamped before 16th January 1992;

(b) instruments executed on or after 16th January 1992 and before 20th August 1992.

(3) For the purpose of section 14(4) of the Stamp Act 1891 (instruments not to be given in evidence etc. unless stamped in accordance with the law in force at the time of first execution) the law in force at the time of execution of an instrument falling within paragraph 82)(a) above shall be deemed to be that as varied in accordance with paragraph (1) above.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of section 50 of the Finance Act 1973. *—[Mr. Maude.]*

10.50 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The measure is before the House for the simple reason that a general election is in the offing and the Government are rattled. The measure is to be followed next week by a Bill. If a general election were not to be held in the next four months, the Government would have shed crocodile tears and Ministers and the Prime Minister himself at Prime Minister's Question Time would have said that nothing could be done about house repossessions. They would have said that citizens whose houses had been repossessed—and that will continue throughout 1992—knew perfectly well that interest rates could go up or down, that they freely entered into a contract and that it was no part of the Government's function to bail them out.

Because of the impending election there are no crocodile tears and no statements that the Government cannot interfere. They are attempting to take action, and I should like to examine it to see whether it will be effective and whether the money resolution and the Bill—which it is rumoured will be before the House next week—are worth serious consideration.

In 1986, when the Prime Minister was a Social Security Minister, he cut mortgage support for those who had lost their jobs. The Tory election guide of 1987 boasted that the Prime Minister reduced the entitlement of those on income support to have their mortgage interest repayments cut from 100 to 50 per cent. for the first six months. Four years ago not only were they not prepared to help but cut state support for those who were losing their houses—and boasted and believed that that was a virtue.

The measure shows a reversal of Government policy but it is not the only reversal because only a few years ago the Government withdrew 40 per cent. mortgage interest relief and introduced legislation permitting relief to be claimed only at the basic rate. The Opposition agreed with

that. In that matter as in this, the Government's philosophy was separation of Government from the operations of the market. That is no longer the case because by their proposal to waive stamp duty for eight months until August the Government are intervening in the market. That runs counter to their political philosophy.

We shall debate the matter again next week and perhaps either tonight or at that time the Minister will tell us what has changed. Has the Conservative party suddenly found a heart and a social conscience? Has it abandoned its political dogma or are the Government acting in this way because they know that there must be a general election within the next four months and are fishing for votes by using election gimmicks?

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): I cannot imagine anyone doing that.

Dr. Marek: Many hon. Members would be tempted to do that and some see their first job in the House as fishing for votes. Indeed, I should not be surprised if the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) who is shaking his head, were one of those hon. Members.

That is not the only reversal of Government policy that we are witnessing. Income support paid by the DSS for mortgage interest will now go direct to the lender. There is a sort of tripartite deal, whereby the lenders—the building societies and banks—will try to restrict the number of repossessions that will take place in 1992, and in return they will be given a Government promise that income support paid for mortgage interest repayments will go directly to the lenders. In addition, stamp duty will be waived for eight months to try to kick-start the housing market. I shall say a few words about that later.

That is all a reversal of Government policy. It was not so long ago that the previous Prime Minister altered income support so that people could pay their own 20 per cent. of the poll tax. It was the citizen who would have to suffer, who would have to save money from his DSS money and pay the poll tax authorities. That is all gone. The Government cannot trust the citizen any more. They will have to send the money directly to the lender. The citizen cannot be trusted because he has been spending the money on other things.

I hope that the Financial Secretary will prepare an answer to the following questions—if not tonight, perhaps on Monday. Is what is happening now a reversal of Government policy? Is that reversal happening because their dogma is being changed, or have the Government suddenly found a social conscience? Do they now understand that it is more important that people have a roof over their heads if possible, or is this a matter of expedience, because there is an election coming and the Government are trying to fish for votes?

Hitherto, there was a brainless scheme whereby the Government were to carry on watching houses being repossessed and then fill those empty houses with the homeless people who had had their own houses repossessed some months before the repossession of the houses that they were to move into. That was a lot of nonsense. I do not believe that anyone in the country—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) wants to intervene he can do so, but inaudible muttering from the Back Benches does not help.

We have a slightly better scheme now,. but I wonder how much better. Lenders will now help to keep people in their homes, the Government will give the money directly to lenders, and stamp duty will be waived. But will that work?

I should like to bring two newspaper articles to the attention of the House. The first, from *The Independent* of Saturday 11 January, is headed in big letters: "Stamp duty incentive fails". The first two paragraphs of that article say:

> "The recent increase in the stamp duty threshold from £30,000 to £250,000 was meant to kick-start the housing market into action.
>
> However, the change is so far proving to be a non-event. High interest rates, the gloomy economic outlook, and the prospect of redundancy are more than enough to take the edge off most people's appetite for homebuying."

I think that I shall save much of that article for next week—although before Ministers cheer up too much at that news, I must tell them that they may hear those quotations at a later hour than this. This is an important matter. If the Government intend to give away £400 million this year——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It is retrospective.

Dr. Marek: It may be retrospective, but I do not always condemn retrospective legislation.

Mr. Cryer: Neither do I, but the Government do.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend and I agree, at least on that point. If the Government are to give away £400 million this year, is there not a better way of giving it away to achieve what we all want, which is to get the economy moving again? I believe that there are much better ways of spending the money.

Let me move on to the other article, which appeared in *The Guardian* on 4 January under the headline,

> "Stamp duty move 'no help'".

I shall not read it to the House in full tonight—there will be time next week for that—but the first part of it states:

> "The Government's decision to suspend stamp duty payments on housing transactions will do nothing to revive house prices or housebuilding before 1993, a leading construction industry chief said yesterday. This would make the present downturn in the housing market one of the longest on record".

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): Is the hon. Gentleman going to vote against it?

Mr. Patnick: Is the hon. Gentleman voting against it?

Dr. Marek: It would be nice if the Whip, who is now parroting what the Financial Secretary said, had some ideas of his own, instead of repeating the last thing that he happens to hear. Conservative Members are trying to provoke me, but I am resisting.

As I was saying, the article said:

> "This would make the present downturn in the housing market one of the longest on record, John Smith, chairman of the Building Employers' Confederation, said."

From reports in the press, at least, it looks as though the Government's scheme will not work and will not achieve the effect that the Government hoped it would. It will not kick-start the housing market. The Prime Minister was wrong when he said last June that the vague stirrings of recovery that he detected would begin in certain sectors, probably in the housing market. Conservative Members are silent on the matter; I hear not a murmur of dissent. I can take their silence only as agreement.

[Dr. Marek]

The stamp duty waiver certainly will not help those people whose houses have been, are being, or will be, repossessed. It will not help the Conservatives to get re-elected, either. It is not a case of, "If it's not hurting, it's not working." And it is not the opposite of that either, because that would be, "If it's hurting, it's working." The Government's policy is hurting and it is not working. It is the worst of both worlds. Yet again, in this economic objective as in many others, the Tory party has managed to find the very worst economic policy which will hurt and which will not work.

We look in vain to the Government to kick-start the economy, as opposed to the housing market. There is no point in kick-starting the housing market or kick-starting the economy by means of a consumer boom. That will not get the country out of the economic mess that it is in at the moment. We can save the country economically only if we look after industry and manufacturing. We look in vain for anything that the Government can do that will achieve that.

At the moment, nothing is being done. It is a pity. We have a Prime Minister who held interest rates at 15 per cent. for a year. Three quarters of a million people have lost their jobs since the right hon. Gentleman became Prime Minister. We have a Prime Minister who, as a Social Security Minister, boasted about cutting income support on mortgage interest payments and who now refuses to look at the real enduring remedies that depend on our industry and our trade. All we hear is gimmickry and fishing for votes. The people are not stupid, and they will see through that on 7 May, if not a little earlier.

11.4 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): My contribution will be more brief than that of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), but not quite as brief as the Minister's remarkably short introduction. As this is a very important matter, however, I want to take a few moments to express some views on it.

The hon. Member for Wrexham suggested that these measures will not help. The people who are involved in housing transactions in the next eight months will not agree. They will find the measures to be of considerable help. The hon. Gentleman will be surprised when he sees how they stimulate the housing market. There is no doubt that they will have that effect. The hon. Gentleman accuses the Government of intervening in the market. In fact, the Government are ceasing to intervene in the market. They should not have intervened in the first place. There should never have been stamp duties to distort the market.

We have heard that the cost to the Treasury this year will be about £420 million. I should like to put that figure in context. I understand that the amount raised by way of stamp duties last year was about £1·7 billion. About £1 billion of it related to property transactions, £700 million to share transactions, and £17 million to miscellaneous matters. The stamp duty on share transactions was due to be abolished, but, for reasons beyond the control of the Government, that step has been deferred. Many of the smaller, miscellaneous duties too are to be abolished.

What we have here is temporary abolition of a proportion of stamp duty on properties. My main complaint is that the Government are not going far enough. In addition, there are certain impracticalities in the proposition, and in due course we shall be confronted with them. I hope that account will be taken of those impracticalities and that the Government will go even further in what is an overdue reform of the tax system.

The threshold is being raised to £250,000. Anyone buying a property for £260,000 will have to pay the 1 per cent. on the whole amount. I expect that there will be very few transactions involving sums just above £250,000. Why do not the Government go all the way and eliminate the tax altogether? There is no justification whatsoever for a property tax of this kind. I am totally against property taxes, but even if I were not I would be of the opinion that they should not be imposed on people incurring the expense of acquiring property. They have a distorting effect on the market.

It is proposed that the exemption in the case of transactions involving sums up to £250,000 should cease on 19 August. The hon. Member for Wrexham said that the measure would not kick-start the housing market. I expect that it will be of considerable help in that direction, and the housing market will certainly come to a stop on 20 August. How many property transactions will take place on that day or during the succeeding weeks? Are we really contemplating cessation of this exemption in mid-August? That is hardly a practical proposition, and I ask Ministers to think again about it.

There is plenty of time for reconsideration, for a decision to extend the exemption or make it permanent. It simply is not practical to remove this penal tax only until mid-August. It is a specific, heavy extra cost, against which building societies do not lend, and is therefore a great deterrent to house buyers. Ministers must recognise that it is impractical to suspend a tax for eight months while applying it to sums above an artificial threshold.

This is not a subject about which I have suddenly become passionate. If I may say so with a certain lack of humility—politicians are never accused of excessive modesty—I have been rereading a speech that I made 26 years ago—that is a sign of old age—to the 1965 Tory party conference, in which I said:

> "The revenue from stamp duties has dropped from £100 million in 1959 to £75 million. But you still meet stamp duties wherever you turn on cheques, receipts, mortgages, leases conveyances, share transfers, legal documents and life policies. To sweep these away altogether would symbolise a cutting-away of the accumulated red tape of centuries and would help the house purchaser, the small investor and many, many other sections of the population."

Alas, the £75 million soared thereafter. We did get rid of many stamp duties but, as with so many other examples of Conservative administration, when we reduced the taxes, we brought in more revenue. A classic lesson that the Opposition do not understand is that one can reduce taxes and increase revenue. Unfortunately, in this case, we have increaseed the revenue to the point where the Treasury does not want to lose it, but the message is none the less the same: stamp duties are not a logical or equitable tax; they are an unfair tax that should be abolished.

This measure takes us halfway along the road of getting rid of stamp duties altogether in the last significant remaining area of stamp duty revenue -raising—property. I urge my hon. Friends to go a bit further and to take advantage of this opportunity. They know in their hearts

that they cannot bring back stamp duty, and they should not even contemplate doing so. They should go one step further and abolish stamp duties altogether and for ever.

11.11 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) has rightly pointed out the difficulties that the Government will face in August —whatever party forms the Government—when they are obliged under the temporary provisions to reintroduce stamp duty, and the reverse effect that that will have on the housing market—to the extent that the proposal has any effect at all.

It is ironic that the Government have brought a temporary tax advantage before the House because a number of the problems that we are now facing, especially in the housing market, started with a temporary tax advantage in 1988. The decision to announce to the world that people had a period of grace until August to take out multiple mortgages so that several people could receive tax relief on one property was part of the source of many of our present difficulties. It coincided with the vastly easier obtaining of mortgages, relatively favourable interest rates and the expectation of tax cuts in the autumn. The coincidence—in the strict sense of that word—of all those things produced a significant effect. The Government knew that all those things were happening and should have judged the position better.

The recognition in the light of that experience that temporary tax advantages may have an effect may be rather exaggerated in the case of this measure because we are talking about £600 per house. This measure is on a smaller scale. I do not really see how a £600 per house maximum benefit will make much of an impact on a housing market in which property values have dropped by £5,000, £10,000 or even by £20,000 in some cases. If a drop of £20,000 in the price does not make a flat in London saleable, £600 less stamp duty certainly will not. The measure seems unlikely to have anything like the effects that the Government have suggested. In Monday's debate, I hope that we can look a little more fully at whether the measure is justified and at what the alternatives might have been.

It seems to me that the Government cannot have all that much confidence in what they are doing because of the cost of the operation. I should like the Minister to tell me how the cost of this measure can be not much over £400 million. As I see it, that is roughly what we got from stamp duty in an equivalent period last year. Is the Minister arguing that house prices will continue to fall over this period and that therefore the yield will not increase? Is he arguing that there will not be an increase in the number of transactions and that therefore the revenue forgone will be roughly similar at the same house prices? Either way, his cost estimates seem to imply that the provisions will not have much effect on the housing market. Therefore, I ask him whether his cost estimate is realistic and, if it is, is he not really admitting that the measure's effect on the housing market will be very limited?

At the end of the day some Government will be faced with the embarrassment of having to restore the tax while very little purpose is served in the meantime. To some individuals at the margin of buying a house the extra few hundred pounds—for many it will be less than £600—will be welcome. It will be nice for them not to have to pay an irritating tax when they are scraping together the money for a mortgage. The possibility of it having a dramatic effect on the housing market is remote, and is largely discounted by the Government's estimate of what it will cost. In his reply to the debate, the Minister might say something about the cost.

11.14 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It is interesting that this emergency provision, is proposed by the Government in a crisis as a prelude to legislation to be introduced next week, contains retrospective provisions. I am not one of those who believe that legislation should never have retrospective provisions. There are occasions when retrospection is useful. Up to now, the Government have taken the view that retrospection is not a principle which they should easily endorse.

I recall that, when a Labour Government wanted to restore civic rights to 11 Clay Cross councillors—rights which had already been restored to 400 Scottish and Welsh councillors in a similar position—Sir Michael Havers, who was to become Attorney-General, rushed to the Dispatch Box to say that retrospective legislation was a terrible thing. That is an illustration of the Government's double standards. When they want to worm their way out of a crisis which their policies have produced, that argument goes quickly by the board. It is an interesting comparison which does not do the Government much credit.

The ways and means resolution has been introduced because of the stagnant housing market, the unemployment increases in the construction industry and the fact that, in 1991, more than 100,000 houses were repossessed from people who had been persuaded by the Government that home ownership was the only possible way of existing. That is the background to the debate.

There is a useful note from the Library about recent developments in mortgage arrears. It links the Chancellor's statement about the resolution to the actual position. I do not think that the modest changes in stamp duty for eight months will galvanise the housing market into action or restore all the building industry jobs. Nor do I think that the Tory Government's failing fortunes will be restored in time for the election.

The research note points out that it is not just the fact that people are facing repossession that is causing the housing market to be in difficulty. A large number of houses are standing empty because they have been repossessed or cannot be sold. The research note says:

"Janet Ford of Warwick University conducted a survey of 29 mortgage lenders in March 1991 which revealed new record levels of short term (two to five months) and serious (over six months) arrears. The survey, which was funded by the Bank of England, found that at the end of March approximately 784,000 loans were two or more months in arrears, representing just over 8 per cent. (one in twelve) of the total number of mortgages outstanding with the 29 lenders. Additionally, the survey revealed that the number of people with arrears of between three to five months, in March of 1991, outnumbered those people owing two months payments for the first time since 1985. These findings have been cited as an indication that for an increasing number of borrowers, the position is a more serious and persistent one than has been the case in the past."

That is one of the important reasons why the ways and means resolution will not provide an answer to the deep-seated defects in the housing construction industry, which arise from the Government's disastrous housing policies. Those policies resulted in many people becoming

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

the owners of houses—unfortunately, only temporarily—but later facing repossession. Several hundred thousand people face the threat of repossession.

There was a news item in my local evening paper, the *Telegraph and Argus*, on Tuesday 14 January 1992. The Minister might care to comment on it when he replies. Headed "Bickering delays bid to end home loan misery", the report says:

"Moves to ease the nightmare of homes repossession have yet to take effect, it emerged today.

Mortgage lenders and housing associations are still reported to be in disagreement over the mortgages-to-rent scheme which is central to the Government's mortgage rescue plans announced before Christmas."

The Chancellor of the Exchequer made a statement that the Government would allow lenders to lend money to the housing associations to buy properties and allow the people in arrears to stay in their home. That agreement has not been reached, because the housing associations cannot get the money at a sufficiently low level of interest. That is one of the underlying faults: the level of interest is far too high. It is inhibiting not only the housing market—that is the reason for the resolution—but industry. That is why we have an ever-soaring rate of unemployment and why, in the near future, the unemployment figures will demonstrate an increase in that terrible waste of ability and people's lives. Lives are wrecked by unemployment, which in turn means that they face the possibility of repossession due to mortgage arrears.

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer made his statement, he covered several points. The ways and means resolution—and the ensuing legislation that will come before the House next week—was one of them. I doubt whether all the people who, as a result of the Government's high interest rate policies, face unemployment and repossession because they cannot keep up their mortgage payments regard it as a price worth paying to support the Government policies of which they are victims. People are being forced out of their houses and homes repossessed at a rate never experienced since the war.

My second point on the ways and means resolution and the housing crisis that it represents is that many people have been forced into home ownership by the Government's policies. The Government have failed to provide local authorities with the means to build houses for rent to replace the houses which local authorities were forced to sell off, yet in turn, the revenue from the forced sales has been denied to the local authorities. Houses have been sold off so that they are no longer available to rent. Therefore, many people have been forced to look round for a house to buy. Some of them are in mortgage arrears unquestionably as a result of taking on a commitment which was too much for their income. That was directly encouraged by the Government.

It is worth pointing out that, in 1977, 112,000 local authority dwellings were constructed. The Government are fond of making comparisons between the period when the Labour Government were in office and their period of office. In 1986, there were 18,500—a drop of 100,000—and that figure has dropped even further. That is why we are debating this paltry ways and means resolution, which is part of a pattern.

People are finding it difficult to get hold of somewhere to live at a decent price. That is also reflected in the increase in the number of homeless people. In 1979, 55,000 people were homeless—the figures were provided by the Library—and that figure was too high. That was under a Labour Government, and it should have been less. In 1988, the figure had shot up to 120,000 and this year it is above that figure. It is all part of the pattern.

The ways and means resolution will reduce stamp duty for eight months to get builders back to work and get the housing market moving, when 120,000-plus people are homeless, and when even the Government admit that the measure will not galvanise the housing market into action, but will be peripheral. It is wrong for the Government to be so inert over this policy and to do so little so late, when all the signs were there. Indeed, my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench have been pressing the Government to introduce a mortgage-into-rent scheme so that people do not face eviction in their hundreds of thousands as they have done because of Government policies.

In Bradford, including my constituency of Bradford, South, the local authority has been forced to sell off 14,500 out of 18,000 houses. Now they let virtually only flats and maisonettes, because the vast majority of houses have already been sold. Would it not be easier to do as Labour is promising to do, and sensibly to inject revenues from house sales into the house building industry so that local authorities can get to work building houses at a rent that people can afford?

It is no good the Government talking about home ownership as the only path to a roof over one's head. The reality is that a significant proportion of the population will only be able to afford houses to rent until they build up money for a deposit, are certain of their own finances, and can go down that path.

Immediately, there is a demand for houses to rent at a level that people can afford. That simply is not available in the private sector, or in the housing association sector. Housing associations are short of funds too and simply cannot meet the demand for houses.

Labour's policy is very good. The Conservatives are nearly always asking what Labour intends to do in one way or another. Labour's policy of releasing the funds which the Government have deliberately denied local authorities, at a sensible pace so that we do not outstrip the capacity of the building industry, and maintaining an increased pace of building by local authorities, will help to solve some of the problems. It will do so far more effectively than the ways and means resolution, which injects only about £400 million and will in no way help existing home owners who face repossession.

The only people it will help are those who are going to buy a house and who will be helped to make the decision by an extra relief of £200, £300 or £500. It will have a marginally beneficial effect, but that is all. It will not answer the important crisis which is facing us.

I hope that the Minister will announce something more widely effective than the ways and means resolution. Even though it would be stealing the Labour party's clothes, I would welcome an announcement that the Government would be prepared to use the £5·5 billion which is available for the sort of housing that people can afford—whether low-cost housing to buy or low-cost housing to rent.

To require local authorities to sell off houses without any replacement is one of the major reasons why we are in

the housing crisis and one of the major reasons why we have cardboard cities not just in London, but in every major city and town throughout the country.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Paris.

Mr. Cryer: It may be anecdotal evidence, and the position may be the same in Paris and in other countries in Europe. I have no doubt that that is the case. We are concerned with policies that affect the building and provision of houses in our country. We have no control over the house-building programme in France, Brussels or elsewhere. We know that, in our country, where it is easier to get evidence, albeit anecdotal, the statistics provided by the Library show that homelessness has more than doubled under the Tories. We know that, in every major town and city, the numbers of homeless are growing. It is a scandal, and it is the responsibility of the Tory Government.

The resolution is very much a marginal factor. We shall have to see greater action to solve the housing problem. The reality is that it is too late for the Government to do anything. They are at the tab end of their period of office and they are thrashing around to try to pick up a policy that will act as a palliative to present themselves as a credible Government at the general election. They will fail.

The only way in which to have a Government with a policy that will produce an effective housing policy to get the cardboard cities removed, that will give people the opportunity of getting a house at a decent rent which they can afford and that will give local authorities an opportunity to replace some of the houses that they have been forced to sell off is to get a Labour Government elected at the next general election.

11.31 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): This has been an interesting short debate and a useful taster for the debates that we shall no doubt be able to enjoy when the Bill is debated in the House.

The resolutions and the Bill which will be introduced if the House sees fit to approve them should be seen in the context of the other arrangements announced by my right hon. Friends before Christmas—the agreement by the mortgage lenders to bring forward funds on concessionary terms for reducing repossessions in the course of the following year and the social security measures for direct payment of benefits to lenders. The resolutions are only one element among a number which we believe will have a beneficial effect on the property market.

It was a little difficult to be sure from the remarks of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) whether he was in favour of the measures. There was a general tone of carping and sniping in his remarks. The measures have attracted widespread support and I am glad of that. It might have been a little more gracious of him to have given full-hearted support to what the Government have done and seek to do in bringing forward measures to assist.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) urged us to go further and to abolish stamp duty on property altogether. As he says, he has made that case for many years and I hear what he says. He makes a case that we listen to with respect.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made a point about the amount that the proposal costs. I did not fully understand his point. He seemed to say that, because the cost that we have put in is the money that we believe would have been raised by stamp duty if the measure had not been taken, we expect the measure to have no effect. With respect, I must say that that does not follow. If there is, as we and most people believe, a significant effect on transactions, that is not tax that is forgone as a result of the measure, because some transactions would not have taken place without the measure. I shall have a look at what he says in the cold light of dawn, but I do not believe that his point is a real one; it is false.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said that he thought this was retrospective legislation and, in his opinion, was none the worse for that. I suppose that it is technically retrospective legislation in that it has an effect going back to before the legislation will be enacted, but this is very common in taxation legislation, and it is usual for legislation of this kind—Finance Bills—to have effect from the time of the announcement. It is not retrospective in a substantive sense in that it does not have an effect on matters which took place before the announcement was made; so everyone who has made a transaction since we made the announcement has done so in the full knowledge of what we propose and what the consequences of his actions will be.

We can pursue these various matters when the Bill is debated in the House, and I look forward keenly to that occasion. I am only sorry that the warm support given to the measure by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham was not echoed in the remarks of Opposition Members; they did not seem to oppose it but at the same time they could not bring themselves to the point of giving it the warm support that it has been given by almost every commentator outside. That reflects the difference between their negative, carping and destructive attitude and the Government's positive and constructive attitude. I commend the measure to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall have effect for the period beginning 16th January 1992 and ending 31 days after the earliest of the dates mentioned in section 50(2) of the Finance Act 1973—

(1) In relation to instruments to which this Resolution applies, section 55 of the Finance Act 1963 (rate of stamp duty on conveyance or transfer on sale) and section 4 of the Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 (equivalent provision for Northern Ireland) shall have effect as if—

(a) each reference to £30,000 in subsection (1) of each of those sections were to £250,000, and

(b) the reference to £300 in subsection (2) of each of those sections were to £2,500.

(2) This Resolution applies to—

(a) instruments executed on or after 20th December 1991 and before 16th January 1992 and not stamped before 16th January 1992;

(b) instruments executed on or after 16th January 1992 and before 20th August 1992.

(3) For the purpose of section 14(4) of the Stamp Act 1891 (instruments not to be given in evidence etc. unless stamped in accordance with the law in force at the time of first execution) the law in force at the time of execution of an instrument falling within paragraph (2)(a) above shall be deemed to be that as varied in accordance with paragraph (1) above.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of section 50 of the Finance Act 1973.

[Mr. Francis Maude]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50 (Ways and Means) motions, to put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of the further motion.*

WAYS AND MEANS

STAMPED INSTRUMENTS (PAYMENTS)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about payments by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue in respect of instruments executed on or after 20th December 1991 and before 16th January 1992 and stamped before 16th January 1992.—*[Mr. Maude.]*

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Francis Maude, Mrs. Gillian Shephard and Mr. John Maples do prepare and bring it in.

STAMP DUTY (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS) BILL

Mr. Maude accordingly presented a Bill to make provision conferring temporary relief from stamp duty and provision for payments by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue in respect of instruments already stamped; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 52.]

Visitors' Visas

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

11.37 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I apologise for raising this matter at this late hour, but it concerns an important point of principle in the cases of Gurmeet Kaur and Manjit Singh. These are totally unrelated cases but they bear certain common features of interest to those who have a sense of justice. In the first case—that of Gurmeet Kaur—I have had discussions with the Minister, and I hope to pursue further discussions with him; it is therefore unnecessary for me to raise that matter further tonight.

On the second case, that of Manjit Singh, may I go into one or two of the circumstances? As an applicant for a visitor's visa from New Delhi, having been turned down by the entry clearance officer, he won his appeal before an adjudicator. Immigration refused to accept the position, called for further information and finally rejected the application again. What, in effect, the immigration authorities are saying is that, if a person wins his appeal, they will ignore the awards favouring applicants if they disagree with them. Spelt out in longer language, this is: congratulations on winning your case, but you lose your appeal.

The other significant fact is that requests for visitors' visas are not infrequently rejected for the thinnest of reasons. To put it another way, the honest and uneducated fail while the crafty and devious manage to penetrate the immigration network. Can the Minister tell me how many requests from India are rejected in this way after they have one their appeals? How many cases refused by the ECO are later allowed to enter the United Kingdom for short holidays?

Manjit Singh applied to the ECO on 23 March 1990 for a visa for a visit of one month. He was refused that visa by the officer on the usual grounds that he was not satisfied that Mr. Singh was genuinely seeking entry to the United Kingdom for the stipulated period. The appeal was heard by Mr. A. F. Hatt on 8 March 1991, a year later. The decision to grant the appeal was made on 16 April 1991. That appeal was supported by a letter from Dr. Fisher, dated 25 March 1990, who said:

"I would like to support the request of this young man to be allowed to visit this country . . . I understand that this young man is a particular favourite of the old lady and there would seem to be no way that she could see him again, other than that he should be allowed to visit in this way. The old lady herself, Mrs. Dhanti, is somewhat arthritic, but her main problem is that she is an appallingly bad traveller."

Mrs. Dhanti and her husband, Dhanta Singh, have two sons. One son, Mohinder Singh, lives in my constituency and he runs a splendidly profitable garage in Wootton. The other son, Jeswant Jakhu, is a lecturer in welding. Dr. Fisher said of him:

"All his children have done extremely well, one of them having recently qualified as a Doctor, another as an Industrial Psychologist. His two daughters have jobs as a teacher and a nurse . . . I regard both Mohinder and Jeswant as extremely trustworthy and reliable."

Many of those who come across from India do not understand the language well and they make serious mistakes. Once they come to put their documentation together, they often prove to be the greatest sinners. However, one expects that those who come on holiday to the United Kingdom will go home after their stay and that

the people who will send them back are those who invited them. If those people are prepared to send their visitors home, surely that should represent the guarantee wanted by immigration officers.

Manjit Singh was invited to come to the United Kingdom by the old lady for no less than six months, but he selected to come for the shorter time of one month. There is no suggestion that he intended to stay on for longer. The old lady also had the medical advice, which I have already read, to support his case.

When the case came before the adjudicator, Mr. A. F. Hatt, he said:

"In my view Mr. Singh gave his evidence in an articulate and unbiased manner and he has produced certain documentary evidence in support of the appellant's appeal. I have no reason to doubt the credibility of the sponsor or the validity of the documents he produced".

He makes the following significant observation:

"I also take account of the fact that the appellant is fairly recently married with a young family and in my view he has considerable incentive to return to India at the conclusion of a visit."

He concludes that

"on a balance of probabilities . . . the appellant was genuinely seeking entry to the UK for the period of one month, and I therefore allow this appeal."

It is apparent that the Minister has the right to put evidence before the adjudicator. The adjudicator has an opportunity to examine any document or witness who comes before him and anything could be found at that stage. Naturally, it is possible that, after adjudication, further circumstances may upset the apple cart, such as documentation that is not considered genuine. However, this is not a case of a person who has come to settle in the United Kingdom but of someone who has come here for a very short stay of one month to see a sick lady.

So far, permission for that stay has taken a long time. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office required further interviews and eventually, on 30 October 1991, it refused to grant a visa, leaving open the road to another appeal. Surely there must be an end to the process. If an applicant coming to the United Kingdom shows that he is genuine and that is proven to be the case before an adjudicator, that should be enough to issue a letter authorising him to come here with the appropriate visa. I fail to understand why the case should go a different way and why further inquiries should be pursued, ad nauseum, to trip him up on the course that he has taken.

I shall give the Minister an opportunity to make his own observation on the matter, but he will have the guarantee of Mohinder Singh, who lives in my constituency at 17, Adelaide square—I know him. The other son is also known to the doctor and I am certain that we could guarantee that the man is returned at the end of the period for which he has applied.

11.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) for what he said, and I shall speak to him further about the case of Mrs. Kaur. Before I go into detail on the case of Mr. Manjit Singh, it may be helpful to the House if I first explain the procedure followed at our posts overseas in those cases where an appeal against refusal of visit entry clearance is allowed by an adjudicator. This will provide the necessary background against which I will comment on the case that my hon. Friend has raised.

The standard procedure in cases where the adjudicator finds in favour of the appellant, but gives no clear direction to issue an entry clearance, is for the entry clearance officer to invite the appellant for a further interview and for the case to be reconsidered in the light of the appellant's current circumstances. The courts have acknowledged that, in the absence of directions, an entry clearance officer has an obligation under the immigration rules to consider the circumstances at the time the matter comes before him again and that, if some possible fraud or deception comes to light, it may well be appropriate and, indeed, necessary to refuse entry clearance.

I must emphasise that all our posts have clear instructions that a second refusal decision with a corresponding right of appeal must not be taken lightly and only where there has been a real change of circumstances subsequent to the original decision of which the adjudicator was either unaware or was unable to take account, or where it has become clear that material deception was practised to obtain the visa. Any decision to refuse a successful appellant is carefully reviewed and endorsed by an entry clearance manager, senior to the entry clearance officer responsible for the refusal decision.

Mr. Manjit Singh originally lodged an application with the High Commission in New Delhi on 23 March 1990 to visit this country for 15 days to see his paternal uncles and his sick grandmother. The visit was sponsored by Mr. Singh's uncle, Mr. Mohinder Singh, who is my hon. Friend's constituent. The sponsorship declaration completed by Mr. Mohinder Singh referred to a six-month visit. On his application form Mr. Manjit Singh stated one month.

Mr. Singh is an agriculturist, and is married with three young children. He proposed to spend 500 United States dollars plus 12,000 rupees on the trip. The entry clearance officer suspected that the bank book produced by Mr. Singh in support of his application was not genuine, but confirmation of that was not received from the bank until very much later, in July 1991. Nevertheless, weighing up all the evidence available to him, the entry clearance officer was not satisfied—as he is required to be under the immigration rules—that Mr. Singh was genuinely seeking entry to the United Kingdom for the period stated and refused his application.

The entry clearance officer received an appeal from Mr. Singh against the refusal decision on 28 May 1990, whereupon he reconsidered the case in the light of the grounds for appeal. He could, however, see no reason to alter his decision, and forwarded the appeal to the independent appellate authority in London for consideration by an independent adjudicator. In his determination, handed down on 16 April 1991, the adjudicator, having considered all the evidence before him, found on the balance of probabilities that the appellant was genuinely seeking entry to the United Kingdom for the period of one month and allowed the appeal. It is significant, however, that, although the adjudicator took note of the entry clearance officer's strong suspicion that the bank book produced by Mr. Singh had been falsified, the adjudicator said that there was not at that time any corroboration of the entry clearance officer's suspicion.

A copy of the adjudicator's determination was received at the High Commission on 27 May 1991 and Mr. Singh

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

was reinterviewed in October, by which time confirmation had been received from the bank that the bank book presented by Mr. Singh in support of his original application contained 19 fraudulent entries which inflated the balance from the equivalent of £11 to £2,357. When informed that the bank had identified fraud, Mr. Singh said that he did not know whether the book was genuine or not as it was his father's book. At interview later in the month, when asked whether he had spoken to his father about the bank book, he said that he had not.

There were other discrepancies. The sponsor, Mr. Mohinder Singh, had claimed at appeal that the appellant had last seen his grandmother when the sponsor and his mother had visited India in 1987. At the October 1991 interview, Mr. Singh said that he had not seen his grandmother in 1987, and in fact had not seen her for 10 years. There was also a discrepancy about the occupation shown in Mr. Singh's passport. He said that he had always been an agriculturist, yet the passport, issued in 1988, described his occupation as "private service", which is the usual description for persons seeking employment overseas. He claimed that he had obtained the passport in case he needed to attend a wedding in the United Kingdom, but he did not attend the wedding of his paternal uncle's son. It was against this background of fraud and deception that the entry clearance officer felt obliged to refuse the application a second time.

I should like to take this opportunity to assure the House that it is extremely rare for entry clearance officers at our posts abroad, on reconsidering a case in the light of an adjudicator's determination, to reach a conclusion different from that of the adjudicator. My hon. Friend has asked me how many times that has happened. I cannot give him a precise figure tonight, but I can say that I have never seen such a case before in the 18 months during which I have been responsible for such matters in the Foreign Office.

In the case in question, the decision to refuse for a second time was taken only after the most careful consideration of all the facts at a senior level in the High Commission in New Delhi, and I am satisfied that the officials concerned acted properly and in accordance with the requirements of the immigration rules.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 16 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be further considered on Thursday 23 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Privatisation

1. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue he expects from the proceeds of privatisation for the period of the public expenditure survey.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): Privatisation proceeds are expected to be £8 billion in 1992-93, and £5½ billion in 1993-94 and 1994-95. These are as announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement of 6 November 1991.

Mr. Mullin: What will we live on when the oil revenues have all gone and there is nothing left to privatise? Or will the Chief Secretary and his friends be sunning themselves in some tax haven by that time?

Mr. Mellor: I suspect that we will live on the talents of the British people, which will be greatly assisted by the tax and spending regime—[HON. MEMBERS: "On the backs of the working class."] It is clear how rattled the Labour party is, as it has to start barracking this early in the proceedings. The real question that the hon. Gentleman should put is to his own party: how will it keep tax and spending plans going if it does not have the benefit of privatisation revenues?

Mr. Marlow: Apparently there are some interesting, exciting, progressive, damn fool ideas going around about renationalising the water industry. How much would it cost if fair compensation were paid to the standard rate taxpayer each year if that were to be done?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend touches on an interesting point. The Labour party has become ever so coy about the details of its renationalisation plans. The last time it was asked about them by *The Times*, the best that it could do was to put up a research assistant to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to answer. I think that in due time the British people will want to know a bit more than that.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister asks what Labour will do when it gets the chance to govern. Labour will ensure that the 3 million people on the pile of human misery known as the dole queue will be given a chance to work and to provide tax and insurance. Then, if I have anything to do with it—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Give the hon. Gentleman a chance.

Mr. Skinner: We shall take back from the richest 1 per cent. of the population the £26·2 billion that they have had in tax cuts and use it for the national health service, pensioners, schools and all the social services.

Mr. Mellor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's application for a job has been noted in the quarters which matter. What the hon. Gentleman must explain away is why, with the reductions in the upper rate of tax which have taken place under this Government, the contribution of higher rate taxpayers as a proportion of income tax is so much higher. It is because a low tax regime is a stimulus to effort, a way of ensuring that the British economy works effectively and that people are put back to work. I do not doubt the hon. Gentleman's aspiration to get people off the dole queue, but I doubt whether he has any policies to achieve that.

Penalty Tax

2. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the policy of the Inland Revenue in respect of charging penalty tax for a period before retroactive primary legislation is passed.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): That depends on the provisions of the legislation.

Mr. Bottomley: As the problem which prompted the question has been resolved by the Inland Revenue, will my hon. Friend pass on to its staff the thanks of many Members of Parliament for dealing with issues that we have raised on behalf of our constituents and say that we hope that the problems will continue to decline as tax rates come down rather than go up?

Mr. Maude: On behalf of the Inland Revenue, not always the best loved department of Government, I accept the kind compliments that my hon. Friend has paid to it; I am sure that they will be echoed in all parts of the House. The Inland Revenue does a difficult job in difficult circumstances extremely well.

My hon. Friend is right to make the point that the job of tax collecting is very much easier with a tax system based, as ours increasingly is, on low rates of tax.

Manufacturing Investment

3. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet representatives of the CBI to discuss manufacturing investment.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I meet representatives from the CBI from time to time to discuss a broad range of issues.

Mr. Thompson: In view of the CBI's projected figure for 1992 of a 4·4 per cent. fall in manufacturing investment, and of the 20 per cent. fall in 1991, is it not time that the Chancellor considered adopting the Labour party's policy on investment?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful for that suggestion, but I am not sure which Labour party policy the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that I adopt to encourage investment.

One of the most important parts of investment is inward investment into this country, which is very much encouraged by our low rates of tax—by our low rates of corporation tax and by the fact that we have a low higher rate of income of tax. We all know what the Labour party will do to the higher rate, but even it does not seem to know what it will do to the tax on middle managers—national insurance contributions. If Labour Members want to encourage inward investment, they should come clean and clarify in their own minds what their plans for national insurance contributions are.

Sir Ian Stewart: As the future of manufacturing investment depends on confidence in future economic performance, does my right hon. Friend think that anyone contemplating what will happen to his income will feel more confident if he is threatened with slow torture rather than immediate amputation?

Mr. Lamont: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Labour party talks all the time about investment, but the other side of investment is savings. There is no investment without savings. The Labour party's way of encouraging savings seem to be the ingenious one of putting extra taxes on it.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Chancellor appreciate the harm being done to the economy by the 20 per cent. fall in investment in manufacturing industry and the CBI's prediction of a further 4 per cent. fall? Bearing in mind that unemployment is rising yet again, and that 900 companies are going bust every week, when will the Government realise the depth of the recession that their policies have caused and do something to stimulate investment in our manufacturing industry?

Mr. Lamont: I note what the right hon. and learned Gentleman says about investment. As he knows, it has fallen from high levels. Business investment grew by 45 per cent. between 1986 and 1989. He will also know that manufacturing investment actually rose in the third quarter of last year. He will also know that, notwithstanding the CBI's prediction, the latest Central Statistical Office intention survey predicted a 2 per cent. increase in manufacturing investment this year.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has advanced his idea of how to encourage manufacturing investment. He says that there should be an increased capital allowance for this year, cunningly saying that it would cost nothing in the first year; that is equivalent to saying that the bill is in the post, as we all know that it is paid after 12 months.

Tobacco Goods

4. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total revenue from duty on tobacco goods in 1990.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): The revenue from duties on tobacco goods in 1990 was £5·5 billion.

Sir John Farr: I thank my hon. Friend for that explicit reply. Does she agree that tobacco companies also contribute a great deal to sport, and that they employ tens of thousands of people directly and indirectly? Will she send out a message to those who oppose smoking and belong to the brigade who say, "Do as I say and as I instruct you," to the effect that they should leave ordinary people to get on with the job of smoking and supporting the economy?

Mrs. Shephard: I note what my hon. Friend says. At this time of year we receive many such representations, but they must be weighed against the annual death toll of 110,000 people which is associated with smoking. Employment in the tobacco industry, which my hon. Friend mentioned, has been falling steadily due to increased automation and the long-term decline in smoking.

Mr. Radice: While we are on the subject of indirect taxes, will the Government tell the House how they will continue to cut direct taxes and improve public services without at the same time raising VAT as they did in 1979 and in the last Budget?

Mrs. Shephard: I certainly would not like to prejudge what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor might announce in his Budget. It was interesting to read in the *Daily Express* about Labour's plan for a luxury VAT rate.

Inflation

5. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of inflation.

13. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of inflation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: All-items RPI inflation was 4·3 per cent. in November.

Mr. Mitchell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that increasing expenditure on day one of a new Government while failing to deal with the important issue of taxation is the fastest way back to the high levels of inflation which characterised all Labour Governments?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is nothing wrong with massive increases in public expenditure, provided that the Opposition are open about the fact that they plan massive increases in taxation to finance them.

Mr. MacKay: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is difficult to take Labour seriously on unemployment when under its policy inflation would rise following increases in public expenditure and our competitiveness in world markets would diminish?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Labour does not seem interested in getting inflation down. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition never even mentioned inflation in his speech at the party conference. Reducing inflation is the absolute first condition for medium-term prosperity. The fight again inflation must go on.

Mr. Graham: While the Chancellor has been concentrating—unsuccessfully—on bringing down inflation, unemployment is raging and further factory closures and redundancies have been announced nearly every week

since he came to office. When will he take steps to reduce interest rates to give some of the companies in Britain an opportunity to survive, fight and compete internationally? Should not the Chancellor hang his head in shame and resign now, and let the Labour party get on with bringing this country back to the richness that it deserves?

Mr. Lamont: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the reduction of 3·5 percentage points in interest rates in the past 12 months. I am sure that he also welcomes today's news that the Abbey National, Halifax and Nationwide building societies are reducing their lending rates to, as they put it, give a fillip to the housing market. I am puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's comment that we are unsuccessful in getting inflation down. At 4·3 per cent., our inflation rate is below the average of the European Community. I hardly dare to mention the 15½ per cent. average rate of inflation under the last Labour Government. Everything that Labour says about public spending shows that it is completely indifferent to inflation, which would have a bad effect on unemployment.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the Chancellor explain why after the 1983 and 1987 elections inflation and other indicators rose significantly but the Government managed to get them down just before those elections? Is that the Government's real policy? What sort of guarantee can the Chancellor give that that sort of thing will not happen again? The only guarantee that I can give is that there will not be a Tory Government after the 1992 election.

Mr. Lamont: Perhaps the hon. Lady will tell me under which of the three Conservative Governments since 1979 the average rate of inflation was remotely near that of the Labour Government from whom we took over.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the figures for factory output prices, which were published earlier this week, show that the underlying rate of inflation continues to fall? What effect does he expect the very welcome news about mortgage interest rates to have on the retail prices index?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is drawing attention to an important point about the underlying rate of inflation. We have had some excellent producer prices figures. Excluding the volatile food, drink and tobacco sectors, which are influenced by Budget changes, the rate of inflation has fallen to 3·8 per cent. It is forecast to be 3½ per cent. in the fourth quarter of this year, which will be the lowest figure since 1969. The fact that the underlying rate of inflation is falling so sharply is a very good indicator and is very encouraging for the trend of the headline rate.

As for the second part of my hon. Friend's supplementary question, I cannot anticipate entirely what will happen, but the reduction in mortgage interest rates will obviously have a beneficial effect.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall telling the House that a rise in inflation was expected in these months for what he called "technical reasons" shortly after the Prime Minister told the country that the Government had inflation licked? Did the Prime Minister speak in ignorance, or was he trying to keep the British people in ignorance before a possible November election?

Mr. Lamont: As always, the Opposition should quote my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister correctly. My right hon. Friend said that we had inflation licked in a way that we had not had it licked for years. The trend of inflation is very good. The statistics prove that absolutely, and everybody except the hon. Lady knows it.

Plant and Machinery

6. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was total investment in plant and machinery in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1991.

Mr. Mellor: Measured at constant 1985 prices, plant and machinery investment was £19·7 billion in 1979, £19·4 billion in 1983 and £25·9 billion in 1987. Complete figures for 1991 are not available, but in the first three quarters plant and machinery investment was at an annual rate of £29½ billion, and 52 per cent. above its level in the comparable period of 1979.

Mr. Hayward: It is important that the figures confirm that positive policies are being pursued. Will my right hon. and learned Friend say how we compared internationally in the 1970s and the 1980s?

Mr. Mellor: The figures reveal the full extent of the increase in investment in the 1980s as a result of the Government's policies, an increase which has been maintained even during this period of recession. In absolute levels, we have fallen off only from the historically high 1980 figures. Comparison with other OECD countries is extremely interesting. In the 1970s, the average increase per annum in business investment in the Group of Seven was 3·1 per cent. whereas for the United Kingdom it was 2·3 per cent. In the 1980s, the average increase in the Group of Seven was 4·6 per cent. and in the United Kingdom it was 6·8 per cent.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman not been listening to the chorus of demands from the CBI, from the trade unions and now also from a number of Conservative newspapers for an increase in capital allowances for manufacturing industry? Why does he not take note of that widespread feeling?

Mr. Mellor: We do take note of that feeling. The right hon. Gentleman, who was a Treasury Minister throughout the lifetime of the Labour Government, will appreciate that figures such as those that I have just disclosed to the House would have been regarded as a complete impossibility in his time.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the level of investment is most of all decided by the real rate of interest? Does he also agree that there has been a noticeable change of opinion in the business community, in that in 1990 it thought that we could go into the exchange rate mechanism without any disadvantage whereas it is now beginning to realise that the ERM obliges us to have a higher exchange rate and higher real interest rates than are appropriate for domestic needs?

Mr. Mellor: I do not know whether my hon. Friend read Gavyn Davies's recent article, which showed that what most greatly influences investment is availability of markets and demand, and that running costs come very much second to those factors. Evidence shows that expected productivity in unit labour costs of British industry are more competitive now than they were when we entered the ERM.

Manufacturing Investment

7. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the increase or decrease in manufacturing investment between 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Complete data for 1991 are not available. In the first three quarters, manufacturing investment at constant 1985 prices was 15½ per cent. below its level in the comparable period in 1990.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Chancellor agree that our abysmal economic growth performance since the Government took office in 1979 is due largely to the dismal performance of British manufacturing industry, and that the forecast for the year 1991 of a 15 per cent. fall in investment is a testimony to the failure of the Government's policies? Was it not sheer arrogant complacency for the right hon. Gentleman to tell the National Economic Development Council at its recent meeting that if he had known before that there would be a fall of 15 per cent. he would still have done nothing? Is it not time he retired and let somebody do something?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman's question was supposed to be about investment, but he has asked about growth in general. I cannot understand why he referred to poor growth performance in the 1980s unless he thinks that it is poor to have grown faster than France and Germany. That is an extraordinary assumption. He seems unaware that our exports in manufactures have recently been increasing their share of world trade. That cannot be described as a poor performance. The hon. Gentleman should get up to date with his facts.

Sir William Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although the Opposition seem to delight in talking down the United Kingdom economy, the confidence of the foreigner investing in this country is great and we have the highest rate of inward investment in the EEC, despite the pessimism that the Opposition are always trying to spread?

Mr. Lamont: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. As he said, inward investment is one of the great success stories of the last decade. We have achieved more inward investment than any other European country. The great thing about that inward investment is that some of the most successful countries in the world have chosen this country in which to invest.

Mr. Beith: Will the Chancellor assist businesses in making their investment plans by telling us whether he has revised his growth forecast for this year in the light of the Prime Minister's statements in his new year interview, which seemed to cast considerable doubt on the growth forecasts given earlier? In the light of what surely must be a changed forecast, will the right hon. Gentleman review his hostility so far to careful public expenditure designed to create infrastructure improvements for the future and to get the economy moving?

Mr. Lamont: I note the hon. Gentleman's early Budget representation. I note that, unlike the Labour party, when the hon. Gentleman's party advocates increased public spending, it is at least honest enough to say that it will put up the basic rate of tax. However, the hon. Gentleman's position does seem a little curious. His party says that it will put up the basic rate of tax. Yet, at the same time, it said that if there were a coalition Government, it would stop the Labour party putting up the higher rate of tax. That is a curious position to occupy.

Exports

8. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the trend in United Kingdom export performance over the past five years.

Mr. Mellor: United Kingdom exports have grown 23 per cent. over the past five years, and reached record levels during 1991. I am pleased to say that after decades of decline, the United Kingdom's share of world trade in manufactures flattened out in the mid-1980s, increased in 1989 and 1990, and looks most likely to have increased again in 1991.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that extremely encouraging response. Does he agree that much of our country's undoubted export success has been due to competitive premium Export Credits Guarantee Department rates? Is he aware that many industrialists are concerned that we shall be unable to maintain our export performance due to uncompetitive rates, particularly vis-à-vis our principal competitors such as Germany, France and Japan? Will my right hon. and learned Friend therefore have a meeting with his opposite number at the Department of Trade and Industry and endeavour to bring ECGD rates down to a level which would be more favourable to British exporters?

Mr. Mellor: We regularly discuss such matters, which I recognise are important, but, as my hon. Friend will appreciate, ECGD premiums must reflect the risk for the taxpayer in export credits. He will be aware that losses by ECGD of £3 billion, which have already been disclosed, with the possibility of a similar sum in the pipeline, suggest that we cannot afford to underestimate the possible losses to the nation if we get the ECGD judgments wrong.

One key way of protecting ourselves in future is to ensure that the premiums charged fully reflect the risks that the country has to take on in allowing such cover to go forward. I acknowledge that we must have an eye to the international experience, and our work internationally is to try to ensure that other countries, too, put up their premiums in a way that sensibly recognises the problems of such cover throughout the world.

Mr. Tom Clarke: If export performance is as impressive as the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests, when will unemployment levels return at least to those that the Government inherited in 1979?

Mr. Mellor: I have already told the House that the export performance of United Kingdom industry has been extremely good, with an increase of nearly 25 per cent. over five years, and an increase in manufacturing exports even during the past year of recession, in excess of 3 per cent. The question that the hon. Gentleman has to answer is what nostrums put forward by his Front-Bench spokesmen would make such a record possible under a Labour Government.

City Institutions

9. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to meet the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss the City institutions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend meets the Governor of the Bank of England frequently, and they discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Self-regulation in the City was meant to be a panacea which would solve most existing problems. Since then we have had Polly Peck, Brent Walker, the scandal of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, and then the greatest scandal of all—the Maxwell scandal. As self-regulation is proving somewhat less than satisfactory, is it not time to consider establishing a Securities and Exchange Commission—an SEC—as exists in America?

The City of London is important to the invisible exports of this country, and we cannot allow scandals such as those that have happened in the past. Under self-regulation people tend to protect one another so that they do not get caught. Let us get things out in the open and have an SEC to ensure that the honour of the City of London is well protected by a statutory authority.

Mrs. Shephard: I hear what my hon. Friend says. We have certainly seen some large and spectacular frauds uncovered recently, although they were not all in financial institutions. Clearly, however, that does not mean that the City is riddled with fraud or that the regulatory system has failed. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that no system of regulation can ever give complete protection against a determined thief or fraudster. The Government have done more than any other Government to tighten the regulation of the City, through a series of powerful pieces of legislation. In the end, a balance has to be struck between tight regulation and cramping any sort of innovation or initiative in the financial services sector, as the Labour party would advocate.

Mr. Vaz: Could the Government be prevailed upon to persuade the City institutions to provide more positive assistance for depositors, creditors and former employees of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? The Minister will know that former depositors will have problems getting facilities for mortgages. She knows, too, that representations have been made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Could the City institutions be made positively to assist people who, through no fault of theirs, have lost a considerable amount of money?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman will wish to know that that point is being pursued. He will also be aware that arrangements are in place for the liquidators to aid banks in their assessment of applications made by small businesses and personal customers for alternative facilities.

Sir Peter Tapsell: May I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) has just said in urging the Government to give serious consideration to the establishment of a Securities and Exchange Commission in Britain. Is it not clear that the multiplicity of often overlapping self-regulating authorities are not adequately protecting the national interest? Will my hon. Friend the Minister bear it in mind that many of the frauds that have come to the attention of our regulating authorities were first discovered and reported to them by the American SEC?

Mrs. Shephard: Of course, that was not so in the case of BCCI. I repeat to my hon. Friend that, while there is cause for concern about the large spectacular frauds that have been uncovered, the Government have done more than any other with the Financial Services Act 1986, the Banking Act 1987, the Building Societies Act 1986 and amendments to the Companies Acts to regulate the City of London.

Mr. Salmond: In discussions with the Governor of the Bank of England on City institutions will the Chancellor discuss how to circumvent the damage done to hopes to locate the Eurobank in the United Kingdom by the Government's opt-out policy on the single currency? Will he further discuss whether it would be better to argue for Edinburgh as a location for the bank—a location much more acceptable to other Europeans than London, which the Labour and Tory Front-Bench teams have argued for?

Mrs. Shephard: No decision needs to be taken for some time on the location of the European central bank. The Government have made it clear that a decision on the site would be premature at this stage. Whatever happens, the Government will do what they can to advance the case of the most credible United Kingdom candidate.

Inward Investment

10. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the Maastricht agreement on future inward investment into the United Kingdom.

12. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the Maastricht agreement on future inward investment into the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We expect to continue our excellent record in attracting inward investment. Latest available estimates are that between 1984 and 1988 the United Kingdom received about one third of all inward direct investment to the EC—higher than any other member state.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the success of inward investment depends on availability of markets. In my hon. Friend the Minister's view, what would be the effect on the economy and inward investment if she abolished the ceiling on national insurance, increased the ordinary rate and basic rate of tax for a third of the population in the south-east and introduced a higher rate of value added tax on luxury products—all measures proposed by the Labour party?

Mrs. Shephard: The attraction of the United Kingdom to inward investment is the skilled labour force, low unit costs compared with other EC countries and, of course, the competitive tax system with the lowest rate of corporation tax in industrialised countries. I fear that many of those features would be threatened by the policies of the Labour party.

Mr. David Nicholson: The effects of the Maastricht agreement will be extremely beneficial for inward

investment into Britain, but does my hon. Friend not agree that all the paraphernalia that would be inflicted on industry by a Labour Government would be disastrous for inward investment? Will she also emphasise that we are building on success and, to this end, will she give the House the figures for 1988, 1989 and 1990 on the proportion of American and Japanese investment in the EC which came to Britain?

Mrs. Shephard: In 1988-89, 62 per cent. of all United States inward investment in the EC came to the United Kingdom and 42 per cent. of all Japanese direct investment in the EC came to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Enright: If the Minister is so keen on inward investment, why are she and her hon. Friends blocking the inward investment that would come from RECHARbonisation?

Mrs. Shephard: For a moment, I rather wondered if the hon. Gentleman was following in the footsteps of his colleagues in the trade union movement who regard inward investment as an alien culture. Perhaps I might say that the problems with RECHAR, the Government consider, are entirely in the court of the European Commission.

Mr. Chris Smith: For every £1 of inward investment that might conceivably be attracted by inadequate employment conditions and inadequate rights for employees, are there not £2 or £3 of inward investment that will be deterred by the absence of any positive contribution from Britain to the growing economic and monetary integration of Europe? Is not the greatest threat to inward investment the uncertainty that the Government have deliberately created by their opt-out on a single currency?

Mrs. Shephard: As I said before, the key factors in the determining foreign investment are a stable economic environment, a commitment to a free and open market and a lack of intrusive social and industrial regulation. The United Kingdom's right to decide for itself on the merits of a single currency is not an important factor in investment decisions.

Employee Share Ownership Trusts

11. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has had any recent representations about ways of encouraging wider utilisation of qualifying employee share ownership trusts.

Mr. Maude: I have received a small number of such representations, from my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) among others.

Mr. Taylor: Despite the considerable progress that has been made under this Government in encouraging employee share ownership, will the Minister take careful note of the recent KPMG Management Consulting report which shows ways in which the qualifying employee-share option trusts can be made more flexible and therefore likely to be more widely used by companies and available to more employees in subsequent years of Conservative government?

Mr. Maude: I have seen the report and am considering its implications carefully, but it is just worth pointing out that in 11 of the past 12 Budgets we have taken steps to encourage employee share ownership to the extent that by the end of March last year about 2·25 million employees had benefited under all employee share schemes and had received options or shares with an initial value of £6·5 billion. It is a highly desirable development and we hope to see it continued.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Does the Minister recall that when we discussed these matters during the passage of the Finance Bill the then Financial Secretary, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, expressed passionate enthusiasm for workers' control? In the light of that enthusiasm is the present Financial Secretary able to tell us how many employee share ownership trusts have been set up under the statutory provisions?

Mr. Maude: As I said, by the end of March 1990, 2·25 million employees had received shares or options under approved share schemes. Employee share ownership trusts are a relatively small part of the Government's provision of tax relief for employee share ownership, but it would be very nice to hear the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) express on behalf of the Labour Front Bench wholehearted enthusiasm for what we believe in, which is giving employees in companies real ownership of the companies that they work for.

National Interest

14. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he takes of the national interest in terms of the viability of businesses and the retention of jobs in deciding on the exercise of the functions of his Department in respect of Inland Revenue responsibilities.

Mr. Maude: The first duty of the Inland Revenue is to collect tax which is properly due. It aims to treat all taxpayers with equal fairness and to settle their tax affairs impartially.

Mr. Michael: Does the Minister recognise that that is a highly bureaucratic response? Given the way that business is suffering under the policies and decisions of this Government, and especially the policies of the Prime Minister, does the Minister recognise that he has a responsibility to ask his officials to deal with businesses in such a way as to enable them, wherever possible, to retain jobs and to keep their businesses going? Will he also accept that this should be his personal responsibility? Will he accept it before the House?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) described my response as "bureaucratic". It is not a bureaucratic response at all; it simply expresses the statutory duty placed on the Inland Revenue by the House—that is, the duty to collect tax which is properly due. But the Inland Revenue does not pursue that in a blind and dogmatic way. If tax is owing and payment on the due date is impossible, the Inland Revenue will discuss payment over a period of time to meet the liability; and any taxpayer who is in difficulty in paying his or her tax should contact the Inland Revenue at the earliest opportunity to discuss how the difficulty might be resolved.

Drugs

16. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what quantities of drugs have been seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is as follows: in 1989, 50,935 kilos of cannabis were seized, in 1990, 24,896 and in 1991 21,796 kilos; in 1989, 337 kilos of heroin were seized, with 576 kilos in 1990 and 357 in 1991; 409 kilos of cocaine were seized in 1989, 561 kilos in 1990 and 1,061 in 1991.

Mr. Banks: Obviously Customs and Excise must be congratulated on its vigilance. However, is it not time to consider the possibility of legalising soft drugs, especially cannabis? After all, cannabis does much less harm to a person's health than nicotine, and yet cigarettes are legal. It is the criminal activity surrounding the supply of illegal drugs that we should really worry about. If we were to legalise soft drugs, that would no longer be a problem.

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman congratulated Customs and Excise. I remind him that its task is to enforce the law. Would it be the policy of the Labour party to legalise those drugs?

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Winnick: In view of the evidence given yesterday should there not be a full and frank ministerial statement —which should come from the Prime Minister—of what was known inside the Government at the time about the supergun affair? Bearing in mind the number of military items sold to the Iraqi regime by this country right up to the invasion of Kuwait and the highly critical comments made about the conduct of Ministers during the Gulf war, what right do the Government have to lecture hon. Members on the Opposition Benches over defence matters?

The Prime Minister: In so far as the Gulf war is concerned, the hon. Gentleman is referring to one of the most successful military operations ever undertaken by this country or any other. It achieved its objectives more swiftly and with less bloodshed than anyone could possibly have imagined. As to the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's question, he knows that much of what he said was nonsense. It has been dealt with often enough.

Q2. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McGrady: Could I remind the Prime Minister that one of the consequences of his Maastricht agreement is to prevent Northern Ireland from participating in the new cohesion fund, to the extent of losing tens of millions of pounds? I am sure that he is aware of the total lack of adequate funding for roads, transport and the environment in Northern Ireland, especially now that the Secretary of State has imposed a total moratorium on all public spending in Northern Ireland. Would he assure the people of Northern Ireland and the House that as soon as possible he will remedy that appalling error, and allow Northern Ireland to benefit from the new cohesion fund as a category 1 area?

The Prime Minister: There is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, a higher level of public expenditure per head of population in Northern Ireland—and rightly so—than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The establishment of the cohesion fund and eligibility to benefit from it were agreed by all the member states. There is a misapprehension that Northern Ireland is the only category 1 area that will not benefit from that, but that fund is designed to help the poorest member states, not poorer regions or provinces within the more prosperous nations. So, the hon. Gentleman does not understand the purpose for which the fund was devised.

Q3. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he has no plans to increase income tax and national insurance contributions for millions of ordinary taxpayers? Does he agree that it is the height of irresponsibility to try to pretend that there can be a massive increase in spending from day one of a Government if the tax increases to pay for that are to be phased in?

The Prime Minister: I can also confirm to my hon. Friend that we have made no plans for a super increase in VAT, as the Opposition have apparently considered. There is no doubt that the Opposition are now in a shambles over their tax plans. Their muddled statements show that they cannot be trusted on tax; they shift their position from day to day. The only thing that is certain is that a party that promises to spend and spend is a party that would have to tax and tax.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister tell us why his record on unemployment is even worse than that of his predecessor?

The Prime Minister: Everyone in the House and beyond regrets the fact that unemployment rises. That is why we are persisting with policies that will create long-term, permanent jobs for the future. We have put those policies in place—low inflation, lower taxes and lower interest rates. Those are the only measures that will get people into work and keep them in work, which is the only proper policy to follow.

Mr. Kinnock: Unemployment has risen by nearly 1 million in the time that the hon. Gentleman has been Chancellor and Prime Minister, but still he refuses to do anything useful to stop that remorseless rise. Is it not because he believes that 2·5 million unemployed is "a price worth paying"?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should not be so cheap over such a problem. Unemployment is greater than a year ago in every country in EFTA and in every G7 country except the Netherlands. French unemployment is at its greatest level ever. United States unemployment is higher than for the past five years. What the right hon. Gentleman might also have fastened his mind upon is the fact that reported job vacancies are rising, that the number of people placed in jobs is rising and that there are 500,000 more people in work than in 1979. Those are some of the facts which the right hon. Gentleman should absorb.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman is a dodger. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: In the last year employment in Britain went down by 873,000. Job vacancies are still 10,000 lower than they were this time last year. When Sir Nicholas Goodison of the Trustee Savings Bank says that this is the worst recession in living memory, is it any wonder that the whole country knows that this is the Government of high unemployment?

The Prime Minister: Some people might say that on policy rather than on personal matters the right hon. Gentleman is a tax dodger. He can give no lecture to us on unemployment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] His policies would cut jobs across the whole country.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that that was meant in a personal sense.

The Prime Minister: Indeed; I expressly said that, Mr. Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman's minimum wage would increase unemployment by putting 2 million people out of work. His plans to slash defence budgets by £6 billion would cost 100,000 more their jobs. His tax on jobs would cost another 100,000. He is the only person in opposition to plan for greater unemployment as a matter of policy.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions were to be removed, it would punish not just somebody earning £20,280 a year but would punish anyone who earned £390 in a single week? Does he agree that a proposal that would impose a massive tax burden on 4 million ordinary people could be produced only by a shower such as those who currently comprise the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is in a very excited state.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. I suspect that the Labour party simply did not understand when it drew up its policy that everyone would pay more national insurance contributions in a single week if they earned above one fifty second of statutory UEL. *The Independent* pointed out, for example, that the Opposition's tax plans would mean

"the largest ever peacetime tax increase."

The Leader of the Opposition promised explicitly that anyone earning less than £21,000 a year would not pay a penny tax extra in income tax or national insurance under a Labour Government. Clearly, he was wrong about that. He should admit it, and do so publicly.

Q4. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Prime Minister confirm that he personally was informed about British Steel's decision to close Ravenscraig over a fortnight before the official announcement last week—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"]—and that instead of trying to reverse the decision, he and the Secretary of State for Scotland took part in a conspiracy of silence? Will the right hon. Gentleman now, even at this late stage, intervene to try to stop the closure, bearing in mind the Government's responsibility for privatising the steel industry, thereby allowing a butcher such as Bob Scholey to betray the Scottish steel workers?

The Prime Minister: It is noticeable that the Labour party has not offered to keep Ravenscraig open. I was informed that British Steel would be making a decision on the day that it made the decision—*[Interruption.]* I was informed in confidence some days before that it would be making a decision on that day. It was a commercial decision by British Steel. It is clear, despite all their words, that Opposition Members would have done nothing different.

Mr. Irvine: Does my right hon. Friend agree that defence cuts of £6 billion would lead to a massive loss of jobs in defence industries throughout the country? Does he further agree about the hypocrisy of those who call on the one hand for the maintenance of defence contracts in public and, on the other, plan in private for defence reductions?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Our policy, both for nuclear and conventional defence, is clear, has been set out in a number of documents and is properly costed. The Opposition do not say where they stand, cannot say where they stand and cannot admit to the jobs that would be lost if their policy were carried out. The Labour party conference has three times voted to cut £6 billion from the defence budget, and we can see the extent to which that would devastate the defence industry and the defence of this country.

Q5. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Madden: Might I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question about which I gave notice to his office earlier this morning? Will he arrange for X-ray and metal detection equipment to be installed immediately at Armley prison in Leeds? I ask for this following a serious breach of security at the prison last Friday, when a visitor inside the prison

drew a knife and sought to attack another visitor. As this is the latest in a series of serious breaches of security at prisons, will the Prime Minister call upon the Home Secretary, who has clearly lost control of his own Department and no longer enjoys the confidence of the public, to resign now or else sack him?

The Prime Minister: First, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of the detailed point that he wished to raise.

Security at prisons holding category A prisoners is already very tight, with rigorous searching procedures. In addition, however, we are providing X-ray equipment, as the hon. Gentleman has suggested we should. A contract has been placed for the supply of this equipment to prisons that hold category A prisoners. Devices have to be specially constructed, and they will be delivered as soon as possible.

In reply to the hon. Gentleman's last point, I can say that I have complete confidence in my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Q6. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: Does my right hon. Friend agree that to base defence policy on defence cuts—the North Sea oil of the 1990s—is irresponsible and misguided? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on Treasury affairs has actually stated this as a belief——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question about Government policy.

Mr. Evennett: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Labour remains unsound on defence?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is clear that, as my hon. Friend says, Labour would cut the defence budget to ribbons. It is true that on defence Labour cannot be trusted. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the Prime Minister please answer the matters for which he has responsibility?

The Prime Minister: I am seeking to do precisely that.

It is perfectly clear that, while the defence of this country is the first priority of the present Government, it might not be the first priority of the Opposition if they were to make the defence cuts to which they have committed themselves.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House please tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 20 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Local Government Bill *[Lords]*

Proceedings on the Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill

TUESDAY 21 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Asylum Bill.

WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY—There will be a debate on a motion to approve the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement.

Motion on the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order.

Motion on the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order.

THURSDAY 23 JANUARY—Opposition day (3rd allotted day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate described as "The Growing Incidence of Poverty" followed by a debate described as "The Government's Failures over Ravenscraig". Both debates arise on Opposition motions.

FRIDAY 24 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 27 JANUARY—Motions on the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order and the Electricity (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order.

Dr. Cunningham: First, I welcome the announcement that there is to be a debate on the Chancellor's autumn statement. Will the Chancellor, as is usual, take the opportunity to announce the date of the Budget—a matter that, this year, is of more than passing interest to hon. Members and to people in the country? May we have an assurance that when the debate is held next week it will be in order for hon. Members to discuss the Government's proposals on, for example, VAT? Will the Chancellor make it clear what he intends to do in the coming months about VAT?

During the debate on the autumn statement, will the Chancellor finally say whether, given the appalling rise in unemployment, which continues—indeed, the rate of increase is now worse than that in almost any other country in the western world, and certainly the worst in Europe—he still believes that that is a price worth paying? Is it not clear that, every week the Prime Minister stays in Downing street, several thousand of our fellow citizens lose their jobs?

Can the Leader of the House tell us when he intends to bring forward the revenue support grant orders for England and Wales? People throughout England and Wales are anxious to know exactly what the Tory poll tax will cost them and their families this year; and of course local authorities, which have the responsibility of trying to administer this fiasco and are now apparently recording more than 7 million cases waiting to go before the courts because of the inadequacy of this legislation bounced through the House, are also anxious to know what is in the revenue support grant orders.

Why have the Government been so reluctant to discuss the implications for Scotland of the closure of the Ravenscraig steelworks? We had to force Ministers to the Dispatch Box on Monday because the Secretary of State refused to make a statement on a matter of such vital importance to Scotland. The Government refused to provide time for a debate. The people of Scotland will not have missed these points and they will know that it is only because the Opposition are providing time on a Supply day that we shall have the opportunity to discuss the implications of the closure for employment and jobs in Scotland.

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I am certainly delighted that we are to debate the autumn statement next week, when it will be possible for us to put forward yet again in considerable detail the Government's spending programmes and the high priorities that we attach to all sorts of key areas, such as law and order, transport, defence, education and housing. It will also be possible to restate that these public expenditure plans are contained and are affordable within existing tax regimes.

That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's point about VAT. The charge that he makes on VAT ignores completely the fact that the main increase in VAT took place in the early years of this Government in order to deal with the very substantial fiscal deficit that we inherited.

The debate will also enable us to probe the Opposition's spending and tax policies, because it seems that they fluctuate day by day. There is total confusion and a huge gap between spending commitments and the tax proposals to fund them. We look forward to hearing the Opposition make their position clear in the debate next week.

With regard to the Budget date, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is quite right in saying that it is usual for it to be given in the autumn statement. Indeed, it was not done in that way last year. But we shall make clear the date of the Budget at the appropriate time.

On the question of the revenue support grant orders, the hon. Gentleman knows that the position on revenue support grants has been made clear in other statements. However, I agree that it is important to have the orders, and I hope to be able to make a statement about a debate on the orders in my next business statement.

The Government were absolutely clear about the position on Ravenscraig and announced straight away their intention to set up an enterprise zone, so we shall be able to talk next week about the effects of that in creating new jobs in the area. I believe that what the whole House, the country and, in particular, the people of Lanarkshire and Scotland will want to know much more clearly than has been spelled out so far is exactly what the Labour party's position is on the Ravenscraig issue.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say that, despite the temptation to initiate an election campaign on the Floor of the House, the object of business questions is to ask about the business for next week. I therefore urge hon. Members to confine their questions to next week's business, bearing in mind that we have an important debate today for which there are no fewer than 16 groups of amendments.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that there is a new and urgent need for a debate next week on defence? Does

he understand that, despite the debate earlier this week, new uncertainties have emerged? They are illustrated in early-day motions 474 and 487.

[That this House recognises that the defence of the realm and the maintenance of international order through alliances are the prime duties of Government; notes the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the instability and uncertainty in many different areas of the world; welcomes Her Majesty's Government's determination to retain a viable and independent nuclear deterrent through the Trident programme and to provide balanced and fully equipped conventional forces; and regrets that the commitment of 130 honourable Members, over half of the Parliamentary Labour Party to CND, and of their Party Conference to massive cuts in conventional armaments, makes it impossible for the official Opposition to sustain a credible defence policy.]

Many people, especially shipyard workers in Barrow, are utterly bewi' 'ered by the Opposition's defence policy. It has been made absolutely clear that many members of the shadow Cabinet and defence committee say one thing but believe another.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That seems to be happening not only in defence: the Labour party seems to be saying one thing one day and another the next. It was made clear in the defence debate this week that many members on the Opposition Front Bench, as well as all the officers of the Opposition Back-Bench committee, subscribe to unilateral nuclear disarmament. My right hon. Friend is right to say that exactly what the Labour party's is on the fourth Trident still needs to be clarified, because it ducked that question completely last week.

I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate on defence next week. We have debated it this week, but as we have received such unsatisfactory answers this week and the Government's position is clear, I am sure that we shall return to it before long.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Does the Leader of the House agree that a debate compromising a review of the present arrangements for the government of Scotland and any proposals that the Government wish to put forward to improve them, the proposals for a Scottish constitutional convention and a review of Scotland's relationship with Europe would provide a full and comprehensive agenda reflecting all views on the Scottish constitutional debate, and would fit the great debate called for by the Secretary of State? Will he table an appropriate motion next week to enable the Scottish Grand Committee to debate those important items?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has suggested that those issues could be debated in the Scottish Grand Committee. I believe that that would be useful, because some aspects of the proposals that have been put forward, not least on the Scottish convention, bear a great deal of scrutiny and the real choices have not been put forward. I shall discuss with my right hon. Friend whether it would be right for me to arrange a debate next week, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the future of grant-maintained schools? Is he aware that Hendon school, in my constituency, was under-subscribed when it was under the control of the local authority but is now over-subscribed? He may remember his visit to that school 18 months ago.

Mr. MacGregor: I do recall that visit, and I remember the great enthusiasm with which the governors, head teacher and staff were embarking on grant-maintained status. I also noted the way in which parents have responded. My hon. Friend is right because many grant-maintained schools already have a high degree of support. I cannot promise a debate next week, but I am sure that there will be opportunities to debate the matter in the coming months.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): May we have a debate on early-day motion 458?

[That this House is deeply concerned that (a) in October 1991, the Inspectorate of Pollution issued an improvement notice plus additional requirements upon Coal Products Ltd., Avenue Works, Wingerworth, Derbyshire, arising from problems of airborne pollution, (b) in November 1991, the North East Derbyshire District Council rejected a planning application for the installation of a plant for the regeneration of active carbon on the same site and (c) in December 1991, the National Rivers Authority issued a report showing that following partial treatment at lagoons in a country park, 40 million gallons of toxic effluent is seeping into the ground near homes at nearby Grassmoor; and calls upon the Secretary of State for the Environment to undertake an urgent environmental audit of the plant and its neighbouring communities with an immediate project of protecting the health and well-being of both the workforce at Coal Products Ltd. and residents in the surrounding communities, whilst seeking ways and means of safeguarding jobs in an area of high unemployment.]

A serious problem has emerged in the area over a period of months, and a series of reports have been issued, concluding with a report by the National Rivers Authority on effluent that is poured into the lagoons at Grassmoor—40,000 tonnes of it a year. The problem with trying to investigate such matters without an overall consideration by the Department of the Environment is that people are shunted between different authorities, such as the pollution inspectorate, the county councils, the district councils and the health authorities. A drawing together of all those authorities is required, as well as a debate that would have some significance to environmental development generally.

Mr. MacGregor: I am happy to have debates at the appropriate time. We have recently debated environmental questions generally. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government recently produced a progress report on the first year following the White Paper which shows, on a wide variety of fronts, considerable progress on environmental matters.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point relating to the early-day motion, Coal Products Ltd., like any other company, is governed by strict environmental regulations introduced by this Government. I cannot, however, promise the hon. Gentleman a debate next week on the specific issue that he raises.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): May we have a debate on junk mail as soon as possible, to discuss a mailshot sent to many of my constituents by an

[Mr. Phillip Oppenheim]

organisation that is partly funded by Maxwell money which is so full of falsehoods that it would make the average time-share salesman blush; which redefines the term "junk mail" and peddles dodgy, old-fashioned and out-of-date remedies which have been banned in most countries and which have passed their sell-by date; and which bears the signature of an obscure Welsh politician, best known for losing his rag with Zimbabwean soldiers and for nutting people in public lavatories?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not seen the leaflet to which my hon. Friend refers, so I do not know the details. I cannot promise a debate on it next week, but perhaps he will find his own opportunities to discuss it in greater detail.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early statement from the Lord Chancellor on the workings of the Civil Evidence Act 1968 following the collapse yesterday in Liverpool and Gravesham of several hundred poll tax cases because the Government have so far refused to introduce a commencement order to allow computer evidence to be used in the magistrates court under that Act? I drew that fact to the attention of magistrates—albeit unsuccessfully—in my cases in Coventry and Wandsworth. What option do the Government now have? If they do not introduce the commencement order, will they tell every council that there must be a council officer with personal knowledge of all the billing arrangements of every individual who is brought before the courts? There are millions of outstanding cases. If the Government do introduce the order, will that not mean that the 5 million liability orders already granted and the 200 imprisonments that have already been made are illegal? Surely all poll tax cases should be stopped until the matter has been sorted out.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government are urgently considering whether there is any need to change the law governing proceedings in the magistrates court to deal with problems in the effective presentation of evidence in community charge enforcement cases. However, there is no bar on the institution of enforcement proceedings by local authorities where evidence of non-payment can be brought before the court, and proceedings continue to be brought successfully in many other areas.

Nothing that has happened in the recent cases provides any reason whatsoever for people who are liable to pay the community charge failing to do so. There is strong feeling among those who do pay the community charge about those who should pay but are not paying. There are exemptions and benefits for people on low incomes. There is very strong feeling about this issue and, although the Government are urgently considering the matter that has recently arisen, the vast majority of people expect those who are supposed to pay the community charge to do so.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the Leader of the House find time next week to debate the issue covered in today's editorial in *The Birmingham Post* entitled "So much for 'Buy British'"? The editorial deals with the Opposition's topic of encouraging people to buy British and points out that the Opposition's deputy leader has just bought a foreign car. Should we not, in conjunction with the very misleading Labour party political broadcast, call to account those who advocate buying home-produced goods but then buy foreign ones?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a good point and I think that it would be legitimate to raise it during the debate next week on the motion to approve the autumn statement, when I hope it will be pointed out that that party political broadcast was a gross travesty of the facts of British manufacturing industry. It was also a clear attempt to talk Britain down.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has written to the Leader of the Opposition drawing attention to the many ways in which it was a gross distortion and to the fact that, for example, one in 10 personal computers sold in the world—let alone in this country—is now made in Scotland and that no less than 85 per cent. of the kitchens sold in this country are made by British firms. The highly selective description of individual items in a kitchen which was contained in the broadcast did no credit to British manufacturing or to the enormous improvement that it has made, and it was a gross distortion of the facts.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Leader of the House bear in mind the fact that there has been no debate on Northern Ireland for a long time? There are 10,000 British soldiers in Northern Ireland. We are debating everything else in advance of the general election but not Northern Ireland, so will he answer two questions? First, are talks taking place? I am advised that the press says that they are but that in practice they are not. Secondly, is it true that, in order to maintain a parliamentary majority, the Anglo-Irish Agreement will be ditched?

Mr. MacGregor: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, there will be a full day's debate on one aspect of Northern Ireland—not the talks, but electricity—a week on Monday. We do debate Northern Ireland matters frequently.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has expressed the view that, unless the outstanding issues are resolved in the near future, it is unlikely that political talks could begin before the election because of a lack of time; but the Government very much hope that the obstacles will be overcome and that the talks can then begin.

I can confirm that stories about meetings at the party-political level are pure invention.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in the debate on the autumn statement, it will be within the rules of order to constrast Government spending policies with the extravagant spending policies of the Opposition and to mention the taxes that will be necessary to pay for them? My right hon. Friend will agree that there is great anxiety about higher taxation and increased national insurance contributions. Surely it is right that the House should be able to question the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer about his apparent differences of opinion with his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett).

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that, subject to Mr. Speaker's ruling, it will be in order to discuss these matters —I know that they have been raised in previous autumn statement debates. The country will certainly be looking to

the Opposition to clarify their position on taxation and spending. It seems as if the Opposition flounder almost every day in their responses to the charges and questions that we put to them, and I very much hope that they will clarify their position on national insurance charges on high and not so high incomes—and on whether any increases will be phased in. If so, we should be told how they will meet their spending commitments on child benefit and pensions. These are legitimate issues on which it would be perfectly in order for the House to spend a good deal of time next week.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will it be possible for the Lord President of the Council to ask the Department of Transport to make a statement or to initiate an early debate on the proposed review of coastguard services, a matter of serious concern to all of us who represent maritime constituencies? Fears have been raised about a reduction in manpower, and we should like to explore the matter further.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think it will be possible to have a debate in Government time, but I shall discuss the matter with my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Can my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on local government finance in London, so that we may discuss the growing evidence that Labour councils, far from struggling to provide services, cannot even be bothered to collect millions of pounds of rates and of community charge still owing to them? These councils do not collect their rents and have lost control of their rented housing stock. In short, they do not want to provide services; they just want to blame the Government.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend draws attention to the fact that there is considerable maladministration among Labour councils, as witness the discovery of what went on in the council of Brent when it was under Labour control. I should think that it would be in order to discuss these matters when we debate the revenue support grant orders for England.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is great concern in the mining industry because, in the midst of important negotiations between British Coal, National Power and PowerGen on the future contracts on which mining depends, British Coal's commercial director, Mr. Malcolm Edwards, has been sacked? Given that it is only a few months since the Secretary of State appointed him under a two-year contract, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State to make a statement to the House next week on the matter?

Mr. MacGregor: We had a full debate on the coal industry yesterday, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I will raise the point with my right hon. Friend, but I doubt whether a statement next week would be appropriate.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to allow the House to debate health, specifically the recently published report which shows the great success of GP fund-holding practices and trust hospitals? Could the debate be held in Government time to allow us to congratulate the people who work in those facilities and the GPs who are now strongly supporting the reforms? A debate might allow the Opposition the opportunity to withdraw some of their more outrageous allegations about those reforms.

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend will have seen in the recent report on the first six months of the NHS reforms, substantial progress is being made by the NHS backed by our reforms and the record resources that we are making available. The report also shows that the NHS is treating more patients than ever before and placing much more emphasis on quality of services. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to all the staff in the health service. The report clearly shows that Opposition warnings about what would happen after the reforms have proved to be completely false. I would welcome a debate, but in the next few weeks many issues have to be fitted into the timetable, not least progress on Government legislation. I shall look for an opportunity for a debate, but I cannot promise one next week.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have an early debate on the Government's determination to prevent part-timers from having the same rights as people who work full time? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in Leicester almost a third of all women workers and almost 20 per cent. of all workers are part-timers? It is disgraceful that they should be refused even the residual rights that the Government have left for those who work full time.

Mr. MacGregor: I am also aware that the Opposition's proposal for a national minimum wage would destroy many part-time jobs.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate next week on the principle and number of live animal exports which, we hear, have reached record levels in the past year? Does he accept that the conditions in which live animals are exported must be humane? There is considerable doubt sometimes about whether live animals are exported in humane conditions and a debate is urgently required.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon. Friend welcomes the steps taken by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the Agriculture Council on this matter, especially in relation to the export of live horses. I cannot promise a debate in the near future, but no doubt my hon. Friend will find opportunities to raise the matter further.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Leader of the House aware that, in the past four days, since we returned from the Christmas recess, I have heard more from Conservative Members about Labour party policy than I have heard on the national executive committee in 12 months? Will he listen to the pleas of those who have occupied the Waterloo ambulance station, using it for 70 homeless people who in a blaze of publicity over Christmas were helped by the Government? Now they need food. By whatever means possible, will the right hon. Gentleman get in touch with Ministers to ensure that, if it is right for the Government to gain publicity over Christmas for looking after a few hundred homeless, it should be right to do something about them now so that they are not turned out on the streets?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall look into the hon. Gentleman's second point. On his first point, I am grateful to him for his confession. Now we know why Labour policies are in such a mess.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will my right hon. Friend consider rearranging next week's business to enable us to have an urgent debate on industrial relations, bearing in mind that our reforms over the past 12 years have brought industrial relations to a new level of success? The number of days lost through strikes is lower than at any time since 1979, and people ought to know that Labour policies would sweep all that away and bring back the sort of industrial anarchy that existed in 1978-79.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is certainly right about the number of days lost through strikes. The figures announced today for the most recent month are the best for a long time and continue the trend of recent months. They are certainly better than 1979. In terms of the Government's general strategy on economic policy matters, it would be appropriate for some of those issues to be raised in Wednesday's debate.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that the seventh report of the Public Accounts Committee on the privatisation of Harland and Wolff was not available to Members in the House until late yesterday evening and that it had been made available to others some time previously? That enabled the *Belfast Telegraph*, for example, to carry a huge article on the real cost of the sell-off. Northern Ireland Members were disadvantaged because they did not have the information and could not comment. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that this sort of thing does not happen again?

As we are to have a debate on the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order, will the right hon. Gentleman seek to have the report of the Select Committee on Energy on the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland available to us before the debate takes place?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall have to look into the second matter. There is a need for a debate on the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland fairly soon.

I shall look into the availability of the PAC report. I am not clear about what was made available in the report last night and what was published in newspapers earlier. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is important that we have a debate soon on Kashmir, especially bearing in mind that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), in his capacity as deputy leader of the Labour party, has pledged his party to support self-determination for Kashmir? Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends take a more measured view, which I think would be much appreciated by our many Indian constituents.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall make the Government's position clear on Kashmir yet again. We believe that the dispute can be resolved only by peaceful agreement between India and Pakistan. That remains the best way to proceed. We have offered help if both sides want us to intervene. What the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said is a matter for him.

Mrs. Ray Mitchie (Argyll and Bute): Yesterday we heard a statement on environmentally sensitive areas in England. I think that it is generally agreed that a positive way forward is to have a partnership between farming and environmental interests. As the Scottish islands await progress on the matter, can the Leader of the House tell us whether the Secretary of State for Scotland will make a statement early next week on ESAs for Scotland?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her support in general for the policy. I entirely agree with her in that respect. The early experience of ESAs that I had when I was Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food showed the policy to be important, helpful and constructive. As for a statement on ESAs in Scotland, I shall have to raise the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, which I shall do.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to read early-day motion 316, which stands in my name and is supported by about 40 right hon. and hon. Members?

[That this House is appalled at the mistreatment and murder of street children in Guatemala; and calls on President Serrano and the Guatemalan Government to urgently deal with this problem and in particular to support the work of the Casa Alianza and other agencies working to bring education and support to these children.]

It is alleged that the street children of Guatemala City are being killed by police officers and others. My right hon. Friend may know that one of my constituents, Bruce Harris, is in charge of the mission called Casa Alianza. Even he has been threatened with death. May we have an early debate on foreign affairs and aid and on the encouragement that should be given to President Serrano, who now says that he is keen to see the problem sorted out? The United Kingdom's full attention should be focused on the problems in Guatemala City.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter. I have read the early-day motion, and the Government share the concern that is expressed in it. We and our European partners have made clear to the Guatemalan Government the importance that we attach to human rights, and expecially to the rights of street children. I do not know when it will be possible to have a general debate on foreign affairs, but I shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said. If we have such a debate, it will be possible for him to raise this matter, as he will be able to do on other occasions.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Obviously I welcome the opportunity to debate next week Ravenscraig and the Lanarkshire economy. I hope, however, that it has not escaped the attention of the Leader of the House that one of the most famous companies in Scotland, Armitage Shanks of Barrhead, is facing closure because of the parent company's axe. May we be given the opportunity to debate the economy of Renfrewshire, which has suffered 35,000 job losses since the Government came to power? As I have said, we are facing the closure of a world-famous company in Scotland. The Government are not lifting a finger to help the economy of Renfrewshire. They are not investigating why the company wishes to move from Barrhead. Why is it that the Government do not want to debate what is happening in Renfrewshire? We have only their failed policies and an enterprise zone in Inverclyde. They are not doing anywhere near enough for Scotland. Do something now.

Mr. MacGregor: I was sorry to hear about the possibility of job losses at the company concerned, and I recognise the company's creditable history. However, this is a matter for the company. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Government have done a great deal to assist the Scottish economy. There have been particular measures in north Lanarkshire, but the matter goes way beyond that. It is the Opposition's choice to confine next week's debate to Ravenscraig and north Lanarkshire.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that high taxation is poor for inward investment and many other things? Will he assure us that next week's debate will be far-reaching enough for us to explain that in the early days of the Conservative Government—1979 and 1980—we had to repay massive debts incurred by the previous Labour Government and that since then we have religiously cut taxation? So, for high taxes vote for the Labour party, and for low taxes vote Conservative.

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad that my hon. Friend made that point; he is right. I hope that there will be plenty of opportunity to debate those matters next week. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is laughing. He knows that the country now recognises that his party has been, is and always will be a party of high taxation, because it cannot resist spending other people's money. If the hon. Member for Copeland is complaining about the level of tax now, the country wants to know why he proposes to add considerably to it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As it was tabled on 17 December, has the Leader of the House had time to reflect on early-day motion 424 in the name of a former Law Officer, a former Home Secretary, myself and 41 colleagues?

[That this House welcomes the public announcement by Her Majesty's Government of the identity of the new head of MI5; but calls on Her Majesty's Government to make a full statement about the role of Stella Rimington, in particular in connection with the activities of Mr. David Hart during the 1984 miners' strike.]

It welcomes the public announcement of the identity of the new head of MI5, but calls on the Government to make a full statement about Stella Rimington's role, particularly as it related to the activities of Mr. David Hart, during the 1984 strike. Also, as the first signatory of the motion, may I say that since it was tabled statements have been made to me about the involvement of Stella Rimington and Mr. Roger Windsor of the National Union of Mineworkers. The motion raises serious issues and calls for some sort of response.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, following the passage of the Security Service Act 1989, the Government judged that it was right to announce the appointment of a new director general of the Security Service and I am pleased that that has, rightly, been seen as a positive step. The hon. Gentleman asked about the new director general designate's previous work. It has been the long-standing practice under Governments of both parties not to comment on operational matters, and we do not intend to depart from that precedent.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although nominal interest rates are falling, real interest rates are rising, causing even normally prudent businesses to fail, with increased job losses and mortgage foreclosures? Is it not economic nonsense that our interest rates should be dictated not by our own grave economic needs but by the interests of the German economy? In the absence of a revaluation of the deutschmark within the exchange rate mechanism, will my right hon. Friend accept that many of us are deeply concerned about our continued membership? Will he please grant an urgent debate on the specific subject of the exchange rate mechanism?

Mr. MacGregor: No. We have debated the exchange rate mechanism and general economic policy on many occasions and it will be possible to refer to that issue in the debate on Wednesday. I would not wish to have a debate on only the ERM because many other matters need to be raised. On the general principle, I believe that the vast majority of my hon. Friends are strongly in favour of the benefits that the United Kingdom economy and British business have received as a result of our membership of the ERM.

My hon. Friend will note that German interest rates and ours are closer than they have been for a long time. I am sure that he will also welcome the reduction in mortgage rates announced by the Abbey National today.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement next week on his handling of the planning process within Scotland in advance of the proposed local inquiry into the construction of a bridge to Skye? In a written answer this week, the Secretary of State for Scotland has confirmed that, in advance of the local inquiry, he and the Scottish Office have entered into a commercial contract with the designated builders of the project. That makes nonsense of the planning procedure and adds to the difficulties of the local objectors, which already include the 9 kg of paper produced by the roads directorate in Scotland, so that no proper analysis or preparation of arguments can be done in advance. Will the right hon. Gentleman examine the handling of the process? It is certainly undemocratic, and many people are beginning to feel that it borders on the unconstitutional.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on the details, and I certainly cannot promise a statement next week. We have much important business to conduct, so I doubt whether a statement will be possible, but I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Could my right hon. Friend find time for a short debate on the question of Short money? Does he agree that events this week have shown that there may be inadequacies in the funding of Opposition parties? If we can examine the matter in detail, might we be able to find sufficient research funds for the Leader of the Opposition to be able to check the quotations that he uses against the Prime Minister before misquoting them? Might it not also be possible to find the right hon. Gentleman a researcher who can at least draft a simple apology?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that that was a failure of finance; it was simply a failure to understand the issues and to do homework.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House take into account early-day motion 452?

[That this House calls for publication of the Register of Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants; notes that the Register includes information on, amongst others provided with access passes, the proprietor of private psychiatric nursing and residential homes, employees of political and economic consultancies, international law firms, company directors, representatives of parliamentary lobbying organisations (including Research and Information Services, Westminster Ltd., Chelgate Public Relations Ltd., Taylor Steingberg Associates, Westminster Communications, Decision Makers Ltd., Charles Barker Public Affairs and others), a parliamentary researcher for parliamentary agents, a Lloyds underwriter and the Managing Director of Charles Barker Watney and Powell; and urges the Leader of the House to place a Motion on the Order Paper to facilitate publication so that the public may be aware of who has such privileged access, and why.]

The motion calls for the publication of the Register of Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants, and asks specifically that something be done about the business of the House—that is, that a motion should be put on the Order Paper to ensure that the register is published, as it contains an astounding cross-section of commercial lobbying organisations. The managing director of one of the biggest of such organisations attached to this place is registered as a Member's secretary or research assistant.

Is it not true that some hon. Members are receiving perks in return for providing passes and conferring advantages on commercial lobbying organisations? Should not that information be open to the public instead of being kept in the Library? Then people outside could know who was being registered and who was getting the passes, and hon. Members could explain the reasons, which may be perfectly valid, why the passes have been given.

Mr. MacGregor: I should not wish to comment on the hon. Gentleman's allegations, but, on his general point, it would not be appropriate to deal with the issue by publishing the Register of Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants. The right way to proceed may be to consider the matter when the House debates—as I hope we shall in due course, when we can find time—the Select Committee on Members' Interests report on parliamentary lobbying, which has now been published.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Is my right hon. Friend certain that he has allocated sufficient time for next Wednesday's debate on the Chancellor's autumn statement to allow the House fully to ventilate the Opposition's extraordinary shambles on taxation? I ask that in the light of the interview given on the "World at One" today by the shadow Chancellor to Mr. James Naughtie, in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman was fully and effectively "kebabbed"—I believe that that is the word. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether he has ever known an Opposition in such a state of panic and disorder over such an important issue so soon before a general election?

Mr. MacGregor: We have been saying for a long time that there is a huge gulf between the spending promises that the Labour party has lavished on just about every interest group and its tax commitments. It now appears that the Labour party is reneging on some of those tax commitments, so my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the issue. I am sure that the subject will feature in next week's debate. I cannot promise him any extended time next week, or another day next week, but we shall return to the matter again—by which time, no doubt, the Labour party's position will have changed yet again.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The attacks of the Leader of the House on my party are boring the public to tears. If he does not believe me, he should trawl public opinion. People are getting switched off by all this nonsense.

May I ask the Leader of the House a question and receive a straight answer, not an attack on the Labour party? May we have a debate on business services and, in particular, export credit guarantee premiums? Is he aware that companies throughout Britain, and indeed several in my constituency, say that they are losing business and large contracts abroad because they cannot afford the premiums? Will the right hon. Gentleman look into the matter? Can it be debated in Parliament?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on the first point. I get a different reaction as I go round the country: I find that there is a great deal of interest. The Labour party would not apparently hint that it will change its position on national insurance contributions unless it was not greatly worried about the reaction that the public are already showing. The hon. Gentleman is wholly wrong about that. *[Interruption.]* I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman is so sensitive on the matter. We are finding such reactions all the time.

The hon. Gentleman's point about export credit insurance could be raised in next Wednesday's debate because it is an economic matter and the debate is on the economy and the autumn statement.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will my right hon. Friend find time, possibly next week, for a debate on unemployment in the north of England? We constantly hear in the House attacks on the Government's employment policy. My right hon. Friend will have noticed that in today's figures unemployment levels in the north-west—in Merseyside, Lancashire and Cheshire—are well over 20 per cent. lower than when the Government were last elected. Perhaps that is one point that should be pushed home hard to the electorate in the north of England.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I think that it would be in order for him to make it in the debate next Wednesday, if he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. James Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): May I raise a specific point about the debate on the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order next Wednesday? Is the Leader of the House aware that that order is not listed today among the Remaining Orders of the Day and Notices of Motions? Is he aware that I have been informed that the order will not be laid until tomorrow and that it is not available at present in the Vote Office? That means that Scottish Members can obtain the order at the earliest tomorrow. They cannot get back in time to discuss it with their local authorities tomorrow afternoon.

There is to be an important debate which relates to Scotland in the House on Monday evening. That leaves about one hour between 9 am and 10 am on Monday

morning for Scottish Members to discuss the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order with their local authority officials and representatives. That is a complete negation of democracy. I ask the Leader of the House even at this stage to withdraw the debate on the order next week and to put it on in the following week when we have had time to discuss it.

Mr. MacGregor: There is a general desire that we should debate the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order. I hope that the House will pass it so that local authorities may know exactly where they stand and are in a position to move forward. I am under the impression that that is generally agreed. I shall look into the point that the hon. Gentleman raises immediately after business questions.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): In view of the belated but welcome interest in the House in occupational pensions, may I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 131?

[That this House regrets that the Occupational Pensions Board has approved the request of Lucas Industries plc to remove £90 million from the employees' pension fund for company use causing a further payment from the fund to the Inland Revenue of £60 million so depleting the pension fund by £150 million; notes that the 35,000 Lucas pensioners do not receive the maximum pensions allowed by the Inland Revenue; is mindful that the company has made no payments into the pension fund for six years; and believes a first call on any surplus in the pension fund should be to existing pensioners up to the maximum allowed.]

It deals with the raiding by Lucas Industries of £90 million from the funds of 35,000 pensioners when it had not paid a penny into the pension fund for six years. British Rail pensioners are unable to be represented as pensioners on the board of trustees of the pension fund.

May we have a debate on early-day motion 131 and the activities of the Occupational Pensions Board, which must rate as one of the least effective guardians of the public interest that the House has ever set up? A debate is long overdue. Millions of occupational pensioners in Britain are worried sick about the future and the stability of their pensions because they have read about disasters and of pension funds being raided. I might add that those pension funds were raided apparently with the official sanction of the Occupational Pensions Board. We need to have the matter opened up on a much wider front rather than merely having fishing expeditions on one incident.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise a debate on the matter next week, but I am told that the Occupational Pensions Board was asked by Lucas to approve a modification of its scheme rules so that the scheme could benefit from a reduced tax liability. As well as transferring funds to the company, the modification also provides a significant package of benefit improvements, totalling £225 million, for scheme members. That is what I am informed as a result of seeing the early-day motion.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR MONDAY 3 FEBRUARY

Members successful in the ballot were:
Sir Michael Neubert
Mr. Jacques Arnold
Dame Jill Knight

Orders of the Day

Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 12

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF DISPUTES BY GAS CONSUMERS' COUNCIL

' . The following section shall be inserted in the Gas Act 1986, after section 32—

"*Preliminary investigation by Council of certain disputes.*

32A.—(1) This section applies where—

(a) representations are made to the Council by or on behalf of a person who appears to the Council to have an interest in the matter to which the representations relate; and

(b) that matter appears to the Council to constitute a dispute of a kind which may be referred to the Director under section 14A above or 33A below, or under regulations made under section 15A above.

(2) It shall be the duty of the Council—

(a) to inform the person by or on whose behalf the representations are made that he may have the right to refer his dispute to the Director; and

(b) to make such investigations with respect to the matter to which the representations relate as may be specified in a direction given by the Director.

(3) Any such direction may be given so as to apply generally or to a specified class of matter or particular matter and may, in particular, specify in relation to any investigation which the Council is required to make under this section—

(a) the practice and procedure which it is to follow in conducting its investigation; and

(b) the information which it is to give to the Director with respect to the matter investigated.".'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.20 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 24—the *Gas Consumers' Council*—

'In section 2 of the Gas Act 1986 (the Gas Consumers' Council), the following subsection shall be inserted after subsection (3)

"(3A) In appointing members for the Council, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of appointing persons who have experience in or knowledge of activities connected with the supply of gas through pipes.".'.

New clause 25—*Gas Act 1986 (Investigations by Director)*—

'—(1) Section 31 of the Gas Act (duty of Director to investigate certain matters) shall be amended as follows.

(2) For paragraph (b) in subsection (1), there shall be substituted

"is referred to him by the Council under subsection (6G) of section 32 below."

(3) Subsection (2) shall cease to have effect:'.

New clause 26—*Gas Act 1986 (Investigation by Council)*—

'(1) Section 32 of the Gas Act (duty of Council to investigate certain matters) shall be amended as follows.

(2) For paragraph (a) in subsection (2), there shall be substituted—

"(a) any matter in respect of which any functions of the Director under this Part are or may be exercisable; and "

(3) For paragraph (b) in subsection (2), there shall be substituted—

"(b) any matter which relates to the supply of gas through pipes and in respect of which any functions of the Director General of Fair Trading under the Fair Trading Act 1973 or the Competition Act 1980 are or may be exercisable."

(4) In subsection (3), for "paragraph (a) of subsection (2) above" there shall be substituted "subsection (2) of section 33 below".

(5) The followng subsections shall be inserted after subsection (6)—

"(6A) Where under an investigation under subsection (1) above any matter appears to the Council to be an enforcement matter the Council may prepare a written report on that matter and shall (subject to section 42 below) send a copy of any such report to—

(a) any person to whom the report refers or who (whether or not he has made a representation to the Council) appears to the Council to have an interest in the matter to which the report relates;

(b) the Director General of Fair Trading or any person whose functions under any enactment appear to the Council to be exercisable in relation to that matter;

(c) any person who appears to the Council to be a person who ought to take account of the report in determining how to act in relation to that matter;

(d) the Director.

(6B) In reporting the matter under subsection (6A), the Council may recommend—

(a) that he matter be reconsidered by the public gas supplier concerned;

(b) that the Director consider exercising any of his functions under section 28 above.

(6C) More than one recommendation may be included in a report under this section.

(6D) Where the Council includes any recommendation in a report under this section, the report shall give the Council's reasons for making the recommendation.

(6E) Where—

(a) a report is sent to any public gas supplier under subsection (6A) above; and

(b) the report includes a recommendation directed to that supplier,

he shall have regard to it and notify the Council of the action which he has taken or proposes to take, to comply with the recommendation.

(6F) Where a public gas supplier fails to comply (whether wholly or partly) with a recommendation under subsection (6B) above the Council shall refer the matter to the Director."

(6) Subsection (7) shall cease to have effect.'.

New Clause 27—*Gas Act 1986 (Duty to advise Director)*—

'—(1) Section 40 of the Gas Act 1986 (general duty to advise Director shall be amended as follows.

(2) After the words "advise the" there shall be inserted "Secretary of State or, as the case may be, the".

(3) In paragraph (a) after the words "any of the" there shall be inserted "Secretary of State's or, as the case may be, the".

(4) In paragraph (b) after the words "by the" there shall be inserted "Secretary of State of the".'.

New clause 28—*Gas Act 1986 (Annual Reports)*—

'—(1) Section 41 of the Gas Act 1986 (annual reports) shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) after the words "advised the" there shall be inserted "Secretary of State or the".'.

New clause 29—*Gas Act 1986 (Information)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Gas Act 1986, after section 41—

"*Information.*

41A The Director shall give information collected by or furnished to him under section 38C above to the Council, with a view to facilitating the exercise of the Council's functions under this Part.".'.

New Clause 30—*Electricity Act 1989 (Consumers' Council)*—

'For section 1 of the Electricity Act 1989 there shall be substituted—

"*The Electricity Consumers' Council.*

2. (1) There shall be a body corporate to be known as the Electricity Consumers' Council (in this Part referred to as 'the Council') for the purpose of performing the functions assigned to it by this Part.

(2) The Council shall consist of a chairman and such other members as the Secretary of State may from time to time appoint.

(3) In appointing members for the Council, the Secretary of State shall so far as practicable, ensure—

(a) that the members of the Council include members who, by reason of their familiarity with the special requirements and circumstances of the different areas of Great Britain or of small businesses, are able together to represent the interests of consumers of electricity supplied to premises in all those areas and such businesses; and

(b) that the interests of consumers of electricity supplied to premises in different areas are represented by different members wherever that appears to the Secretary of State to be appropriate having regard to the manner in which the various parts of the electricity supply industry in Great Britain organise themselves.

(4) In appointing members of the Council, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of appointing persons who have experience in or knowledge of activities connected with the supply of electricity to premises.

(5) A member of the Council shall hold and vacate office in accordance with the terms of the instrument appointing him and shall, on ceasing to hold office, be eligible for re-appointment.

(6) The provisions of Schedule X to this Act shall effect with respect to the Council.".'.

New Clause 31—*Electricity Act 1989 (information by Director)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Electricity Act 1989, after section 42

"42A. The Director shall give information collected by or furnished to him under section 42 above to the Council, with a view to facilitating the exercise of the Council's functions under this Part.".'.

New clause 32—*Electricity Act 1989 (investigation of enforcement matters)*—

'For section 45 of the Electricity Act 1989 (investigation of enforcement matters) there shall be inserted—

"45.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Director to investigate any matter which appears to him to be an enforcement matter and which—

(a) is the subject of a representation (other than one appearing to the Director to be frivolous) made to the Director by or on behalf of a person appearing to the Director to have an interest in that matter; or

(b) is referred to him by the Council under subsection ( ) of section 46 below.

(2) in this section and section 46 below "enforcement matter" means any matter in respect of which any functions of the Director under section 25 above are or may be exercisable.".'.

New Clause 33—Electricity Act 1989 (investigation of certain matters)—

'For section 46 of the Electricity Act 1989 (investigation of certain other matters) there shall be substituted—

"46.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Council to investigate any matter which to which subsection (2) below applies and which—

(a) is the subject of a representation (other than one appearing to the Council to be frivolous) made to the Council by or on behalf of a person appearing to the Council to have an interest in that matter; or

(b) is referred to it by the Director under subsection (11) below.

(2) This subsection applies to—

(a) any matter in respect of which any functions of the Director under this Part are or may be exercisable;

(b) any matter (other than an enforcement matter) which relates to the supply of electricity to premises; and

(c) any matter which relates to the supply of electricity and in respect of which any functions of the Director General of Fair Trading under the Fair Trading Act 1973 or the Competition Act 1980 are or may be exercisable.

(3) Subject to subsection (4) below, it shall be the duty of the Director to refer to the Council any matter which appears to the Director to be a matter (other than an enforcement matter) falling within paragraph (b) of subsection (2) above and which is the subject of a representation (other than one appearing to the Director to be frivolous) made to the Director by or on behalf of a person appearing to the Director to have an interest in that matter.

(4) Nothing in subsection (3) above shall require the Director to refer to the Council any matter in respect of which he is already considering exercising functions under this Part.

(5) Where on an investigation under subsection (1) above any matter appears to the Council to be a matter falling within subsection (2) above in respect of which it would be appropriate for the Director General of Fair Trading to exercise any functions under this Part, the Council shall refer that matter to the Director with a view to his exercising those functions with respect to that matter.

(6) Where under an investigation under subsection (1) above any matter appears to the Council to be an enforcement matter the Council may prepare a written report on that matter and shall (subject to section 57 below) send a copy of any such report to—

(a) any person to whom the report refers or who (whether or not he has made a representation to the Council) appears to the Council to have an interest in the matter to which the report relates;

(b) the Director General of Fair Trading or any person whose functions under any enactment appear to the Council to be exercisable in relation to that matter;

(c) any person who appears to the Council to be a person who ought to take account of the report in determining how to act in relation to that matter;

(d) the Director.

(7) In reporting on a matter under subsection (6), the Council may recommend—

(a) that the matter be reconsidered by the electricity supplier concerned;

(b) that the Director consider exercising any of his functions under this Part.

(8) More than one recommendation may be included in a report under this section.

(9) Where the Council includes any recommendation in a report under this section, the report shall give the Council's reasons for making the recommendation.

(10) Where—

(a) a report is sent to any electricity supplier under subsection (6) above; and

(b) the report includes a recommendation directed to that supplier,

he shall have regard to it and notify the Council of the action which he has taken, or proposes to take, to comply with the recommendation.

(11) Where an electricity supplier fails to comply (whether wholly or partly) with a recommendation under subsection (7) above the Council shall refer the matter to the Director.".'.

New clause 34—*Electricity Act 1989 (functions of director)*—

'In section 47 of the Electricity Act 1989 (general functions of Director) subsection (4) shall cease to have effect.'.

New clause 35—*Electricity Act 1984 (duty of consumers' council to advise Director)*—

'For section 51 of the Electricity Act 1989 (general duty of consumers' committees to advise director etc.) there shall be substituted—.

"It shall be the duty of the Council to keep under review matters affecting the interests of consumers of electricity supplied to premises and to advise the Secretary of State, or as the case may be, the Director on any matter which—

(a) appears to it to affect the interests of consumers or potential consumers of electricity; and

(b) is referred to it by the Secretary of State or the Director or is a matter on which it considers it should offer advice.".'.

New clause 36—*Electricity Act 1989 (reports of consumers' committees)*—

'For section 52 of the Electricity Act 1989 (periodical and other reports of consumers' committees) there shall be substituted—

"52.—(1) The Council shall, as soon as practicable after the end of each calendar year, make to the Director and to the Secretary of State a report on its activities during that year.

(2) Each report shall include a statement of the matters on which, during the year to which it relates, the Council has advised the Secretary of State or the Director under section X above.

(3) The Council shall arrange for every such report to be published in such a manner as it considers appropriate.

(4) In making any such report, the Council shall have regard to the need for excluding, so far as that is practicable —

(a) any matter which relates to the affairs of an individual where the publication of that matter would or might in the opinion of the Council, seriously and prejudicially affect the interests of that individual; and

(b) any matter which relates specifically to the affairs of a particular body of persons, whether corporate or unincorporate, where publication of that matter would or might, in the opinion of the Council, seriously and prejudicially affect the interests of that body.".'.

New clause 37—*Electricity Act 1989 (National Consumers' Consultative Council)*—

'Section 53 of the Electricity Act 1989 (the National Consumers' Consultative Committee) shall cease to have effect.'.

New clause 38—*Electricity Act 1989 (Abolition of Consumers' Council)*—

'In section 54 of the Electricity Act 1989 (abolition of Consumers' etc. Councils) the following paragraphs shall be inserted after paragraph (c)—

"(d) the consumers' councils established under this Act; and

(e) the National Consumers' Consultative Committee.".'.

New clause 39—*Electricity Act 1984 (Schedule 2)*—

'Schedule 2 of the Electricity Act 1989 shall cease to have effect.'.

New clause 40—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (investigation of complaints)*—

'In section 49 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 (investigation of complaints) the following paragraph shall be inserted in subsection (1) after paragraph (b)—

"; or

(c) is referred to him by the Council under subsection (ii) of section 54D below.".'.

New clause 41—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (Telecommunications' Consumers Council)*—

'For section 54 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 there shall be substituted—

"*The Telecommunications Consumers' Council.*

54.—(1) There shall be a body corporate to be known as the Telecommunications Consumers' Council (in this Part referred to as 'the Council') for the purpose of performing the functions assigned to it by this Part.

(2) The Council shall consist of a chairman and such other members as the Secretary of State may from time to time appoint.

(3) In appointing members for the Council, the Secretary of State shall so far as practicable, ensure—

(a) that the members of the Council include members who, by reason of their familiarity with the special requirements and circumstances of the different areas of Great Britain or of small businesses, are able together to represent the interests of consumers of telecommunication services in all those areas and such businesses; and

(b) that the interests of consumers of telecommunication services in different areas are represented by different members wherever that appears to the Secretary of State to be appropriate having regard to the manner in which the various parts of the telecommunication services in Great Britain organise themselves.

(4) In appointing members for the Council, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of appointing persons who have experience in or knowledge of activities connected with telecommunication services.

(5) A member of the Council shall hold and vacate office in accordance with the terms of the instrument appointing him and shall, on ceasing to hold office, be eligible for re-appointment.

(6) The provisions of Schedule X to this Act shall have effect with respect to the Council.".'.

New clause 42—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (duty of Council)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Telecommunications Act 1984, after section 54—

"*Duty of the Council*

54A.—It shall be the duty of the Council to keep under review matters affecting the interests of consumers of telecommunication services and to advise the Secretary of State, or as the case may be, the Director on any matter which——

(a) appears to it to affect the interests of consumers or potential consumers of telecommunication services; and

(b) is referred to it by the Secretary of State or the Director or is a matter on which it considers it should offer advice.".'.

New clause 43—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (annual and other reports)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Telecommunications Act 1984, after section 54A—

"*Annual and other reports*

54B.—(1) The Council shall, as soon as practicable after the end of each calendar year, make to the Director and to the Secretary of State a report on its activities during that year.

(2) Each report shall include a statement of the matters on which, during the year to which it relates, the Council has advised the Secretary of State or the Director under section 54A above.

(3) The Council shall arrange for every such report to be published in such a manner as it considers appropriate.

(4) In making any such report, the Council shall have regard to the need for excluding, so far as that is practicable —

(a) any matter which relates to the affairs of an individual where the publication of that matter would or might in the opinion of the Council, seriously and prejudicially affect the interests of that individual; and

(b) any matter which relates specifically to the affairs of a particular body of persons, whether corporate or unincorporate, where publication of that matter would or might, in the opinion of the Council, seriously and prejudicially affect the interests of that body.".'.

New clause 44—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (information by Director)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Telecommunications Act 1984, after section 54B—

"*Information to be furnished by the Director*

54C.—The Director shall give information collected by or furnished to him under section 27C above to the Council, with a view to facilitating the exercise of the Council's functions under this Part.".'.

New clause 45—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (Investigation of complaints by Council)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Telecommunications Act 1984, after section 54C—

"*Investigation of complaints by the Council.*

54D.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Council to investigate any matter to which subsection (2) below applies and which is the subject of a representation (other than one appearing to the Council to be frivolous) made to the Council by or on behalf of a person appearing to the Council to have an interest in that matter.

(2) This subsection applies to—

(a) any matter in respect of which any functions of the Director under this Part are or may be exercisable;

(b) any matter which relates to telecommunication services provided or telecommunication apparatus supplied in the United Kingdom; and

(c) any matter which relates to the supply of telecommunications and in respect of which any functions of the Director General of Fair Trading under the Fair Trading Act 1973 or the Competition Act 1980 are or may be exercisable.

(3) Where on an investigation under subsection (1) above any matter appears to the Council to be a matter falling within subsection (2) above in respect of which it would be appropriate for the Director General of Fair Trading to exercise any functions under this Part, the Council shall refer that matter to the Director with a view to his exercising those functions with respect to that matter.

(4) Where under an investigation under subsection (1) above any matter appears to the Council to be a matter falling within paragraph (a) of subsection (2) above the Council may prepare a written report on that matter and shall (subject to section 48 below) send a copy of any such report to—

(a) any person to whom the report refers or who (whether or not he has made a representation to the Council) appears to the Council to have an interest in the matter to which the report relates;

(b) the Director General of Fair Trading or any person whose functions under any enactment appear to the Council to be exercisable in relation to that matter;
(c) any person who appears to the Council to be a person who ought to take account of the report in determining how to act in relation to that matter;
(d) the Director.

(5) In reporting on a matter under subsection (4), the Council may recommend—
(a) that the matter be reconsidered by the telecommunications supplier concerned;
(b) that the Director consider exercising any of his functions under this Part.

(6) More than one recommendation may be included in a report under this section.

(7) Where the Council includes any recommendation in a report under this section, the report shall give the Council's reasons for making the recommendation.

(8) Where—
(a) a report is sent to any telecommunications supplier under subsection (6) above; and
(b) the report includes a recommendation directed to that supplier,
he shall have regard to it and notify the Council of the action which he has taken, or proposes to take, to comply with the recommendation.

(9) Where a telecommunications supplier fails to comply (whether wholly or partly) with a recommendation under subsection (5) above the Council shall refer the matter to the Director.".'.

New clause 46—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (Advisory Bodies)*—

'Section 54 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 (power to establish advisory bodies) shall cease to have effect.'.

New clause 47—*Telecommunications Act 1984 (Advisory Bodies) (No. 2)*—

'The advisory bodies established under the Telecommunications Act 1984 shall cease to have effect.'.

New clause 48—*Water Industry Act 1991 (Customer Services Committee)*—

'-. (1) Section 28 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (customer services committees) shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1) for the word "Director" in each place it occurs there shall be substituted the words "Secretary of State".

(3) In subsection (3) for "Director" there shall be substituted "Secretary of State".

(4) For subsection (4) there shall be substituted—

"(4) A customer services committee shall consist of—
(a) a chairman appointed by the Secretary of State; and
(b) such members (not less than ten nor more than twenty) of other members appointed by the Secretary of State as he may determine:"

(5) In subsection (5) for the word "Director" in each place where it occurs there shall be substituted the words "Secretary of State".'.

New clause 49—*Water Industry Act 1991 (duties of customer services committees)*—

'—. (1) Section 29 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (duties of customer services committees) shall be amended as follows.

(2) The following paragraph shall be inserted after paragraph (c) of subsection (1)—
"and
(d) to advise the Secretary of State or as the case may be, the Director on any such matter as the committee considers appropriate.".

(3) In subsection (2) the words "Subject to subsection (3) below," shall cease to have effect.

(4) In subsection (3) for "refer to the Director" there shall be substituted "investigate".

(5) Subsections (4) to (6) shall cease to have effect.

(6) The following subsections shall be inserted after subsection (3)—

"(3A) Where under an investigation of a complaint under this section any matter appears to the committee to be a matter falling under paragraphs (a) or (b) of subsection (3) above the committee may prepare a written report on that matter and shall (subject to section ( ) below) send a copy of any such report to—
(a) any person to whom the report refers or who (whether or not he has made a representation to the committee) appears to the committee to have an interest in the matter to which the report relates;
(b) the Director General of Fair Trading or any person whose functions under any enactment appear to the committee to be exercisable in relation to that matter;
(c) any person who appears to the committee to be a person who ought to take account of the report in determining how to act in relation to that matter;
(d) the Director.

(6B) In reporting on a matter under subsection (6A), the committee may recommend—
(a) that the matter be reconsidered by the company concerned;
(b) that the Director consider exercising any of his functions under this Part.

(6C) More than one recommendation may be included in a report under this section.

(6D) Where the committee includes any recommendation in a report under this section, the report shall give the committee's reasons for making the recommendation.

(6F) Where—
(a) a report is sent to any company under subsection (6A) above; and
(b) the report includes a recommendation directed to that company,
the company shall have regard to it and notify the committee of the action which it has taken, or proposes to take, to comply with the recommendation.

(6G) Where a company fails to comply (whether wholly or partly) with a recommendation under subsection (6B) above the committee shall refer the matter to the Director.".'.

New clause 50—*Water Act 1991 (Other functions of consumer services committees)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Water Industry Act 1991, after section 29—

"*Other functions of consumer service committees.*

29A.—(1) Every consumer committee shall, as soon as practicable after the end of each calendar year, make to the Director and to the Secretary of State a report on its activities during that year.

(2) Each report shall include a statement of the matters on which, during the year to which it relates, the committee has advised the Secretary of State or the Director under section 29 above.

(3) The committee shall arrange for every such report to be published in such a manner as it considers appropriate.

(4) In making any such report, the committee shall have regard to the need for excluding, so far as that is practicable—
(a) any matter which relates to the affairs of an individual where the publication of that matter would or might in the opinion of the committee, seriously and prejudicially affect the interests of that individual; and
(b) any matter which relates specifically to the affairs of a particular body of persons, whether corporate or unincorporate, where publication of that matter

would or might, in the opinion of the Committee, seriously and prejudicially affect the interests of that body.".'.

New clause 51—*Water Act 1991 (Information by directors)*—

'The following section shall be inserted in the Water Industry Act 1991, after section 41—

"*Information.*

41A.— The Director shall give information collected by or furnished to him under section 38A above to the customer service committee allocated to the company concerned, with a view to facilitating the exercise of the committee's functions under this Part.".'.

New clause 52—*Water Industry Act 1991 (customer service committees) (No. 2)*—

'For Schedule 4 of the Water Industry Act 1991 there shall be substituted—

"SCHEDULE 2

CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEES

1. A customer service committee shall not be regarded as a servant or agent of the Crown or as enjoying any status, immunity or privilege of the Crown.

2. A customer service committee may pay to any member such sums, whether by way of remuneration or otherwise, as the Secretary of State may with the approval of the Treasury determine.

3. (1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2) below, a customer services committee may, with the approval of the Secretary of State as to numbers and terms and conditions of service, appoint such staff as it may determine.

(2) A customer services committee shall not appoint a person to act as principal officer of the committee except after consultation with the Secretary of State.

(3) For the purpose of ensuring that there are persons available in particular localities of its functions under this Act, a customer services committee may, without any such approval as is required by sub-paragraph (1) above, appoint such persons to be so available as it may determine.

(4) Persons appointed under sub-paragraph (3) above shall not be paid any sums by the committee for or in respect of their services except sums reimbursing them for their travelling expenses and such of their other out-of-pocket expenses as do not relate to loss of remuneration.

(5) The consent of the Treasury shall be required for the giving by the Secretary of State of an approval for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1) above.

4. A customer services committee shall have power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is incidental or conducive to, the performance of any of its functions under this Act.

5. It shall be the duty of a customer services committee to comply with any notice given by the Secretary of State with the approval of the Treasury requiring it to perform duties of a financial nature specified in the notice.

6. The Secretary of State may, to such extent as may be approved by the Treasury, defray or contribute towards the expenses of the Council.

7. Any sums required by the Secretary of State for the purposes of paragraph 6 above shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament.

8. In the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 in Part II of Schedule 1 (bodies of which all members are disqualified) there shall be inserted (at the appropriate place) the following entry—

"A Customer Services Committee",

and the like insertion shall be made in Part II of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975.".'.

The following amendments: No. 50:

'The following Schedule shall be inserted in the Telecommunications Act—

"TELECOMMUNICATIONS CONSUMERS' COUNCIL.

1. The Council shall not be regarded as a servant or agent of the Crown or as enjoying any status, immunity or privilege of the Crown.

2. The Council may pay to any member such sums, whether by way of remuneration or otherwise, as the Secretary of State may with the approval of the Treasury determine.

3.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2) below, the Council may, with the approval of the Secretary of State as to numbers and terms and conditions of service, appoint such staff as it may determine.

(2) The Council shall not appoint a person to act as principal officer of the Council except after consultation with the Secretary of State.

(3) For the purpose of ensuring that there are persons available in particular localities of its functions under this Act, the Council may, without any such approval as is required by sub-paragraph (1) above, appoint such persons to be so available as it may determine.

(4) Persons appointed under sub-paragraph (3) above shall not be paid any sums by the Council for or in respect of their services except sums reimbursing them for their travelling expenses and such of their other out-of-pocket expenses as do not relate to loss of remuneration.

(5) The consent of the Treasury shall be required for the giving by the Secretary of State of an approval for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1) above.

4. The Council shall have power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is incidental or conducive to, the performance of any of its functions under this Act.

5. It shall be the duty of the Council to comply with any notice given by the Secretary of State with the approval of the Treasury requiring it to perform duties of a financial nature specified in the notice.

6. The Secretary of State may, to such extent as may be approved by the Treasury, defray or contribute towards the expenses of the Council.

7. Any sums required by the Secretary of State for the purposes of paragraph 6 above shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament.

8. In the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 in Part II of Schedule 1 (bodies of which all members are disqualified) there shall be inserted (at the appropriate place) the following entry—

'The Telecommunications Consumers' Council',

and the like insertion shall be made in Part II of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975.".'.

No. 51, new schedule—*'Electricity Consumers' Council (Staff Etc.)*—

1. The Council shall not be regarded as a servant or agent of the Crown or as enjoying any status, immunity or privilege of the Crown.

2. The Council may pay to any member such sums, whether by way of remuneration or otherwise, as the Secretary of State may with the approval of the Treasury determine.

3.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2) below, the Council may, with the approval of the Secretary of State as to numbers and terms and conditions of service, appoint such staff as it may determine.

(2) The Council shall not appoint a person to act as principal officer of the Council except after consultation with the Secretary of State.

(3) For the purpose of ensuring that there are persons available in particular localities of its functions under

this Act, the Council may, without any such approval as is required by sub-paragraph (a) above, appoint such persons to be so available as it may determine.

(4) Persons appointed under sub-paragraph (3) above shall not be paid any sums by the Council for or in respect of their services except sums reimbursing them for their travelling expenses and such of their other out-of-pocket expenses as do not relate to loss of remuneration.

(5) The consent of the Treasury shall be required for the giving by the Secretary of State of an approval for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1) above.

4. The Council shall have power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is incidental or conducive to, the performance of any of its functions under this Act.

5. It shall be the duty of the Council to comply with any notice given by the Secretary of State with the approval of the Treasury requiring it to perform duties of a financial nature specified in the notice.

6. The Secretary of State may, to such extent as may be approved by the Treasury, defray or contribute towards the expenses of the Council.

7. Any sums required by the Secretary of State for the purposes of paragraph 6 above shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament.

8. In the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 in Part II of Schedule 1 (bodies of which all members are disqualified) there shall be inserted (at the appropriate place) the following entry—

"The Electricity Consumers' Council";

and the like insertion shall be made in Part II of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975.'.

Mr. Redwood: The new powers to set standards and resolve disputes rest with the director general, but the Gas Consumers Council shares with Ofgas the responsibility for sorting out consumer complaints about British Gas. This new clause provides the framework to accommodate their special position, something which the Standing Committee that considered the Bill was keen to see. It will allow the Gas Consumers Council to carry out investigations of complaints that come to it, while ensuring that the customer is informed of his entitlement to have the dispute resolved by the director general.

Opposition proposals in their new clauses would complicate the position considerably. They amount to a vote of no confidence in the director general and a vote for confusion over the duties and responsibilities of the different bodies. I urge the House to reject the Opposition new clauses.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): That was a very disappointing speech from the Minister. I am sorry that he seems oblivious to the large volume of complaints that he knows about because he has had more than one report on them—complaints that emanate from every part of the country and concern every utility. The commonest complaint from constituents, from the public, from the users, is that the utilities that were formerly public service companies have now become monopolies within the private sector. Regulation has failed and we would not be debating these clause if the earlier Act had not failed properly to protect the users of these utilities.

Nowhere is that failure more apparent than in the volume of complaints which the House is aware of. The Gas Consumers Council, for instance, has dealt with more than 125,000 complaints since it was established under the Gas Act 1986. It has answered 400,000 inquiries. It has had to deal through its regional offices with problems of billing, of service and of supply.

In the other sectors, about which the Minister has again had adequate information, the figures are equally shocking. In telecommunications there have been nearly 40,000 complaints in England and almost 50,000 complaints up and down the country, and that does not include the half a million complaints which have been received about billing disputes, most of which remain unresolved; this is the single biggest area of consumer dissatisfaction when it comes to unresolved complaints. There were more than 10,000 complaints about electricity and more than 4,500 complaints about water.

One may suspect, with considerable justification, that it is because of the inability—demonstrated by the utility, the regulator and certainly by the Secretary of State and his Department—to tackle those complaints effectively that there have not been many more complaints. There can be little doubt that people feel that it is hardly worth while complaining about water and electricity.

Nothing demonstrates that more than the electricity price increase forced on more than 22·5 million customers last year. At the beginning of 1991 the electricity operators began submissions to the regulator, advising that there would be an increase well above inflation. In spite of the fact that the Secretary of State, in February, stated his unhappiness with the expected size of the increase, and that the regulator was well aware of the planned price increase, it was approved. An increase of 10·6 per cent. was foisted on customers on 1 April when 6·4 per cent. was more in line with the RPI.

What happened then? We can judge how ineffective the regulator was in standing up for the consumer by the fact that by October the electricity companies had merely been asked what they were going to do about bringing their prices down towards the RPI figure of 6·4 per cent. In effect, the regulator was snubbed by them. The increased charges have been imposed for the past 10 months. Since October, the companies have done nothing except overcharge their customers.

I am grateful to Mr. Littlechild's department—the Office of Electricity Regulation—for giving me the figures. The rate of overcharging is staggering. OFFER told me today that Eastern Electricity was overcharging by 1·5 per cent. That does not seem much, but it amounts to £25 million. The Merseyside and North-Western electricity board is overcharging by 0·5 per cent., according to OFFER, which amounts to £2·5 million. Northern Electric has been overcharging by 2 per cent., which puts £12 million into its pockets. Southern Electricity has gained £17 million from overcharging, according to OFFER. The South Western electricity board has gained £10 million and Yorkshire Electricity has gained £7 million. That makes a staggering total of £93·5 million for overcharging electricity customers. Meanwhile, the Minister and the Secretary of State sat and did nothing and the regulator was powerless to act.

That is the Government's record on representing the consumer. It is shocking that the Minister should come to the House and dismiss so casually the merits of these excellent amendments.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Does my hon. Friend have the figures for NORWEB, which have been causing considerable problems for consumers in its area and have resulted in many letters to local papers, especially in Tory marginal constituencies?

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I missed NORWEB. To put the matter beyond doubt, the level of overcharging by that company was the highest in the country and netted it £20 million. My hon. Friend is assiduous in ensuring that such abuses are highlighted and in defending his constituents. He certainly speaks eloquently for the concerns of Opposition Members.

New clauses, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 and their effect on the Gas Act 1986, the Electricity Act 1989, the Telecommunications Act 1984 and the Water Industry Act 1991, will bring considerable advantage to consumers.

Let us consider why we are faced with the problems of overcharging and the high number of complaints.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the main purposes of the Bill is to give director generals the necessary power to resolve the complaints and to take fully into account customer interest? Does he agree that his amendments do not help? The amendments say that customer complaints should go to the Secretary of State, but they do not give the Secretary of State power to override the director general and to determine the complaint. Surely it is better that the complaint be determined by the person who has the power—the person who receives the customer complaint.

4.30 pm

Mr. Griffiths: The Minister has been in office since 1987 and is obviously a fast learner. We put down a reasoned amendment because we support the principle of the Bill, as we have made clear. The Minister seems surprised at that. If he reads the Second Reading debate, he will see that that was made clear to the House. Indeed, we support the principle to such an extent that I am only echoing what we said when the individual measures were going through the House earlier in the 1980s. It is the failure of those measures to take account of what Labour was saying at that stage which has necessitated the new legislation.

The saddest thing is that the Minister is prepared to go only halfway to meet the challenge that faces the industries in addressing consumer grievances. He is still over-concerned about the profits that the businesses were making. He is over-concerned to make sure that the directors are protected so that they can pay themselves what they want and can take whatever boardroom perks they want at the expense of the consumer. That will be the subject of further debate later.

The powers in the previous legislation were too lax to protect consumers. The powers in this Bill, sadly, are also lax. The Minister seems pleased about what has been happening and is willing to defend it. If we consider each area individually, we shall see why the new clause is necessary to address the problem of the ineffective consumer committees. We also propose a cut in the number of consumer committees from approximately 190 —most of which are ineffective—to about 50 effective committees which will have tough powers to represent users.

In electricity there are 14 regional consumer committees, with one for each electricity company. They are funded via the licence fee. The members and the chairman of the regional committees are not independent of the regulator and the industry. They are hired and fired by the regulator. That is the main reason for our opposition to the present set-up.

The regulator has a distinct role as an economic regulator. That is very different from the role of consumer advocate. In many areas the blurring between the role of the regulator and the dependence of the consumer committees on the regulator have caused them to be so ineffective.

An indication of the dependence of the committees on the regulator is given in a brochure issued by one electricity consumer committee. It says that OFFER provides each committee with secretariat support. The committee secretary is a member of OFFER's staff. OFFER also provides each committee with its finances and its accommodation. The committees in England and Wales are based at OFFER's regional offices and those in Scotland are in OFFER's Scottish headquarters. That close link could have worked to the benefit of the consumer, but clearly it has failed the consumer. The reason is that the consumer committees have too often been toothless watchdogs, unable to command the information which new clause 27 addresses.

The structure for water is similar. There are 10 regional consumer service committees covering the various sewerage areas. The regulator appoints the chairmen, Ofwat—the Office of Water Services—provides the secretariat and, as with electricity, the chairmen of those committees comprise a national consumer committee which is chaired by the regulator. It is all far too cosy.

Only when we examine telecommunications, the area which generates the greatest number of complaints, do we see how ineffective is the present absurd structure established by the Government. There are four national advisory committees. They were set up specifically to be advisory bodies rather than user councils. An indication of their status can be gleaned from examining the submission of the English committee to Oftel's latest financial report. It expresses its gratitude to the Office of Telecommunications,

"without whose support, the functions of an Act would be impossible to carry out."

One can bet that to be the case, with the use of its offices, its secretariat and, most important, being dependent on it for its membership.

Another fact has come as a surprise to several hon. Members with whom I discussed the matter earlier today. There are about 150 telecommunications advisory committees throughout the country. Earlier today, my research assistant telephoned directory inquiries for the telephone number of the telecom advisory committee for the Edinburgh area. The telephone operator told my researcher, "My screen says, 'See Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Scotland' but when I key that, nothing comes up. I will refer you to a supervisor." A little later the supervisor said, "I am searching for you. Nothing is coming up. May I take your number and call you back?" I am still waiting for the return call.

In other words, we have, covering telecommunications, 150 advisory committees, the telephone numbers for which are apparently not in the telephone directory, and directory inquiries knows little, if anything, about them. It seems odd that, when a member of the public tries to contact one of the committees, its telephone number is not available. I will willingly give way to the Minister now if he can put forward any defence of those 150 telecommunications advisory committees. Nothing could be more indicative of the ineffectiveness of the Government's lapdog consumer representation than those advisory

committees. It is time that we had tough, effective committees representing consumers. That is what we are demanding today.

The new clauses have considerable importance. For example, new clause 24 would impose a clear duty on the Secretary of State to appoint members with appropriate expertise to the Gas Consumers Council and the other consumer councils. Lest my remarks about the Gas Consumers Council are misconstrued, I hasten to put on record my gratitude for the work done by that council and its staff. We want the powers of the other consumer councils brought up to the levels enjoyed by the Gas Consumers Council.

So the first aim of the new clause is to ensure that the structure of the consumer councils is similar to that which the Gas Consumers Council has enjoyed. The Gas Consumers Council is special, because it is completely separate from the regulator and is not dependent on the regulator for any form of patronage or secretariat. That separation is critical, because the job of the regulator is not simply to look after the Minister's and wider interests but to examine the interests of the business, as is right and proper. The consumer councils, however, have the job of championing the consumer. That is the model that we are seeking to embrace. We want to see the Gas Consumers Council as the model for all the utilities, with five key enhancements.

New clause 24 would ensure that consumer councils had people with the appropriate expertise—not necessarily as members but certainly as consultants and advisers. There can be little doubt that any consumer body, if it is to be effective, must have access to expertise.

That is something which new clause 24 would establish. Sadly, given the Minister's introductory remarks, as well as some of the comments that peppered the Committee stage debate and his previous speeches and writings on this matter, it is hardly surprising that he is not too keen to give consumers more effective access to information and expertise.

That, after all, is what puts pressure on business to justify its decisions. New clause 24 would give the consumer councils the weaponry to ensure that they were staffed with people who had an understanding not only of consumer affairs—vital though that is—but of how industry works. In terms of expertise, they would be on the same footing as both the regulator and the industry itself. They would not necessarily have the multi-million-pound back-up that business has, but at least they would be on the first rung of the ladder.

New clause 25 would empower the Gas Consumers Council, and the subsequent new clauses would empower the other consumer councils, to deal with enforcement matters. It is a matter of some concern that issues relating to licence conditions are currently outwith the remit of the Gas Consumers Council and, of course, none of the other consumer bodies or committees come close to dealing with that matter. We want to make sure that the consumer has access to the material that determines licensing and the licence conditions so that we may have someone to speak for consumers when a licence is being considered. There should be provision for vetting and for the structure to be considered with some expertise. The regulator is more neutral in this matter, and we need someone to champion the interests of consumers.

New clause 26 would give the consumer councils power, in dealing with an enforcement matter, to draw up a report and make recommendations. We should like to see such a report sent to the regulator and, where appropriate, to the Office of Fair Trading, which plays a critical part in vetting business and in ensuring fair and proper business practice. Under this new clause, the utility would have to have regard to the report, and if it should fail to comply with the recommendations the consumer council would have to refer the matter to the regulator. We realise that the regulator would still have the last say in determining the outcome of a complaint, but the process would be much more open, and the consumer council would have much better access to the information, which at present is held by the regulator as the referee and by the utility itself as one of the major players.

To enhance that openness we need new clause 28, which would give the consumer councils the same access to raw data on the utility performance levels as the regulator has. It is critical that business should not be able to stand behind bogus and unsustainable claims of commercial confidentiality and that it should be compelled to provide the consumer bodies and others representing the consumers with information about how decisions are taken. Too often the regulators have been over-defensive and over-protective of their information. In this regard, I think that the Minister has accepted their defence. We all know of officials, whether in the private or the public sector, who are afraid to give up information. That is being overcome gradually. Once it has been overcome, businesses, councils and other bodies wonder why they were ever so secretive.

New clause 28 would give a further push in that direction, a further impetus to ensuring that data that might be used very effectively were made available. Of course, the Gas Consumers Council has been very effective in getting data —one way or another. It has been able to influence decisions because it has information. Over the past six years, one of its greatest achievements has been its campaign against disconnections. In 1988, the number was between 60,000 and 80,000; thanks to the gas consumers' pressure on Ofgas, on the basis of information that they collected through their regional offices, it is now below 20,000.

4.45 pm

I want to refer to something that may be a fear of the Minister and of those who think that individuals are the only consumers. Business consumers are often the biggest spenders and often stand to lose the most. We are very keen to see that they too are protected. The Gas Consumers Council brought about the change in British Gas's contract market to protect businesses. All the consumer councils established by the next Labour Government will be effective not just for the domestic consumer but for the business consumer. It will be remembered that the Gas Consumers Council referred British Gas to the Office of Fair Trading, with a recommendation that there should be a referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. We know that; as a direct consequence of that, the contract matter became subject to regulation. Even where only limited information has been available, the Gas Consumers Council has been able to secure great benefits not just for the domestic consumer but also for the business consumer.

The sad thing is that, because the other advisory committees have been hamstrung in the way that I outlined, they have not been able to act in the same limited but effective way as the Gas Consumers Council. How

many disconnection abuse cases have not been properly addressed because the consumer bodies lack proper resources and proper independence? How many businesses have been paying too much because of the absence of a body like the Gas Consumers Council to champion their interests?

I do not understand why the Minister does not accept the thrust of this argument. Surely it is beyond party political dispute that, in the 1990s, we want consumer bodies that are as effective as possible, but the Government have been plagued by narrow dogma for the past 13 years, and the dogma is as alive and well today as it has been at any time during those years. The Government have been in favour of deregulation and have been intent on watering down consumer representation and on making sure that business is free to do very much what it wants.

With new clause 27, we want to make sure that the consumer committees are able to go directly to where the buck stops—to the Secretary of State—rather than through the regulator, as at present. It is ludicrous that a consumer committee should not have direct access to the Secretary of State. We all know that if a utility wants to speak to him, the Secretary of State—certainly in the case of the present Government—will trot down the road to meet it rather than expect it to come and see him. The importance of these five new clauses—the importance of extending the powers of the Gas Consumers Council and bringing all the other consumer bodies up to the strength of that council—cannot be overstressed.

It is important that any money that is spent at present is spent effectively. I want to know from the Minister how much is spent on the current consumer bodies—electricity, the National Consumers' Consultative Council and its 14 regional committees, the 10 water committees, the four Telecom national advisory committees—and I hope that he will be able to answer my question today. I should like to know, in particular, the budget for the 150 telecommunications advisory committees. We know, of course, that the budget for the 12 gas consumer committees is around £2 million. I want to see those 190 bodies, only one of which has been really effective, cut to around 50 on a regional basis, all of them with enhanced powers, championing the consumers' point of view, and making sure that the absurd and quite unjustifiable increases that have been forced on so many people are not perpetuated.

One of the problems that have to be addressed is the composition of these committees. If the past 13 years have taught us anything about quangos, it is that Tory quangos really are Tory quangos. The packing of these committees too often with defeated or failed Conservative party members is common. My predecessor as the Member for Edinburgh, South is a case in point. I will write to the Minister giving a list of the quangos that he was put on after he lost the Edinburgh, South seat. I am sure that my hon. Friends who were triumphant in the last election will act similarly.

This is the important message that I want to deliver. It is not that we will reverse what the Government have done with a mirror image. In the 1970s, it was noticeable that consumer committees and other quangos were much more balanced and had representatives of all parties and of no party. I want to see on the new consumer consultative committees people who, irrespective of party, know and care about consumers and do not have to carry a Tory party card, as they often do now when appointed to these committees, and certainly to the higher salaried levels. That is one of the reasons why these bodies have been so ineffective.

We need consumer committees that truly represent consumers. That is why, in new clauses and amendments, we have suggested ways of democratising, which I am sorry that the Minister has not been able to take on board.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Gentleman that it is necessary to have wide representation on consumer committees. However, at least in Wales, the Labour party had as bad a reputation as the present Government for putting its party members on to quangos. Will he confirm that the Labour party is committed to advertising places on consumer committees so that the widest possible range of applications can be received? Does he agree that that is the fair way of doing it?

Mr. Griffiths: I certainly have no objection at all to making sure that the widest possible publicity is given to the posts, and I have no objection in principle to advertising. However, I take deep exception to the hon. and learned Gentleman's earlier comment. We know from the speech that he made to trading standard officers how his thinking goes. He wishes to centralise everything—to make sure that everything is brought into the centre, that responsibility for trading standards is removed from local councils and brought to the centre. I wonder what malevolent purpose lurks there. I do not want to provoke the hon. and learned Gentleman——

Mr. Carlile: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has ascribed to me a malevolent purpose, which is a personal slight on me, on an issue with which, with respect, the structure of trading standards authorities has nothing whatsoever to do. Surely the hon. Gentleman should be required to withdraw his assertion that I have a malevolent purpose and to apologise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I think that the hon. Gentleman was momentarily diverted from what is in order in the debate.

Mr. Griffiths: I accept your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

When the hon. and learned Gentleman interrupted me with what I thought was a fairly irrelevant and malicious intervention, I was drawing my remarks to a close by saying that there is a commitment on our part to ensure that consumers are adequately represented, as they are not at present, and that the widest possible membership is sought.

As I have said, I have no objection to the principle of advertising these posts. Indeed, if the hon. and learned Gentleman was in the Standing Committee when I raised the possibility of elections to these committees, he knows that that was not ruled out. Indeed, I was canvassing that pretty strongly myself in a probing amendment. So I am not prepared to take lectures from the hon. and learned Gentleman about the structure of such bodies. I believe that we are at one in wanting to ensure that there is much wider representation than at present and that we have effective bodies.

It is in that spirit that I commend the new clauses.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman said that his researcher had had trouble finding the telephone number

of the Scottish TAC. My inquisitiveness has managed to get the reply very promptly. He may like to know that the number is 031—for those dialling from outside Edinburgh —244 5576. I cannot understand why his researcher went for such a long lunch that he could not find it.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, is clearly that when the Minister's civil servants telephoned, it was fresh in their memories because they had just spent three hours finding it.

Mr. Redwood: That was a very pathetic attempt to recover the position. There is no secret, as far as I am concerned, about these numbers and I am very happy to advertise this one today through the usual channel of *Hansard* in this debate which is being so intently listened to by so many hon. Members.

The hon. Gentleman implied that appointments were made throughout the system of representation entirely by director-generals. He should note that the chairmen and members of the four national advisory committees of Telecom are appointed by the Secretary of State. So there is more distinction in those appointments than he was suggesting.

I was not enchanted by the hon. Gentleman's idea of going back to the golden era of the 1970s, the winter of discontent and justice in appointments to all bodies. It did not seem to me to have the ring of truth about it, any more than it did to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile).

Mr. Alex Carlile: This is a winter of discontent for the Labour party.

Mr. Redwood: I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman is right in that intervention from a sedentary position. Also, Labour has not enjoyed comments on its tax proposals, but those are not relevant to this debate.

The main contention of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) is that there should be a clear distinction between the customer committees and the regulator. That is where I beg to differ and where I hope that the House will agree with the Government. In order to have effective regulation, there has to be one person or one body that can make the decisions, that can settle the complaints in the interest of either the customer or the business, based upon a fair judgment of the legitimacy of those complaints.

The great weakness in the Opposition new clauses—I suspect that they were not drafted by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen but were drafted elsewhere—is that in the end——

Mr. Griffiths: What about Government amendments?

Mr. Redwood: Government amendments are, of course, approved by and in part drafted by Ministers, who are entirely responsible for them and have taken an active part in their drafting. The hon. Gentleman does not know how government works; it is so long since his party has been in government. Little does he know how much attention these amendments get from Ministers.

The Opposition new clauses suggest that the regulator should still be the only person in the system with the power to determine disputes, so although the hon. Gentleman tries to make out that there is a big divide between us, in practice we seem to agree on the important thing—that only one body or person can settle those disputes and that person or body should be the regulator in each case. The hon. Gentleman did not answer my intervention on that point, and I think that he now accepts that there is no difference between us on that crucial matter.

The hon. Gentleman's new clauses would create far more confusion in the system. They would disrupt existing boundaries between the consumer bodies and the director generals. They would try to shift the balance and would give the consumer bodies a more advisory power, but they, would have no power to deliver that, so they might increase the tensions and boundary disputes within the system, rather than help the proper and prompt settlement of disputes by the director general.

5 pm

If Labour Members have no confidence in the directors general, they should say so and be honest in their criticisms. They should say why they think a particular director general is falling down on his task and should come forward with their own recommendations on how it could be done better. I think that we are well served by the current directors general and, with the strength and powers in the Bill to settle customer disputes, in all cases with the force of law behind them, they will provide an even better service, as the Opposition and the Government want.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South says that he has been reading my speeches and writings, but he has not been doing so very attentively or he would know that I have often insisted on the primacy of a customer interest. One of my main criticisms of the performance of the nationalised industries under Labour and Liberal Administrations in the past is that they were too negligent of customer interests, and that customer interests needed to be promoted in the order of priorities. That is exactly what a policy of competition does. Under a competitive system, customers are put first because everyone wants to win their business. Under the system of regulation that we have laid out in recent years and which the Bill now strengthens, customer interest is a driving force for better quality, prices and service from businesses.

One of the new clauses proposed by the Opposition seeks to change the balance of representation on the Gas Consumers Council. It says that that council should consist of people with direct practical experience of the industry's activities. I suspect that, again, the Labour party has not done its homework, for if it had, it would see that three members of the Gas Consumers Council have direct practical and professional experience in the areas which Labour Members say should be represented on that council. One is an engineering consultant with a lifetime's experience of fuel issues and two are currently in business in the commercial sector as fuel purchasing managers, with exactly the detailed knowledge and experience which Labour Members say should be available to the council.

Therefore, we do not need the new clauses, because it is clear that current practice takes into account the need for the right kind of expertise on that body, and it already works perfectly well. The right clarifications that the Bill needs to settle the boundary lines between the Gas Consumers Council and the regulator are those in the Government new clause. I commend our new clause to the House and urge hon. Members to reject the other new clauses.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 13

THE DOMESTIC SUPPLY DUTY

'. In section 52 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (the domestic supply duty), in subsection (2), the words "and which are situated in the area of the undertaker" shall cease to have effect.'—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Redwood: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: Government new clause 22—*Transitional provision with respect to replacement appointments.*—

Government amendments Nos. 24, 47, 25, 26, 30, 33, and 41 to 45.

Mr. Redwood: The clauses dealing with competition in water services were the subject of a public consultation undertaken by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office just before the Bill's publication last November. Those who commented during the consultation generally welcomed the increased scope for competition but many considered that the proposals were still too restrictive and suggested modifications. As a result, we have now brought forward—as I said we would in Committee—amendments to give still greater encouragement to competition. Those amendments are along the lines that I outlined to the Committee.

Part of this group of amendments—new clause 13 and amendments Nos. 25, 26, 43 and 45—will ensure that water and sewerage undertakers must allow any prospective customers to connect a service pipe to their water mains or a drain to their public sewers, whether or not those customers are in the area for which the undertaker is appointed.

Initially at least, the new right is likely to be used mainly by prospective customers close to the border of their appointed undertaker, who may be nearer to the neighbouring undertaker's mains or sewers than to those of the local company. As inset appointments are made, the practical opportunities for connecting to another undertaker are likely to increase, giving more choice to more customers.

The customer will continue to be responsible for providing the service pipe or drain from his premises and meeting the cost of making the connection to the undertaker's main or sewer. Commercial agreements could vary that practice.

Amendments Nos. 24, 30, 33 and 44 will replace the arrangements at present in clauses 38 and 39 with provision for companies to be given an inset appointment to serve a single large customer. A large customer is defined as one using more than 250 megalitres of water a year. There is provision for the Secretary of State to reduce that threshold, after consulting the director. Applications for inset appointments are subject to procedures laid down under section 8 of the Water Industry Act. They require applications to be published within 14 days of being made and will thus adopt the suggestion of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) for meeting the concerns raised by some hon. Members in Committee about the length of the consultation period on proposed appointments to serve large customers.

There are also necessary consequential amendments. Those include transitional provisions in new clause 22 to cover the period between an appointment being made and its coming into force; provisions in amendment No. 47 to ensure that the necessary pipe-laying powers are available where an inset appointment is to serve a single large customer; and requirements for the NRA, which is responsible for water resources, to be kept informed of applications for inset appointments.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): As the Minister rightly points out, he gave undertakings in Committee that the Government would attempt to widen competition possibilities. The amendments certainly do that, but only in theory. Practice will show that the amount of competition will be at the margins of the existing water company areas because of the infrastructure costs of moving a great distance into another water company area, and even the need to create extra water capacity that does not exist in many areas. About three water companies have enough spare capacity to consider competing with other water undertakers, and it is highly unlikely that anything will happen in practice. The proposals to extend competition are simply a fig leaf for the privatised monopoly that will still exist in the form of the water companies.

We shall not vote against the amendments because, if we find that they come to something, all well and good, but the public should not be fooled by the idea that competition in the supply of water or sewerage services will be significantly increased. The existing companies simply do not have the capacity to become involved in a big way.

I raised the following question in Committee and was not absolutely satisfied by the Minister's answer. In a period of drought, with the water company having made commitments outside its area, will the companies within its area take precedence in terms of supply or will they suffer because of contractual commitments made by the water company outside its area?

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's grudging assent to the proposals. We must wait and see what develops. They are methods by which competition can develop and spread in the industry, and we welcome them for that reason. Fig leaves can be becoming and may turn out to be rather larger and more becoming than the hon. Gentleman suggested. The proposals also include ways in which competition could be further strengthened as in the case of the 250-megalitre limit which can be reviewed when we have seen how it develops. That will provide a way to vary the current practice under the proposed legislation when the Government and the director general think it right to do so.

I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave the hon. Gentleman in Committee about what happens when there is a scarcity of water, other than to remind him that the legislation requires the water companies to maintain supplies. Of course, there are ways in which water rationing can be introduced for non-essential uses in good time so that fundamental supply is not interrupted.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 22

TRANSITIONAL PROVISION WITH RESPECT TO REPLACEMENT APPOINTMENTS

' . The provisions of section 10 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (transitional provision with respect to replacement appointments) shall become subsection (1) of that section and the following subsections shall be added at the end—

"(2) Subsections (3) and (4) below apply where, by such an appointment or variation, one company ('the new undertaker') is to replace another company as a relevant undertaker, but the appointment or variation has not come into force.

(3) The following provisions of this Act shall (except where they are inapplicable to the kind of undertaker in question) apply in relation to the new undertaker as if the appointment or variation had come into force—

(a) sections 18 to 24 and Schedule 3;
(b) sections 32 to 35;
(c) section 155 and Schedule 9;
(d) sections 156, 158 to 161 and 163 to 167 and Schedule 11;
(e) sections 168 to 171, 173, 174, 178 to 180 and Schedule 12;
(f) sections 181 to 183 and Schedule 13;
(g) sections 184 to 188 and Schedule 14;
(h) sections 189 to 192, 197 to 200, 202, 203, 206, 208, 209, 211, 212 and 217.

(4) Such of the conditions imposed on the new undertaker under section 11 below as the Director may specify in a written notice given by him to the undertaker shall have effect, in relation to the operation of any provision mentioned in subsection (3) above before the appointment or variation comes into force, as if the appointment or variation had come into force.

(5) The Secretary of State may by regulations amend subsection (3) above by adding to, removing or modifying references to provisions of this Act.".'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 23

CONDITIONS FOR CONNECTIONS WITH WATER MAINS AND FOR SUPPLIES OF WATER

' .—(1) Section 47 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (conditions of connection with water main) shall be amended as set out in subsections (2) to (4).

(2) In subsection (2)(b)(ii), after "expenses" there shall be inserted "reasonably".

(3) After subsection (2) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2A) No condition shall be imposed by a water undertaker under subsection (2)(e) above unless the undertaker would have difficulty in discharging its statutory obligations, in relation to the supply of water to the relevant premises or any part of those premises, if the condition were not imposed.

(4) After subsection (3) there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(3A) Any dispute as to whether any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2)(a), (b), (e) or (f) above has been complied with may be referred to the Director for determination under section 30A above by either party to the dispute.

(3B) Any dispute between a water undertaker and any other person as to whether—

(a) any security required by a condition imposed under subsection (2)(a) above was reasonably required,
(b) the expenses referred to in subsection (2)(b)(ii) above were incurred reasonably, or
(c) in a particular case, subsection (2A) above prevents a water undertaker from imposing a condition under subsection (2)(e) above,

may be referred to the Director for determination under section 30A above by either party to the dispute."

(5) In section 53 of the Act of 1991 (conditions of compliance with domestic supply duty), in subsection (2)(a)(ii), after "expenses" there shall be inserted "reasonably" and after subsection (2) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2A) Any dispute between a water undertaker and any other person as to whether the expenses referred to in subsection (2)(a)(ii) above were incurred reasonably may be referred to the Director for determination under section 30A above by either party to the dispute.".'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take Government amendment No.46.

Mr. Redwood: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Section 47 of the Water Industry Act 1991 allows a water undertaker to require customers to meet certain conditions before the undertaker has to carry out its duty to connect a customer to its water main and to provide a supply of water for domestic purposes. In some cases there may be room for dispute about whether it is reasonable for undertakers to impose a particular requirement. New clause 23 limits the circumstances in which an undertaker can require separate service pipes and the costs of disconnection that it can recoup from the customer. It also provides for disputes about certain of the requirements which can be imposed to be referred to the director for determination. The new clause also includes the provision of clause 31(4) which is deleted by amendment No.46. I commend the new clause to the House.

Question put and agreed to. Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

PRICE RÉGIME

'Having determined the standards of overall performance under 27B(a) above, the director will give due regard to the price régime which he approves to assess whether that price régime is appropriate in relation to the provison of the standards of overall performance and the level of remuneration received by the directors and senior managers; and the Director will require the operator to change that price régime to one which is commensurate with the standards of overall performance which are met and the cost structure of the operator in meeting those targets.'—*[Mr. Henderson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take the following: New clause 7—*Energy efficiency objectives*—

'.—The Director shall give due regard in the price regime which he approves to the achievement of standards of overall efficiency in the performance of the electricity companies in their duties to meet consumers' needs, and in particular the contribution made in achieving energy efficiency objectives laid down in section 3 of the Electricity Act 1989.'.

New clause 54—*Prohibition of late payment penalty charges by electricity companies*—

'.—The following subsection shall be inserted after subsection (3) of section 18 of the Electricity Act 1989—

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

"(3A) A domestic tariff fixed by a public electric supplier shall not include provision for any additional charge upon any person solely because of delay by that person in paying monies due in respect of supply".

5.15 pm

Mr. Henderson: It might be helpful if I were to explain the contents of the new clause. New clause 1 provides that, where a regulator is empowered to set standards within an industry, he must take some account of the prices charged. I hope that the House accepts that there is a clear relationship between the provision of standards and the price that a consumer or customer might have to pay. Most of my remarks will deal with new clause 1. I had hoped that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) might be able to comment on new clause 7 and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) will comment on new clause 54.

In many ways, new clause 1 is important because it relates in principle to a number of organisations and industries covered by the Bill and which the Bill attempts to regulate. Many hon. Members and some members of the public might wonder whether the Bill as originally drafted and the Acts on which privatisations were based —for example, those dealing with telecommunications and gas—do not already give a regulator considerable powers to do several things, including set the prices. That is the case, but the Government, recognising the weakness in the current legislation, have identified the fact that it is necessary to go further and to place an obligation on a regulator to establish standards of performance for individual customers and for the industries in general. We support the objective but having gone that far, we believe that it is also necessary to give additional powers to the regulator, which will emphasise the responsibilities involved in setting those standards, to take into account the resulting price regime.

We have not tabled the new clause merely to extend the debate on the Bill. There is considerable evidence that Oftel—in the case of telecommunications—has not been as effective as most of us want it to be. It has not been able to regulate the industry effectively in the ways that we believed essential for the future of the industry and for the protection of the customer.

Very few people would dispute the fact that British Telecom has high—some would say excessive—profit levels. In the various discussions between British Telecom and Oftel, Oftel has not been able to get to grips with the way in which British Telecom can interpret price agreements one year and follow through with largely inflated profits in the following year.

Similarly, Oftel has not been able to have meaningful discussions with British Telecom about the way in which British Telecom's cost structures relate to the provision of the service. It has not been able to get to grips with the level of salaries paid to senior executives of that company. I hope that the House accepts that that is a legitimate issue about which the regulator should be concerned. If not, there is an open invitation to any private monopoly to pay its bosses salaries which are in no way commensurate with the level of responsibility. Some obligations should be extended to the regulator to take care of those shortcomings.

I shall not prolong the argument in supporting new clause 1, but it is necessary to give a little more evidence covering some of the issues which were debated in another context in Committee. Whatever the Government say about the improvements in British Telecom's control over its prices increases since 1984—I accept that controls have been tighter since then—the evidence still shows that during the Government's period in office from 1979 until now, British Telecom's prices have moved ahead of the retail price index by 3·1 per cent. That has happened at a time when everyone in the industry internationally recognises that there have been huge improvements in productivity.

The Government cannot dispute that, whatever else has happened in the telecommunications industry in this country over the past 10 or 12 years, there would have been major improvements in productivity which arise—thankfully—out of major changes and improvements in scientific knowledge and its application. That, above all, has enabled British Telecom to be slightly less aggressive in its price increases since 1984, but there is still a long way to go.

I do not believe that the *Financial Times* is objective in all issues but it has taken a special interest in the changes in telecommunications. Indeed, on many occasions it has complimented the Government on the changes that have taken place. At the time of the announcement of the last set of results for British Telecom the *Financial Times* said that its profits were £1 billion more than would be expected from a reasonable profit return on capital in a company that was reasonably well managed and achieving slightly better than average performance. Spread among the 20 million residential customers of BT in this country, that money represents about £50 per family.

That £1 billion could be spent in a number of different ways. I do not intend to judge how the money should be spent; I merely make the point to emphasise that, should the Government or any telecommunications company choose to start taking action on this matter, the resources to do so exist.

I do not want to overplay the salary increases of the bosses of private utilities, but it would be wrong not to take note of the recent salary increases enjoyed by the chairman of British Telecom. Between 1988-89 and 1989-90, he received a 90 per cent. increase in addition to other fringe benefits, taking his salary from £282,000 to £374,000. If that was not enough, in the following year, the latest for which we have figures, he received an additional 43 per cent. pay increase—between 1989-90 and 1990-91 —taking his pay to £536,000. That tells us something about the cost structures of British Telecom.

Of course I recognise the need to pay attractive salaries to senior management in private utilities so as to attract the best people to them. I make no judgment on these levels of salary. It is, however, legitimate for the regulator to be able to assess how appropriate the bosses' salaries are as one factor in a general assessment of whether the cost structures are appropriate to the standards of performance and to the price regime.

British Telecom is apparently not satisfied with present levels of profitability, as we were told in press accounts yesterday. It is not happy with the present price regime agreed with the regulator. In the talks to begin in a few weeks time, it proposes to lay down a new agenda for the regulator, to the effect that the obligations into which it has already entered to reduce prices have been so onerous

that it cannot continue with them, and that it wants to slow down the process of improving prices. So British Telecom is not prepared to agree to the same price cuts next year as those to which, to some extent at least, it agreed this year.

British Telecom also says that line rental charges—they are excessive and there is great scope for reducing them in real terms so as to extend phone ownership—are not high enough and that it wants to increase them relative to its other charges. I repeat, therefore, that it is important when assessing standards of service to scrutinise prices and cost structures.

The Government have consistently argued that competition can help to bring prices down and improve the industry's performance. I do not dispute that competition has an important role in attempting to achieve those valid objectives, but there is not much competition among providers of telecommunications services. Mercury has a small percentage of the business market, although that is concentrated in the City of London and in other major cities. It is a fairly lucrative market, but Mercury has not attempted to take on the residential market. In effect there is no competition in the provision of residential telephone services—British Telecom has an effective monopoly.

The only difference now is that this is no longer a public monopoly with some accountability: it is a private monopoly, and instead of a direct relationship between the state and the monopoly provider, there is now an indirect link through the regulator.

I do not dispute that this is the shape of the future, but if it is, we must ensure that the conditions are right to govern the way in which the regulator operates. Regulation will be the key to making providers of utility services accountable to the public.

The Government should accept that this principle is valid, and that there is serious public concern about British Telecom prices and about the amount of its directors' remuneration. They must also accept that prices must be related to standards of service. We discussed this in Committee, although not as explicitly as the new clause does. I hope that the Government will show more flexibility than they showed in Committee and that they will show themselves willing to listen to the arguments, to understand public anxiety and to accept the new clause, which I believe will bring about more public confidence in the way in which these important private utilities are run.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a Labour Government would set the prices of British Telecom or any other large telecommunications provider? Would a Minister decide how much to charge the consumer?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman must be telepathic, because he has moved on to the last point that I wanted to make. Before doing so, I can assure him that a Labour Government would not set prices for the utilities. It would set out general objectives for the utilities, and the regulators would be charged with implementing that agenda in negotiations and consultations with the utilities.

If the Government this evening fail to accept the new clause—it is an utterly reasonable new clause—I give notice that a future Labour Government will seek to modify the context in which utilities provide a service. We want to toughen up regulation, not to weaken standards of service. We want good standards of service in telecommunications and other utilities, but we also want the regulator to get a grip on the price regimes adopted by the various utilities.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) said, I shall be concentrating on new clause 54, which stands in my name. The idea behind it is to safeguard the position of low-income electricity consumers by stopping electricity companies charging for late payment.

When this matter was first brought to my attention, only Yorkshire Electricity was carrying out this practice of imposing penalty charges on customers who paid late—it was something of a novelty. But it was said that we needed regulation to stop the practice for fear that other companies would follow suit. Just today I have heard that other companies are to take up the practice, and that gives added strength to my argument in favour of the new clause.

The amount of penalty paid is determined by the length of the delay in payment and can amount to between £9 and £16. Many people cannot pay their electricity bill on time because they have low income, and to add £9 or £16 to the next quarter's bill makes matters worse. It does not solve any problems but creates more. No one argues that people should not pay if they can afford to pay or that the companies should not try to obtain their rightful dues. However, the practice that I have described discriminates against low-income families with budgeting problems.

5.30 pm

It is argued that slow payment or non-payment can have an enormous effect upon profits and is unfair to those who pay on time because they will be charged more to offset people who are not paying on time or do not pay at all. There is some strength in the argument that good payers may be affected by non-payers but that will be the case only if companies are struggling to make a decent profit. Of course, that is not the case at all.

The recently released interim results for the first six months of 1991-92 show that Yorkshire Electricity's profits are up by a fifth. In the six months to 30 September 1991 its pre-tax profits were £33·1 million, an increase of 17 per cent. on the £28·3 million profit for the first six months of 1991. Over the same period, its operating profit fell slightly from £34·8 million to £34·3 million. That was largely due to the point that I am making—the provision against bad debt. Despite that, the operating profit represents the equivalent of £18·79 per domestic customer. That is a considerable profit, bearing in the mind the number of customers. A profit of £34·3 million shows that Yorkshire Electricity is not short of money and does not need to take such drastic action.

The problem with low penalty payment schemes such as the one adopted by Yorkshire Electricity, is that they do not fully discriminate between people who can afford to pay their bills and those who are struggling. Those who are struggling, consumers on low incomes with difficulty in budgeting, are supposed to be helped by the companies. That was the whole point of some of the regulations discussed in Committee and elsewhere. The companies should not penalise them.

It is well known that the franchise licences under which the electricity companies operate require them to

formulate and abide by codes of practice on debt recovery and discrimination. They require companies to give every assistance to people to pay their bills if they have difficulty in budgeting. Regrettably, the electricity regulator has not so far been able to persuade those companies, and certainly not Yorkshire Electricity, to withdraw the penalty scheme.

I was glad to hear from my hon. Friends that they support the new clause, which I shall not press to a vote. I have been assured that the points that I have raised will be carefully considered. I am sure that we shall have a Labour Government after the next election and that they will give effect to the new clause in a code of practice, or something of that nature. I have doubts about codes of practice, because I understand that they are self-regulating and I should like something stronger. I hope that my hon. Friend who will be responsible for future legislation will bear that in mind.

Many people are affected by the penalty practice. The late payment scheme that operates in Yorkshire is thought to penalise at least 20,000 to 30,000 low-income consumers per year. I estimate that the figure is more likely to be 40,000 per year. For that reason alone, it is time that the House made sure that the companies do not impose such fines on people who face financial difficulties. That is the point of the new clause, and I hope that it will be taken on board.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I support the new clause. The problem with the Bill and the Government's attitude to and policy on telecommunications in particular, although it also applies to water, gas and electricity, is that, under privatisation, prices are geared to the interests of big business and not to the interests of the ordinary citizen. That is the essential problem we face when seeking to introduce consumer protection legislation.

Old-age pensioners, the disabled, the poor and the unemployed get a very bad deal from the large private monopoly utilities. They get a particularly bad deal from British Telecom in terms of standing charges and the pricing regime. They also get a bad deal because of high deposits, and are cut off when they are unable to pay the high charges. The whole pricing regime seems to close in on such people and denies them their elementary human rights. Therefore, they suffer a double penalty, first by being poor and secondly by having imposed upon them charges which they cannot possibly bear.

I spoke about elementary human rights. Conservatives may snigger and dispute that, but in a modern age it is a human right to have the essential lifeline of a telephone. As the family is broken up and extended, many citizens are deprived of links with their families. People are huddled in city centres, often frightened to go out of their homes because of rising crime, and they lack the income to enjoy a decent quality of life. For them the telephone is a vital lifeline and therefore an essential citizen's right.

The present pricing regime, which the Government are happy to allow to continue and which they encourage, denies such people access to a telephone. That is a deliberate policy by the Government, as one can see from the rebalancing of tariffs to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) referred. That rebalancing, carried out in negotiations between British Telecom and Oftel, deliberately increased rental charges by much more than ordinary charges. That bears most heavily on the poorest sections of the population. Rental charges have shot up over the past year.

In the first half of 1991-92, revenue from rentals increased by 14·8 per cent. That is more than double the average RPI increase over that time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North has said, not content with that, British Telecom now seeks an increase in rental charges. As I have said, that will bear most heavily on those who are least able to carry the charges.

Many old-age pensioners who come to my surgeries are paying more for rental than for telephone calls. In some cases, they pay 10 times more. That problem bears most heavily on pensioners who are just above benefit level—the income support level—perhaps because the husband has been a miner and has a miner's pension, which is often trivial, and is therefore not entitled to the range of benefits to which he might be entitled if he were paid the basic retirement pension. He is faced with telephone charges that seem to him to be sky high.

The Minister may say that British Telecom has introduced the support-line scheme and has operated the low-user rebate scheme for a while, but rental charges are still far too high under the support-line scheme. They are £9·23 a quarter. That may not be much money to the Minister and his colleagues who enjoy high salaries but it is a great deal of money to ordinary pensioners who are on low incomes. Conservative Members may scoff, snigger or laugh, but they do not understand and they do not care about the conditions in which ordinary people are living.

The installation charge for a telephone is £163·05, which is about three times the sum to which a single retirement pensioner is entitled. Many of the people to whom I have referred do not have a very good credit rating and so they have to put down a heavy deposit. What prospect is there of such people acquiring a telephone in those circumstances?

At the same time, BT is generating huge profits. It makes a profit of £105 every second. The Minister may say that most of BT's profit has been channelled into investment. I understand that argument, but the ordinary consumer, including the ordinary pensioner, who cannot afford to have a telephone installed, will take the view that exorbitant profits are being generated. He or she will want to know why BT is not finding the cash to reduce rental charges or, in some circumstances, to abolish them, and why it is not funding the provision of telephones for some of the most vulnerable and deprived citizens.

Ordinary consumers do not understand how the chairman of BT can get £10,000 a week while they receive perhaps less than £100 a week and are denied access to a telephone. The Government should ensure that there is a pricing policy that makes it possible for every householder to afford to have a telephone installed. If installation charges were either free or purely nominal, I believe that BT and the Government, through corporation tax and so forth, would get their money back in no time at all. The increase in tariffs that would come from the increased use of lines would produce extra revenue for BT. It could be that it would be able to introduce a new pricing structure that abolished standing charges for pensioners and those on income support, for example, while having a higher initial tariff to fund that abolition.

In many instances a telephone is an essential lifeline for a pensioner who lives alone, and it is interesting that a third of single pensioners do not have telephones. That is

deplorable in a civilised or so-called civilised society. It is interesting to compare our household penetration rate with the rates of other countries. I understand that 80 per cent. of residences here have telephones. In the United States, the rate is 95 per cent. It is even more significant that it is 98 per cent. in France. The French have a publicly owned telephone system that is regarded as the best in the world. The "great" privatised telecommunications system that the Government praise to the rooftops cannot get anywhere near what the French have achieved. As I have said, a third of our single pensioners do not have access to a telephone. That is deplorable, especially when the competitive regime has been rigged in such a way that businesses receive much more favourable treatment than ordinary consumers.

I urge the Government to change the regulatory regime. If they do not use the Bill to do that, they should do so after it has been enacted. They should ensure that there is a level playing field between BT and its major competitor, Mercury, and any other competitor that comes into the market. That would enable BT to concentrate on providing an equal service for everyone instead of giving a better service to the business customer. It is the business sector that provides the profitable market and that is where competition is fiercest. Accordingly, BT is forced to drive down its prices if it is to compete, but every citizen requires low prices, or at least prices that are fair. We shall not see such prices until the regulatory regime is changed.

I believe that the Minister will have to acknowledge that the introduction of an allegedly consumer protectionist Bill will have no effect because of the pricing and regulatory policies that have been introduced. Market forces are not sufficient to protect consumers. Consumers need rights to be enforced and pricing policies that are designed to protect them. The Government may claim to be the champion of the shareholder in the context of telecommunications, but they are not the champion of the consumer. When we look back with the benefit of historic hindsight on the 1980s and early 1990s and reflect on telecommunications policy, I believe that it will be seen to be geared to the short term. Investment in BT is falling while profits rise. Consumers take second place while the number of complaints shoots up.

It is time that the Government changed their entire policy. They should act to protect the consumer. They should allow BT to stop looking over its shoulder towards domestic competition and enable it to become a leading player in the global market. At the same time, BT should ensure that old-age pensioners, the disabled and those who are on low incomes have the benefit of a telephone and have a decent quality of life.

5.45 pm

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to all those who have contributed to the debate. On many occasions it seemed that the Opposition's policy, on analysis, was similar to that which the Government are recommending. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) for his intervention, which teased out the fact that, when it comes to how the system works, the Labour party is endorsing much of what we have been doing.

I think that the right approach is the promotion and development of competition wherever possible and the existence of firm and clear regulations for monopoly areas, where customer interests are very important and are a duty upon the regulator. That is exactly what our legislation and regulatory framework provide. The Bill and other regulations and legislation that are already in being require the establishment of standards of performance and standards of service. It is against the background of those standards that the price regime is agreed.

I cannot see how the kernel of the Labour party's proposal in new clause 1 would do anything or why it is necessary, given the requirements that are already upon the industry, as are set out in the Bill and in preceding legislation, licences and regulation.

The Bill provides measures to prevent a reduction in standards to achieve a hidden price rise. I think that the Labour party agrees with that proposal. The regulator has, of course, to bear in mind the total costs of the industry when considering price caps. Labour's policy towards BT was described at greater length in Committee, and it seems that the Labour party would cut profits and at the same time demand increased investment. As we said in Committee, that is an implausible policy for the Labour party to recommend. Profits have an important function in paying for investment and providing the necessary signals to make the investment worth while.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) accepted that prices have been much better controlled since 1984. Indeed, only since 1984 has there been a sensible system of price control. There was never one under nationalisation. There was no effective system through Ministers or directors in the 1970s when Labour and Labour-Liberal Administrations were in being. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North has not yet seen a full year's trading with the new retail prices index minus 6·25 per cent. formula. He must be aware, however, that it is the most stringent system of control to be operated anywhere in the world. I think that it is one of which BT, the industry and the country can be proud. Prices will fall by 6·25 per cent. in real terms during the period of that price control.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, asked about the future. He asked whether there would be a review of line rental charges and the price cap. He put forward the views of BT. He well knows that in due course there will be a review of these matters. The evidence of BT and of other interests, including customers and the Opposition, if they care to submit evidence, will be carefully considered by the director general.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, expressed scepticism about the power of competition. He did so not because he doubts the theory that competition can do the job but because he wonders whether the practice will build up, especially in the local loop. He should look carefully at what is happening with the development of local loop competition from cable television operators entering telephony. He might like to know that there are 20 licence applications at the Department of Trade and Industry for new services under the duopoly review that we announced last year. I hope that we shall be able to make speedy progress in processing and granting the licences where the applications are of the right form. Some of these services will strengthen competition in the local loop. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that when we can make the announcement.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) spoke to new clause 54. I have a great deal of sympathy with what he said about those who are under considerable

[Mr. Redwood]

financial pressure when faced with the possibility of additional charges from their electricity utility. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that matter, because he will find that action has already been taken that goes a long way to meeting his requirements.

The hon. Member understood in his speech that, if people deliberately delay payment until they are finally threatened with disconnection, they increase the costs for other electricity consumers. They increase the cost of capital for the business as the business has to borrow for the money that it has forgone and it is incurring the additional cost of reminder letters and chasing up before the final threat of disconnection and the levying of the additional charge. He said clearly that, if people can pay but will not do so, it is not unreasonable for them to pay more when the utility catches up with them because they have imposed those additional costs upon other electricity consumers, many of whom are less well off but who have met their bills on time because they do not want to experience that hassle.

I accept that there could be cases such as those described by the hon. Gentleman where people are in genuine hardship. Therefore, the Director General of Electricity Supply has requested that electricity companies waive the charges in such cases. I am told that Yorkshire Electricity has agreed to do so and has included that in its code of practice.

The hon. Gentleman said that he wanted codes of practice, but that he was sceptical about how strong they would be. I hope that he will accept the good faith of the codes of practice and see how they work out. If he becomes aware of cases of hardship following the introduction of that measure, I hope that he will refer them to the director general, because he is just as concerned about genuine hardship cases. The hon. Gentleman may care to note that the penalty charges for late payment pre-date privatisation by a long way. Therefore, it is not fair to say that they are the result of a privatised management seeking to increase its profitability. They are a perfectly sensible response to a genuine business problem. If too many customers delay payment, it is disruptive and costly for the business.

The hon. Gentleman may care to note that there is good news on disconnections, which are even more worrying and threatening to the type of consumer about whom he and I are concerned. In 1976, there were 114,330 disconnections, and by 1990, that had dropped to 55,196, well below any figure achieved in the 1970s under the Labour Administration. I hope that he will welcome that and see that some things are getting better.

The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) repeated his point about the human right to have a telephone and the need for more people on low incomes to have access to the system. We debated that extensively in Committee. He is trying to under-sell British achievement. The penetration figure was 88 per cent. in 1990, but it has risen since then. I welcome, as he does, the great progress made in improving and increasing access to telephone use, ownership and rental over recent years.

In 1972, which was not long ago, only 42 per cent. of households had a telephone. It is well over double that level now, because we have introduced a system that enables the industry to have the resources and profits to invest in growth, and because the industry has introduced the support line and low user rental rebate schemes which are imaginative and good schemes and much better than anything that was in existence before.

I think that the hon. Member for Neath finds himself at variance with this Front Bench spokesman. He got a little carried away in his peroration and said that he thought that our entire policy should be changed, yet the Front Bench spokesman said that he agreed with the idea of introducing competition and with many of our regulatory measures. In fact, much of new clause 1 supplements, in looser language, what we are already doing in existing legislation and in this Bill. I hope that the House will rest content with the Bill as tabled and as amended by the Government.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I want to deal particularly with new clause 7, which has not been dealt with so far. As we have found throughout the passage of the Bill, some of the matters are common to the different public utilities and, as a result, it is right to group them. However, that means some jumping about from electricity and gas in the energy sector to British Telecom in the trade and industry sector and to water and sewerage in the environment sector.

In many ways, new clause 7 is similar to new clause 1, but it deals specifically with electricity. It could be applied easily to gas, because it deals with the place of energy efficiency in any pricing or regulatory regime for any of the four great public utilities—particularly gas and electricity—in a monopoly position.

We are interested in the way in which energy efficiency should be encouraged in a monopoly public utility. Gas was privatised three years before electricity and has undergone a five-year review. I believe that the review will take effect in April 1992. In the negotiations between the regulator and the gas industry, the industry has accepted the proposal by Ofgas that there should be an E factor, or efficiency factor, in the way in which gas prices are changed year on year. In other words, an allowance will be made for an additional price rise per unit if the gas industry makes suitable efforts to reduce the number of units consumed.

The industry will split the difference with its consumers. If a utility introduces measures to help its customers to use less of its product, the customer will gain most of the benefit, but the industry will gain some benefit through the application of the E factor—a small increase on top of the retail prices index plus X minus Y, or whatever it may be. Also, there will be a contribution towards the reduction in the number of units used while raising the unit charge. That is admirable, except that it has taken five years to arrive.

In the new clause, we have asked for something that most people in the industry realise is inevitable—there will be an E factor for electricity. This is a rattling good idea for the gas industry, so why do we have to wait five years for it to be applied to the electricity industry? I hope that the Minister will revise the Government's rigid idea that it is fair dinkum for the City that, when a company is privatised, it must be left alone for about five years with a level playing field that keeps the investment institutions happy. That is nonsense.

The Government are about to agree all sorts of proposals with the European Community to encourage energy efficiency. They half agreed to the idea of carbon taxes during meetings in December with their EC

counterparts at Environment, Energy and Finance level. They are adopting all sorts of proposals for stabilising CO_2 emissions, but they will not accept this good idea in case it offends their friends in the City. That is idiotic. They will have to revise their views shortly. It could be introduced in this Bill very simply, but they will not do it because of the "not invented here" problem and because they do not want to offend the investment institutions.

When this Bill had its Second Reading and went to Committee, the remaining shares in British Telecom had not been sold. I am sure that the Government were worried about offending the investment institutions that they needed to keep sweet in order to sell the remaining shares. Now that British Telecom has been sold, I hope that we will see a last-minute conversion, either here or in another place. I hope that they will accept the energy efficiency incentive for the electricity industry so that it can assist its consumers to reduce their consumption while being able to increase the unit charge and, thereby, reducing overall the bills for their consumers.

That is what we hope will happen, and that is what we promise will inevitably happen when we assume the powers of government. There is no time to lose on the environment front, and energy efficiency can make such a contribution to the environment that we hope the Government will have a deathbed conversion and, before the Bill receives the Royal Assent, will announce that they too will equalise the priority given to energy efficiency in the gas and electricity companies.

6 pm

What effect might that have on the electricity distribution companies' profits? It has been calculated that they now make a return of about 8 per cent., after allowing for inflation. That is a very high rate of return for monopoly public utilities. Most people seem to assume that a monopoly public utility ought to make a rate of return of about 5 per cent. after allowing for inflation, but our regional distribution companies make 8 per cent.—about 60 per cent. more than one would have expected. The Government have allowed profits to let rip, so there is a big margin which the companies should undoubtedly be asked to spend on improvements in energy efficiency. In the end, that would bring their profits down to what could be called normal profits for public utility companies.

The companies should not be making more than 5 per cent., taking the good years with the bad. We are in the middle of a recession, and this would not normally have been expected to be a good year. But the profits have been allowed to run freely, because we are still in the initial stages after privatisation. The Government have allowed the companies to do nothing more than mug the consumer. The Government have not created privatised companies in the conventional commercial sense; they have created pound note machines, which are beneficial for the shareholders and earn profits 60 per cent. higher than they should be, considering the nature of the companies and the protection from competition that their monopoly position gives them. People cannot have two sets of wires leading to the three-pin plugs in their homes.

Profits are far too high, and the surplus should be creamed off to assist with energy efficiency. That would be good for the environment and for consumers; the shareholders themselves, especially the large institutions, expect that to happen in the long run. But of course it cannot be allowed to happen yet, because that might upset the merchant banks which advised the Government so ill on the privatisation of the distribution companies. It might even upset the regulator, because he, in effect, wrote the preparatory documents for electricity privatisation, and perhaps he would not yet like to admit how wrong he was.

I have some examples of what the Government have done in setting up what I call pound note machines rather than conventional commercial enterprises. I was interested to read the analysis of the top 500 European and British companies in Monday's *Financial Times*. The list was interesting, because it contained recently privatised companies. There was a special analysis of which 25 of the United Kingdom's top 500 companies had had the biggest profit increases in the past financial year.

Seven of those top 25 companies were recently privatised water or electricity companies. The third was Northumbrian Water, the fifth was Welsh Water, the seventh North West Water, the 10th Wessex Water Services, the 15th South Wales Electricity, the 23rd Yorkshire Water Services, and the 24th South West Water Services. Thus, of the 500 biggest British companies in terms of market capitalisation, seven of the 25 with the biggest percentage increases in profits were privatised utilities.

We can look at the figures another way. Seven of the 12 companies with the biggest increases in profits among the biggest 300 companies in Britain are recently privatised water or electricity companies. Top of the list for profit increases is Northumbrian Water; second is Welsh Water; third is North West Water; fifth is Wessex Water Services; seventh is South Wales Electricity; 11th is Yorkshire Water Services; 12th is South West Water Services. More than half of the top profit rockets among the biggest 300 companies in Britain are recently privatised companies.

That is a staggering figure, and it shows, if we needed to be shown, the degree to which privatisation has been carried out so as to mug the consumer and benefit the shareholder—to stuff money into the pockets of City advisers and shareholders. The consumer has been left with nothing to gain and everything to lose from privatisation.

We have asked about standards of service. Why has the process of privatisation made it so easy for the companies to make profits 60 per cent. higher than what we could call the norm for monopolies? It has happened because the regulators cannot really know as much about the industry as the companies do. One can ask about the standards of service—for instance, why do such an unbelievably high number of consumers in south Wales have their electricity cut off?

I wrote recently to OFFER asking what it could do about the fact that we had paid an increase of 46 per cent. in the four years since the electricity privatisation White Paper was published in February 1988. It was the second highest price increase in the country—the increase in the south-west was the highest—yet Wales and the south-west also had the highest number of cut-offs. Standards of service were appalling, yet the price rises were the highest.

When I asked OFFER what it could do about that, the letter that I received in reply gave the companies' explanation—not OFFER's explanation but the companies' explanation, because the director-general of OFFER cannot know as much as the companies. The companies can always flannel; they can always find an Enid Blyton excuse, a little story to tell OFFER, and

OFFER passes that on to the Member of Parliament who is trying to do his job and look after the consumers in his area.

We need regulators with teeth, regulators with powers. We have not got them at the moment.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman was discussing the desirability of an E factor. Will he clarify the size of E factor that would be necessary to achieve the kind of energy-saving programme that he wants?

Mr. Morgan: I thought I had given an explanation of the kind of E factor that we would seek. We would keep the price of electricity stable in cash terms but would order, by way of a code of practice, that the difference between a 5 per cent. rate of return, after allowing for inflation, and the 8 per cent. return now being earned by the 12 regional electricity companies in England and Wales should be spent on improvements in energy efficiency on their customers' premises—for instance, by providing low-energy light bulbs, loft insulation or draught-proofing. That is not uncommon in the United States, and it would be sensible here. Either electricity prices could be reduced so that the companies earned a real rate of return of roughly 5 per cent., or prices could be left at today's levels, whereby the companies earn 8 per cent., and the companies could be told to spend the extra money on energy efficiency.

That would achieve some of the Government's objectives over the next three or four years—catching up for the benefit of consumers, but catching down, as it were, in terms of the roaring rates of return now being earned.

Let us return to the subject of how strong we want to make the regulators. We did not contest the Bill on Second Reading because we approve of the regulators' powers being roughly the same in the four big public utilities, but we are anxious to ensure that the regulators have a strong commitment to regulating the industries and use the statutory powers that they are given.

Considering the history of the four public utilities, one could say that we are looking for regulators who have the statutory powers that Stephen Littlechild has in the electricity industry, combined with Ian Byatt's brains and James McKinnon's teeth. Some such composite regulator is needed providing the best of the three worlds—I always leave out telecoms because I am no expert on that industry.

We all take an interest in seeking some sort of regulator who will do something for the consumers rather than take the company's view 90 per cent., of the time. We have seen in the gas industry the regulator doing something for the consumer. Perhaps that is because James McKinnon was not involved in the process of privatisation but was found subsequently. Ian Byatt and Stephen Littlechild are severely inhibited by the fact that they virtually wrote their own job descriptions by being so involved in the process of privatisation as political advisers or, in the case of Ian Byatt, civil servants at the Treasury. They do not seem to know quite how to use their powers to compel the industry to do what is necessary to defend the consumers' interest.

I have outlined how we see the need to strengthen the regulators and make them far more independent of the industry and far less tied up with the wish not to create antipathy in the City or the investment community for the next round of privatisation. We want someone who regards is as his one plain and simple job to look after the consumers of the four major utilities. Whether the Secretaries of State for Energy, the Environment or Wales like it, that will be the job to which he is 100 per cent. committed. That is the type of person whom we shall appoint. The four utilities need stronger powers to protect the consumer.

Mr. Redwood: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the points that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) has made.

One of the main ways in which energy usage can be made more efficient is to improve and change the system of generation. Of course, that is exactly what competition and the changes in the industry are doing. The substitution of combined cycle gas projects for the old coal-steam projects that dominated the industry prior to privatisation will make a large difference. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the thermal efficiency of those new stations is greatly superior to that of the old type of station that was constructed by the nationalised industry.

The hon. Gentleman may be well aware that the Office of Electricity Regulation has issued codes of practice on the matter about which he is worried. Of course, section 3 of the Electricity Act 1989 requires the promotion of efficiency and economy in the use of electricity. The Bill before the House tonight gives new powers to the Director General of Electricity Supply to require electricity suppliers to inform customers of standards set and achieved for energy efficiency.

I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman has discovered that the privatised companies have done well. They have done well and increased their profitability against the background of firm price regulation and control. The reason why they have done well is that they now have the incentive to do so. They are raising their productivity in a way that they never did under Labour Governments and nationalisation. So my hon. Friends would have been surprised if the electricity companies had not figured prominently in the list of companies showing considerable improvements and better profitability. The hon. Gentleman's attack on both Mr. Littlechild and Mr. Byatt was unfair. They are extremely good regulators, and their contribution to the development of regulatory styles and techniques in Britain and throughout the world is extremely important.

Professor Littlechild's development of the formula of simple price control based on the retail prices index and an adjustment to take account of fuel costs and efficiency in the industry is being monitored and adopted elsewhere in the world because it is an extremely good way of regulating an industry and offering a pledge and a promise to the customer. That pledge matters to the customers because it is a pledge on the price of the goods or service that they will receive.

I urge the House to reject the new clause. It is unnecessary. The Director General of Electricity Supply has the powers that he needs. His consultative document has set out several ideas, including an E factor. We are happy to trust his judgment, and he does not want the powers in the Labour party's new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 124, Noes 204.

Division No. 39] **[6.13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Anderson, Donald
Allen, Graham	Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Alton, David	Armstrong, Hilary

Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Blunkett, David
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding, and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary

Ward, John	Wood, Timothy
Warren, Kenneth	Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Watts, John	Yeo, Tim
Wells, Bowen	Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Wheeler, Sir John	
Whitney, Ray	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Widdecombe, Ann	**Mr. John M. Taylor and**
Winterton, Nicholas	**Mr. Irvine Patnick.**

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

ELDERLY AND DISABLED CUSTOMERS

'The following section shall be inserted in the Telecommunications Act 1984, after section 7(4)—

"New Section 7(5)

(1) A licence granted under this section shall require the licence holder to produce a Code of Practice describing their services for elderly and disabled customers.

(2) A Code of Practice prepared under subsection (1) above may only be made after—

(i) consultation with, and approval of, the Director

(ii) consultation with persons or bodies representative of elderly and disabled people.".'.— *[Mr. Henderson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Henderson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): It will be for the convenience of the House to debate the following amendments to the new clause: No. 1, in clause 1, page 3, line 14, after 'performance', insert

'including household penetration services for the disabled, and the balance of regional infrastructure development.'.

No. 2, in clause 6, page 7, line 14, at end insert

'27HA The criteria settled under section 27H above shall provide that disabled people and people of pensionable age shall be exempt from the requirement to pay a deposit.'.

Mr. Henderson: May I begin by explaining to the House the purpose of the clause and amendments before it? New clause 2 deals with the introduction of a code of practice in utilities governing facilities for elderly people and for disabled people. Amendment No. 2 deals with deposits in regard to facilities for pensioners, and amendment No. 1 relates to a number of issues in connection with the standards of performance which a regulator will in future require an operator to meet—a subject which the House has already discussed to some extent in a previous set of amendments. Most of my comments relate initially to amendment No. 1.

If there is a particular virtue of the Bill, it is that the Government have recognised that privatisation of public utilities in itself is inadequate as a means of improving services and developing the utilities, and that, where a private monopoly has replaced a public monopoly, there is an ever-increasing need for the public interest to be recognised and to be represented in some way. There is a growing consensus in the House—already acknowledged in the debate—that the important way of representing the public interest is to make sure that a regulator is appointed and that the regulator has teeth to make things happen in the industry.

There has therefore been a fairly discernible change in the perception of the Government of the benefits that can accrue from privatisation. Some might argue that it is a transformation in Government thinking, and the Minister may be able to confirm whether that is his view or whether he believes that it is just a turning back in Government thinking, slightly away from a purely ideological position to one that reflects the actualities of running a utility and providing a service which is desired and needed by the community.

It is on the record this evening that the Government have accepted the need to improve the status of and give greater powers to the regulator, and that one of the crucial powers of any regulator is that of determining the general standards of performance expected of a utility in the delivery of its service. The issue before us now is whether the Bill as currently constructed has sufficient teeth to enable the regulator to undertake his or her responsibilities in the regulation of those utilities.

I suggest that elements of clause 1, dealing with standards of performance, are too timid. They leave the regulator exposed to undue pressure from the private utilities and their supporters. They do not give the regulator sufficient power to say to the utility, "When I talk about standards of performance, I mean specific things." There should not be an argument on the core of what matters regarding standards of performance. There will always be scope for interpretation at the periphery, but, when dealing with core standards, the regulator should be able to tell the utility what matters and what is on the agenda, and that they affect everything in the negotiations, whether it is the provision of services or the prices paid for them.

6.30 pm

The purpose of amendment No. 1 is to lay down three items of importance to the regulator when dealing with telecommunications. The Government have made the jump from thinking that privatisation was all that mattered to recognising that privatisation in itself does little to improve the performance of utilities and that, where a private monopoly exists—as it essentially does in telecommunications—a regulator is required to protect the public interest. Is it not appropriate for the regulator to have pre-designated issues that affect standards of performance?

I hope that every hon. Member understands that, until every residential property is linked to a telephone service, one cannot begin to provide the software and the other services which can benefit the individual or society. One cannot provide those without establishing the basic physical link. I hope that, in acknowledging that technical point, the Government will go further and recognise that it is important for us to give the highest priority to establishing that link to every residential premises. Virtually all business premises are connected. Twenty years ago, we had a comparative advantage over some other countries because of our level of telephone penetration, but we are beginning to fall behind, even taking into consideration the changes made in the past few years.

In Germany, more than 91 per cent. of residential premises are connected by a fixed-link telephone. In the United States of America, more than 93 per cent. have such a connection, and in France the figure is 98 per cent. However, in Britain, as the Minister told us earlier, the figure is 89 per cent. In 1988, it was 87 or 88 per cent. Whichever figure we take, there is clearly a gap between the level of provision in this country and that in comparable industrial nations. When beefing up the powers of the regulator and setting performance

standards, it is crucial that the House recognises the necessity of giving the regulator the power to extend levels of telephone penetration.

Surely the regulator should be able to insist that those providing telephone services should reconsider the amount of deposit required, as my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) said. Is the present level of deposit appropriate in the circumstances? Does it deter many people from taking the opportunity to have a telephone?

The regulator should be able to consider the cost of installation, which is way in excess of such costs in many comparable countries. Are those charges appropriate if we are trying to extend telephone penetration?

The regulator should consider the cost of local calls. Many people who want a telephone because they want that essential link with the outside world would mainly make local calls, yet they know that in this country the cost of those calls is way in excess of their cost in competing industrial nations. They know it instinctively even if they have not studied the statistics.

I hope that the Government will be able to decide that the regulator should study the industry and developments taking place, including the aspects that the Minister referred to, such as developing the provision of local loops through cable companies and others. If such developments take place, is it not essential that British Telecom, which will incur the largest burden in having to provide extensions to households throughout the country, is able to agree a price relationship with other companies that link into the BT system? That would enable everyone in the industry to play their part in extending the telephone service.

Is it not right that the regulator should encourage the various providers to extend telephone services? In that way, the potential profits, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Neath referred, could become reality. There will only be potential for those organisations which want to use BT's facilities or for BT itself to accrue such profits once there is a telephone in every residential premises.

In the past 40 or 50 years, and especially in the past 10 years, there have been serious regional disparities in economic activity in this country. Is it not appropriate for a nation with that background to put high on its agenda the provision of essential infrastructure, so that there can be a good spread of resources and investment throughout the regions? To some extent, that has already happened in the highlands of Scotland, where modern facilities have been introduced with the help of European funding, which has helped the small business community in the more remote areas. That is one good example. Surely the regulator should be given the responsibility of making that a top priority in discussions with various operators about the standards of performance essential to developing the telecommunications structure.

As we discussed facilities for the aged and the disabled extensively in Committee, I do not want to labour the point, but I want to establish the principle that a utility is not like any other company that provides a service or goods. A utility provides a core service for the community —a service on which everyone depends, whether it is electricity, gas, a telephone or water. There is something different about those commodities and the Government have recognised that fact because they are moving towards regulation. Surely, when providing those services, a special case can be made for establishing special facilities for the aged and the disabled—such as, for example, the provision of a coupler attached to the telephone so that the 3 million people who are hard of hearing have a better opportunity to use the telephone.

There might be a need for liaison between British Telecom and a local Department of Social Services office about the advantages of a mobile phone with a limited range for pensioners in a fragile physical state, so that, if they fall, they do not lie on the floor for hours because they cannot reach the fixed-link telephone on the wall. Often such facilities are made available by the operator, but the regulator should have the responsibility to ensure that operators have a code of practice which includes such provisions. That is merely one example, which good operators would probably want to provide of their own free will. However, that does not mean that there is no need for legislation.

Not every operator will always operate to the highest standards. Some new operators wishing to enter the business might not have the same social conscience as operators have demonstrated in the past. That is another reason why standards of performance need to be designated by the regulator.

If they are consistent with what they said in Committee, the Government will argue that the regulator already has the power to make those matters count in his or her negotiations with the operator in establishing a price regime. My answer is to ask why, if the regulator already has the power, it is necessary to have the Bill which identifies that the standards of performance must be a crucial element in determining whether the activities of an operator are acceptable to the regulator. If the Government have jumped that gap and reached the point where they accept that standards of performance are crucial, surely they should go that little bit further and identify the important standards of performance that will affect the future of the industry and the needs of consumers.

There is advantage in being specific. If our proposal is accepted, it will give the regulator much greater scope to do what he or she currently wants to do. I hope that the regulator would want the things that I have referred to included as important priorities by the operator. The Opposition proposal would give more power to the regulator's elbow in negotiations to force change upon the operators.

If clause 1 is to have more teeth, and if the Government are to convince the public that they are serious about regulation, they should accept that the new clause and the amendments being discussed with it are reasonable. If the Government fail to accept the changes, and if similar amendments are not accepted in another place, people will begin to ask just what kind of citizens charter we have. They will want to know whether it is a real citizens charter with teeth which, in the case of telecommunications, can do something about extending the telephone service to the 13 per cent. of the population who do not have a telephone, which can spread investment in the industry throughout the regions and which can establish strict codes of practice to assist disabled and aged people. People will want to know that the citizens charter regards such issues as important. If the Government want the citizens charter to be credible, they have an obligation to accept the new clause and the amendments.

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): I should like to speak to amendment No. 2, tabled in my name and the names of

[Sir John Hannam]

other hon. Members from the all-party disablement group. The amendment relates to the deposit which is required before a telephone can be installed. The deposit is of tremendous importance to disabled people and the aged. The amendment seeks to give them exemption from deposits for telephone services.

The citizens advice bureaux—I am sure that we are all great admirers of the work they do throughout the country—are particularly anxious that the exemption is given, because they are in the front line in dealing with the numerous cases of clients who are unable to afford the deposit and installation cost of several hundred pounds which are asked of them.

The CABs very much welcome many of the Bill's provisions, which will assist them greatly. They and the disability organisation, RADAR, also welcome the Government's attempt to regulate the criteria relating to deposits and particularly the upper ceiling of £150 placed by British Telecom on deposits for its customers. However, I share their belief that, for very elderly and disabled people, particularly housebound disabled people, a telephone is an essential service. It is more often a lifeline than a luxury.

Telephones provide the link not only with the medical and paramedical support that disabled people need but also with social services, family and friends, all of whom may be necessary in an emergency. In addition, we all know that most disabled people have lower incomes, yet have to pay higher costs than the non-disabled. They have to pay extra for heating, laundry, clothing and medicines. It is punitive for them to have to pay a deposit on what for many is an essential piece of equipment for everyday life.

We all know that, in today's society, the telephone plays a pivotal role in interactive communications. The services that can be accessed via the telephone often provide disabled people with the ability to function in mainstream life when inaccessible buildings would deny them that ability. It is important that disabled people are automatically exempt from telephone deposit charges so that that channel of communication and access is not barred to them.

6.45 pm

A couple of cases from CABs will illustrate the point. The first involves a couple in Greater Manchester who are on income support. They were recommended by their general practitioner to have a telephone installed. They were asked to pay a £150 installation cost plus a £200 deposit. They could not afford those amounts. In another case, in the Chilterns, an elderly disabled pensioner wished to have a telephone installed. As a new subscriber, the pensioner was asked to pay a deposit of £350, which he was unable to pay. After negotiation, British Telecom would only reduce the deposit to £200, which was still far in excess of what the pensioner could afford.

Under the electricity and gas legislation, it is already a statutory requirement that particular regard shall be paid to the needs of elderly and disabled people. Under the Telecommunications Act 1984, British Telecom is required to design special services for disabled consumers. I pay tribute to it for the technology which it has introduced and the practical changes which it has made over the last few years.

The amendment would be a logical extension of existing statutory duties to assist disabled people to lead as normal lives as possible and to be protected in emergencies. In the spirit of the Government's community care policies, I hope that the principle will be accepted and that the necessary changes will be made to the Bill, probably when it reaches the other place.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I too should like to make a brief intervention on amendment No. 2. I agree with everything that has been said by the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), but I should like to put a slight gloss on the matter in relation to two issues: first, the very elderly and, secondly, the problem of the very elderly living in rural areas. In my constituency there is a high proportion of elderly people; that applies throughout rural Wales and similar rural areas.

In rural Montgomeryshire there are approximately 6 per cent. more elderly people than in the average rural district in the United Kingdom. We are proud of our elderly population. It is a fact that in areas like Montgomeryshire people live longer because the climate is pleasant and the way of life is perhaps a little more peaceful. Certainly the work that the people have done over the years has tended to be more healthy than working in the House and in many other more sedentary occupations.

The average rural village, certainly in my part of Wales, tends to be high, somewhat isolated, with little or no public transport. Although unemployment is low, wages tend to be low, too. Usually people want to stay, if they can, when they become very old.

Care in the community is doing well by and large in rural mid-Wales, and the Government are to be commended for the emphasis that has been placed on trying to ensure that elderly people retain their independence for as long as possible. In my Christmas round of hospitals and old people's homes, both public and private, I noticed that their population had aged, with the average age of the residents being much higher than it was some years ago. The reason is simply that more elderly people can stay in their own homes. They are being provided with home helps, nursing care and the excellent general practitioner care.

Medical care in rural Wales is of an exceptionally high standard and is an example to other parts of the country, but because there is no public transport and people can become isolated and lonely—an emotional viewpoint which becomes overwhelmingly subjective as they become much older, perhaps being widowed—it is essential for them to have the one means of communication which can keep them in touch with the outside world on a person-to-person basis. The television tells them what is going on in the outside world, but does not enable them to speak directly to anybody.

A deposit for an elderly person who may have done without a telephone until becoming older, as is common in rural Wales, may be too much to meet. The great majority of pensioners in my constituency do not have occupational pensions. They do not complain about that. They just get on with life and live on their state pension, and they manage surprisingly well, considering the level of the pension. But when the time comes and they are isolated and must choose between going into an old person's home

—possibly going into a council pensioner's bungalow—and staying in their own home, their ability to communicate with other people is a key factor.

It would be consistent with Government policy for care in the community to say that if not for all pensioners—amendment No. 2 perhaps aims high in that respect—at least for pensioners who are 75 or over, telephones should be provided without a deposit having to be provided. I hope that the Government will give a sympathetic response on that point.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to hon. Members who have contributed to the debate for the sympathy that they have shown to disabled people, and of course the Government and the regulator wish to see progress made in providing the right kind of services to such groups of people.

I remind hon. Members that under the telecommunications legislation, the director general has a duty to promote the interests of consumers, purchasers and other users in the United Kingdom, including, in particular, those who are disabled or of pensionable age. That is the first requirement in section 3, which lays down the duties. The director is also obliged by section 54 to set up a body to advise him on matters affecting the disabled and elderly.

Disabled and elderly people are specifically covered in British Telecom's general code of practice, and the director general has established a committee to advise him on their needs. Licence condition 31 requires BT to consult the director general from time to time about the supply and connection of apparatus for the disabled. Condition 32 requires BT to ensure that telephones with sound amplification facilities and telephones capable of being inductively coupled to hearing aids are available. BT also provides a wide range of other services, and has established an action for disabled customers' department to help it meet the needs of the disabled. It has also issued a publication setting out in detail the facilities it has to offer people with difficulties who need special treatment.

The regulator has not been inactive. He obtained a change in British Telecom's policy on deposits which was announced in August, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) for mentioning that favourably. The House might wish to know some of the detail. As a result of that change of policy by BT, there are now four new categories of customer and customers seeking different kinds of service.

The first comprises those who need pay no deposit—that is a large category—being those who have had a BT service in the past and have paid their bills when requested. They will rarely be required to pay a deposit. One would be requested only if there had been some other problem, relating to their credit-worthiness, which had cropped up more recently. So, many people are asked for no deposit because they have been past customers and there has been no problem with their credit rating.

There are then three categories—low, medium and high risk. The—low risk new customer is asked for a deposit of £75; the medium risk, £100; and the high risk, £150, as my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter mentioned. About 40 per cent. of new customers pay a deposit. Such deposits are repaid, with 9 per cent. interest after a year.

I am, of course, concerned if it is felt that that is still an impediment to disabled people who need access to the service and are not an extreme credit risk to BT. If a customer is asked for a deposit and is unhappy with the position, he can go to the director general. This legislation will be of assistance, because the director general may decide, with his duties under the telecoms legislation and given the new powers that this measure will give him, that he wishes to influence the decision by BT.

I should like to see the system in operation before going all the way with my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter and Opposition Members in their proposals. I shall make sure that, on this important issue, the strong feelings of hon. Members are relayed to the director general in the context of his general powers for disabled people.

Mr. Hain: I appreciate the sympathetic response that the Minister is giving. Is he aware that, in addition to the deposit charge levels which he has identified, there is a connection charge in respect of telecommunications of £163? In other words, people are being asked to find a great deal of money. That double charge is the key problem.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and I agree that it can make things difficult, as my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter implied. A deposit of £150, or even more before the new policy was introduced, on top of the full connection charge, represented a substantial sum. I suggest that the right approach is to start with the deposit, which is what the director general has been doing as a result of that new policy of BT. I hope that I have helped the House by what I have said about how we would like to see the director general use his powers and how he may wish to be involved in some cases where difficulties still arise.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) asked whether there had been a latter-day conversion or U-turn by the Government in seeking stronger regulatory powers. Not at all. The bulk of the regulatory powers are already in existing legislation. The Bill looks at those powers in the light of experience and brings the powers of all the regulators broadly up to the level of the best in the different pieces of legislation evolved over time for the various industries.

The Government have always said that there will be large monopoly areas in many industries for the foreseeable future and that those areas need careful regulation in the customer interest, as we have identified in previous debates. We have also said that we believe that the best regulator of all is competition. That is why we have taken measures to promote competition, and as competition builds up, our point will be even better established that competition is the customer's best friend and can provide an excellent deal on price, service quality and range of services available.

BT already sets out its services for disabled customers, and the regulatory framework does much of what the House is seeking to achieve in this short debate. So, while expressing much sympathy with the aims of some hon. Members, I suggest that the new clauses are not required and that the director general should get on with his work in the way I have described.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 8

GENERAL OBLIGATIONS OF UNDERTAKERS

'( )—(1) In section 68 of the Water Industry Act 1991, subsection (3) shall be omitted and there shall be substituted—

"(3) An undertaker shall be in breach of his duty under subsection (91)(a) above if water is unwholesome, or becomes unwholesome, at any point along a pipe supplying the premises concerned, unless—

(a) the unwholeness arises from a leak which is the responsibility of the occupier, or

(b) the occupier, or a person on his behalf, has wilfully or negligently caused damage to the pipe and such damage has caused the unwholesomeness.".'.—*[Mr. Win Griffiths.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may take the following: New clause 9—*Responsibility for sewage pipes*—

'( )—(1) In section 98 of the Water Industry Act 1991, after subsection (1) there shall be inserted—

"(1A) A sewerage undertaker shall remedy any defect in a sewer to which this section applies at any point along the whole such length of the pipe, unless any such defect arises from wilful or negligent damage caused to the pipe directly by an occupier of any premises to which the pipe is connected.".'.

Amendment No. 4, in clause 24, page 20, line 15, at end insert—

'(aa) the number, length and location of pipes in the area of each undertaker through which drinking water is supplied to domestic and non-domestic premises which contribute to a deterioration in the quality of water supplied particularly when it could be a public health hazard;'.

Amendment No. 5, in page 20, line 19, at end insert 'including the wholesomeness or otherwise of water supplied in accordance with section 68 of the Water Industry Act 1991 as amended.'.

Mr. Griffiths: New clauses 8 and 9 bring an important new principle into play. At present, the customer is responsible for the pipe from the main to the property. In the case of a terrace house the length could be a metre or two; in some cases it is the length of a garden; in others it can be at least the length of a lane. The Government are responsible for ensuring that tap water quality meets the standards set out in the European Community directive. The water and sewerage undertakers are responsible, on behalf of the Government, for ensuring that the standards are adhered to, and we believe that they should be responsible for the entire length of pipe to a customer's tap or toilet. The Government should accept that the undertakers will assume that responsibility. However, the new clauses contain the proviso that, if a customer can be shown to have been negligent about the care of pipes under his property, he should bear the cost of dealing with any resulting problems in respect of the quality of water or sewerage. That is a fairly straightforward principle.

In this group of amendments, we make the point that the director general should collect information about any water-carrying pipes that, in themselves, could cause a deterioration of water quality, which, in turn, could be harmful to the consumer. In this respect there are two important contaminants or pollutants. One of them is lead, and there is a well established link between the presence of lead in water and brain damage, particularly in the case of young children. Indeed, this theory has an historic and well established pedigree."The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" could have been shortened considerably if Gibbon had simply pointed out that it was the magnificent lead-lined water systems of the Romans that did so much damage to their intellectual powers.

Lead is the first problem in respect of which the director general should collect information about pipes that can cause damage to the health of consumers—information to be made publicly available. In this country there are about 2 million people who drink water that fails to meet the EC standard of 50 micrograms per litre. This is clear from samples taken by the water inspectors.

The figure of 2 million does not include children and adults who go to the old schools and hospitals that still exist. Medical research has demonstrated that lead levels above the EC figure of 50 micrograms per litre, in combination with exposure from other sources, can result in blood lead levels that have adverse biochemical effects, including interference with the formation of red blood cells. That is why we are keen to establish for consumers a list of the places in which these offending pipes are to be found. Samples that were taken in 1988 and 1989 indicated that, in the country as a whole, almost one quarter of water zones did not comply with the EC limit of 50 micrograms per litre. Thus, lead is a widespread and serious problem.

The other pipes that give rise to concern are those that are lined with coal tar pitch. Most of them are old mains, and they are to be found principally in the Thames water authority area, particularly in and around London, and to a certain extent in the south-west water area. In England and Wales 102 water zones are affected. Over a period, the water combines with the coal tar pitch to produce chemicals known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. These are extremely deadly chemicals, and under EC regulations only 0·2 of a mocrogram per litre of water is allowed.

As it is a cancer-causing agent, the consumer has a right to know exactly where such mains are and whether there is a potential problem. Altogether, it affects about 4 per cent. of water zones, which in the last two years for which measurements were taken had levels which exceeded the EC limit for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. That is why we want the water companies to take full responsibility, as the Government's agents in this matter, for meeting the standards of the EC water quality directives and why, in these two particular cases of which there is public knowledge, the damaging effect on people's health of lead pipes and of coal-tar, pitch-lined pipes, should become public knowledge and information on these matters should be collected and printed.

I shall be returning to the more general question of our water supplies and our beach and river water quality standards when looking at some later amendments, and also to some more specific problems relating to lead.

I hope that the Government can respond positively by saying that the water undertakers will accept this responsibility for pipes, right to the customers' taps and toilets, and that they will get the director general to publish specific information about lead pipes and coal-tar, pitch-lined pipes.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): New clause 8 seeks to place an unfair burden of responsibility on the water supplier. Whereas now the water supplier is, quite rightly, responsible for the wholesomeness of water in water supply pipes, the new clause would make the water supplier additionally responsible for water in customers'

pipes unless the water supplier was able to prove that the customer had damaged the pipes or caused a leak which had led to contamination of the water. It would clearly be unreasonable to make the supplier responsible for the condition of a large number of other people's water pipes.

Safeguards for water wholesomeness are already stringent. Ninety-nine per cent. of the 3·3 million tests carried out in 1990 by the drinking water inspectorate were satisfactory. Indeed, privatisation has enabled the water industry to set in place a programme for remedial action for those supplies which do not yet comply with standards. This will involve a capital investment programme of over £2 billion by 1995. So new clause 8 would not add any significant protection to the consumer but would place an unfair burden on the water supplier.

New clause 9 is redundant. It seems to be trying to make sewer undertakers liable for repairs to public sewers, but they are already so liable.

With regard to further information, clause 24 already makes provision for the director general to collect information from water undertakers about their performance against standards set out in section 38 of the Water Industry Act 1991. In this context, quality of drinking water is obviously of paramount importance. As I made clear in Committee, this is not a matter for the Director General of Water Services; it is a matter for the drinking water inspectorate, which enforces the standards. Knowledge of the whereabouts of pipes is needed at times, but that information is already available. Section 198 of the Water Industry Act requires undertakers to keep records of all pipes and underground works vested in the undertakers and to make those records available, free of charge, for inspection by the public.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I hear what the Minister is saying and I only wish that it were correct—unless, of course, Dwr Cymru has got its own legal position absolutely wrong. I shall be referring to this information in more detail later, but I will read one sentence of the reply I received to my request for information about lead pipes. The chairman of Welsh Water, John Jones, said this:

"Unfortunately, I am unable to provide details of areas specifically affected by lead piping since Dwr Cymru has no right to obtain this information. However, I believe that it can safely be assumed that all areas will have some properties with lead pipework."

He could not give me specific information.

Mr. Baldry: As I made clear—and of course this is correct because it is on the face of an Act of Parliament—section 198 of the Water Industry Act requires undertakers to keep records of all pipes and underground works vested in those undertakers and to make those records available, free of charge, for inspection by the public. In short, if the director general has need of such information, he too has access to it. This amendment is unnecessary.

7.15 pm

The purpose of amendment No. 4 is to require the director to collect and publish information about drinking water quality. Again, this amendment shows a misunderstanding of the nature of the tough regulatory regime that we have already put in place and of the various regulators.

Drinking water quality standards are not a matter for the Director General of Water Services. The standards for drinking water quality are set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the water quality regulations which are enforced by the drinking water inspectorate. The inspectorate already regularly obtains information from the water companies about the quality of water supplied under no fewer than 57 parameters and the inspectorate publishes an annual report giving a comprehensive description of drinking water quality in England and Wales tested rigorously against the very demanding criteria of the water quality regulations.

Therefore, this amendment is not only not appropriate but would simply lead to a duplication of effort, requiring the director general to collect and publish such information—an exercise already ably and competently undertaken by the drinking water inspectorate.

The new clauses and amendments are redundant, otiose or unnecessary.

Question put and negatived.

New Clause 11

RESTRICTIONS ON DIVERSIFICATION

'The following section shall be inserted in the Water Industry Act 1991, after section 14—

"14A. The Director General of Water Services may require the appointed company not to engage in specified diversification of its activities if he is of the opinion that the company's ability to meet its statutory obligations would be prejudiced by such diversification.".'.—*[Mr. Alex Carlile.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we will take new clause 53—*Water and sewerage undertakers: subsidiary companies*—

'.—(1) It shall be a condition of appointment that any water and sewerage undertaker shall separate completely its statutory functions from those of any subsidiary company which carries out activities unrelated to its statutory role.

(2) The Director shall establish such rules as are necessary to ensure that customers of any water and sewerage undertaker pay no charges or make any contribution to the undertaker for the activities of any of its subsidiaries.'.

Mr. Carlile: The Liberal Democrats recently published a drinking water survey called "Coming Clean on the Water We Drink". It produced some interesting results—rather more interesting than the title, perhaps, for which I am pleased to claim no credit. Our survey found that about 416,000 people in the South West Water area were supplied with water which breached regulations owing to its aluminium content. We know how much concern there has been, in the south-west in particular, about aluminium in water. Another 208,333 people were supplied with water which had come from 10 zones where regulations governing lead were being breached.

It is certainly fair to say that South West Water has undertaken a large investment programme, and it is to be commended, but that programme has failed to make up for years of decay and under-investment in the infrastructure. As a result, a large number of people are still drinking sub-standard water.

It is my view that it is reasonable that, faced with the enormity of this problem, water companies which do not possess sufficient resources to meet their commitments as water suppliers should not, without close regulation, be

[Mr. Carlile]

allowed to diversify their activities, particularly into speculative ventures. The new clause offers a straightforward and necessary additional measure of regulation.

The Water Industry Act 1991 sets up a different corporate structure for the privatised water plcs from that for other utility plcs. The holding company may own other companies, one of which is called the "appointed" company under the Act. That company receives the appointments under the relevant licence. The appointed company deals with the core business, which is water and sewerage works. That core business is regulated, but the holding company may, perfectly reasonably, also own subsidiaries that are totally unrelated to the core business.

That means that Ofwat has no jurisdiction over those associated activities, except to ensure that any diversification does not harm the appointed company's ability to meet its commitments. That in turn means that, although the director general can look at the potential effect of an associated company, relating to the appointed company's ability to meet its commitments, he cannot look at what is happening in associated companies once they have been established by the appointed company.

Last September, Ofwat issued a licence amendment specifically dealing with that issue. The director general, Mr. Byatt, who has exercised great skill in his role—I deprecate the earlier criticism of him—quickly recognised the effects that diversification was having both on the public image of water plcs and on the companies' resources. The decision by Welsh Water, Dwr Cymru, to set up a series of hotels stamped clearly on the public mind the fact that water plcs are engaging in business that is very diverse from water. Wales has some fine hotels, but many of its country hotels are available to any purchaser who can offer a reasonable price because he will not make much money out of them. It may be argued that Dwr Cymru's investment is sound in the long term, but it does not appear to be a sound investment at present.

The licence means that the plcs must certify that they have the necessary financial and managerial resources to meet the appointed companies' obligation under the statute. Ofwat is carrying out a ring-fencing exercise to assess the sufficiency of the resources that are going in to meeting the appointments. However, Ofwat recognises that the issuing of a licence is only a monitoring device and that the regulator cannot forbid diversification, even if it is found that the company does not have sufficient resources to undertake its statutory duties because the resources are being frittered away elsewhere. That is what the new clause is all about.

Who pays for the losses that may occur as a result of diversification? Many companies have gone out of business, and big business is not exempt from that trend. Clearly, it would be wrong for the water companies' customers—those of us who turn on the tap and provide the sewage—to pay for the provision of services that are unrelated to the water companies' main purpose, if those services lose money. Mr. Byatt is on record as saying plainly that the losses made by subsidiaries should be borne by the shareholders of the plcs, not by the customers. Otherwise, a dreadful injustice could result whereby not only would the companies fail to meet their obligations to the detriment of consumers, but they would be forced to stand the losses made by the activities that had diverted the resources away from keeping up the appointments for statutory duties.

To show that I am not exaggerating, I shall focus on some examples of diversification activities, other than the hotels that I have mentioned. There are good and bad examples. Some of the diversifications that have been carried out by North West Water should be considered against the background of the capital expenditure programme to which the companies are committed and the costs of meeting various European Community drinking water, bathing and waste treatment standards—for example, the municipal waste water directive.

Earlier this year, I went bathing in Bournemouth at 3 o'clock in the morning and a very pleasant experience it was, too. Bournemouth's is one of the few beaches in this country that meets the European criteria. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, are welcome to join me next time I go swimming at 3 o'clock in the morning.

The impact of meeting all those obligations already has an inevitable cost consequence for the consumer. Indeed, the Secretary of State for the Environment recently said that water charges may need to increase by 50 per cent. by the end of the century to meet statutory and European Community obligations. So it is important that diversification should not bleed money from the plcs to raise charges even more. Naturally, some diversification is relevant and makes good sense.

North West Water has diversified into activities related to the water business, such as water purification and treatment, which is an acceptable form of diversification. It is important, however, that it be monitored closely because of possible competition implications.

An example of competition implications can be taken, again, from North-West Water. It has acquired several businesses from abroad and at home that specialise in the designing and engineering of water and waste systems. In particular, it has acquired a good company called Water Engineering Ltd., primarily engaged in the design and installation of water and waste treatment plants in the United Kingdom. That key company is involved as a supplier in the £24 billion capital expenditure programme to be undertaken in the next 10 years. A consequence of that ostensibly sensible investment is that North West Water will be involved in buying services from a company that it owns wholly.

That raises the issue of transfer pricing and the dangers of cross-subsidisation between the core business of North West Water and Water Engineering Ltd. It is important that the cross-subsidisation should not be at the expense of the consumer of water services. North West Water has given assurances that it would buy services from its subsidiary at full market rates, and I welcome that assurance. Nevertheless, there is plainly concern about the possible vertical integration of the water industry by such deals.

Ofwat is carrying out a survey of transactions between core businesses of the water plcs and subsidiaries in related markets, and investigating transfer pricing. If Ofwat finds that the survey shows that the public interest is not being served, it is important that it should have powers to deal with such a problem.

7.30 pm

Much less defensible, however, is diversification into completely unrelated areas, especially when the companies involved—the plcs—have very high environmental targets which in many cases they are not meeting. There is plenty of evidence that those targets are not being met. High targets also mean that companies are likely to have higher K factors—as they are called—relating to price increases. That is the case with South West Water, which recently chose not to defer its full K increase for 1992. Its average bill for next year is £91·23, an increase of well over 10 per cent. on 1991.

One appreciates that South West Water has a very high capital programme, which includes investment to end the dispoal of sludge at sea by 1998. However, South West Water, with all those obligations and in addition to possessing six subsidiaries in businesses which relate to water and waste treatment, has a 20 per cent. stake in West Country Television Ltd. That media acquisition might be a good investment, but it is plain that such an investment has no relation whatever to the core business.

The new clause raises an issue of principle: is the regulator to have a full range of powers to deal with the panoply of business conducted by the water plcs in order to ensure that that full panoply is being operated in the interests of the consumer, or is he to have only powers which are restricted to the appointed company, to the company providing the water services? If he has the full range of powers, the public interest is fully protected. If he has only limited powers, it follows logically that there is only limited protection. The new clause seeks to ensure maximum public protection without in any way preventing the privatised companies from conducting their businesses sensibly and with reasonable regard to normal business practice.

Mr. Win Griffiths: We fully endorse all that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said about the need to control the diversification activities of the water companies. Our new clause seeks to do more or less the same as his. We want to ensure that, before any water or sewerage undertaker is appointed to carry out its statutory role, any subsidiary company that it establishes whose activities are wholly unrelated to that statutory role is completely separate from the core business and that the director establishes such rules as are necessary to ensure that, whatever happens to the unrelated subsidiary business, the customers of the water and sewerage undertaker do not contribute in any way.

There is no doubt that the current appointees in England and Wales—the water and sewerage companies —have taken advantage of the immensely beneficial position in which they found themselves as monopoly suppliers of water and sewerage services to buy into businesses which cannot be regarded as related to their core business. Northumbria Water, for example, has bought into cable television; Yorkshire Water is involved in the direct mail business; Thames Water is involved in landscape gardening and Southern Water in vehicle leasing.

I must not neglect to mention Welsh Water, Dŵr Cymru. I usually mention it as its chairman is a constituent of mine and I try to look after his best interests, however he might test my desire to do so. Welsh Water has engaged in some wonderful diversifications which currently include —I believe—a 14·9 per cent. share in South Wales Electricity, which cost, if I remember rightly, more than £300 million. Surely, that money which it claims was raised on the capital markets, could have been much better used to speed up the programme to comply with water quality standards required under European Community directives.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery raised a number of serious issues relating to the activities of water and sewerage undertakers in subsidiary businesses which are not related to their core activities. I shall deal with one or two issues which were not fully covered in his speech.

The first relates to the way in which the subsidiary business may receive loans from the core company to develop its activities. I am advised by consultants interested in the water industry that at the moment the accounts of the water companies cannot be sifted to detect whether the subsidiaries are paying the full commercial rate of interest on any loans that they may receive from the core business. That is one reason why we believe that the two activities should be completely separate. The way in which the money may move between the two and the way in which the charges are made for services provided between them should be immediately evident to anyone who studies the accounts of the core business or of the subsidiaries.

Another issue is that of taxation. The water companies were given a highly preferential deal on corporation tax when they were created. I think that it is true to say that, for well over 20 years, they will not have to pay corporation tax. Under the complex group taxation rules, if a core business somehow made a loss in a particular year —I agree that that would be incredible under the present rules—but the subsidiary companies made a profit, that profit would not be subject to corporation tax because it could be subsumed into the accounts of the core business, and corporation tax relief would be given. That would mean a loss of finance for the Exchequer arising in the first place from an extremely beneficial deal given to the water companies when they were created.

It is of course also possible for the core business to subsidise its subsidiary companies. Thames Water has acquired a business that is not directly related to its core services but which is a water industry service that Thames might use itself—it is a subsidiary plumbing company. It would be perfectly possible for Thames to allow that company to provide it with services at a favourable rate. Thames could put business its way, to the disadvantage of other private competitors. I am sure that the Government would be concerned by such a development.

There are all sorts of ways in which core businesses and their subsidiaries might cross-subsidise each other. However, the customers of the core business could be disadvantaged and pay higher water charges because of the way in which the subsidiaries of that business operate.

We lost the vote in Committee on the principle of not allowing core businesses to run subsidiaries in unrelated areas of business, so at the very least the Government should accept these new clauses now, since they contain the sort of rules which will mean that customers paying for core business activities will not suffer from the multifarious and complex operations that are possible under our company and taxation rules. The waters, dare I say it, should not be muddied and no advantage should be taken of customers of a core business.

Mr. Baldry: The two new clauses have a similar purpose —to allow the director general to include conditions in a water or sewerage companies appointment prohibiting it from diversifying. I hope that the House will not think me discourteous if I therefore discuss them both together.

There was some suggestion that the water companies might be in some difficulty in meeting their statutory and other obligations. It is fair to point out that, last year alone, capital spending by the water companies increased by nearly 40 per cent. in real terms, to £2·5 billion. In the current financial year capital spending is planned to show a further increase of more than 20 per cent. in real terms, to more than £3 billion. There is every reason to expect that that will be achieved. As all hon. Members know, the water companies together are expected to spend about £28 billion over the next decade, which works out at investing £5,000 each and every minute on enhancing water quality.

It is clear that we get good value from our water charges. They are among the lowest in Europe, averaging only 43p per household per day for the combined costs of water supply and sewerage—roughly the cost of a single cup of coffee in any cafe in the country. The French, Germans and Italians all pay much more for their water services.

As for diversification, I appreciate the concern that lies behind the new clauses, but I feel that they are unnecessary. Of course it is important that the director general should have the power to ensure that an appointed undertaker's ability to carry out its core business is safeguarded. The legislation already provides for that. The director already has power to impose conditions restricting diversification by water and sewerage undertakers. Section 11 of the Water Industry Act 1991 gives the director wide powers to impose such conditions of appointment as appear to him necessary or expedient. Section 2 of the Act imposes a general duty on the director to exercise his regulatory functions in a manner best calculated to ensure the proper provision of water and sewerage services throughout England and Wales, and to ensure that the undertakers can finance the proper carrying out of their functions.

The director general has already taken steps to ensure that water and sewerage services are not put at risk by diversification. He has agreed to an amended condition F of the instrument of appointment of water and sewerage undertakers, which came into effect on 3 September last year. It requires the appointed undertakers to act at all times in a manner best calculated to ensure that they have adequate financial and management resources to enable them to carry out the regulated activities, including their investment programmes, to submit to the director with their accounting statements a certificate confirming that they will have adequate financial and management resources to carry out the regulated activities for at least the next 12 months, and to submit a further certificate when an appointee or any group company embarks on any activity other than a regulated activity which could be material to the appointee's ability to finance the carrying out of the regulated functions.

7.45 pm

So, condition F already requires the finances of the core business carrying out the regulated activity to be ring-fenced and reported on separately from any other activity. The director keeps the licence conditions under review and I have no doubt that he will take action if there is evidence that the new conditions are not providing adequate protection for the customers.

In my submission these new clauses would not add any protection to consumers or customers, and there is no evidence to suggest that businesses are failing to discharge their responsibilities in every regard.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I am disappointed by the Minister's response, because the purpose of the new clauses is to ensure that, if the director general sees, in his regulatory role, that he ought to be able to take certain actions to correct what is happening, he should be able to take them. Such powers do not exist now, or at least they are not strong enough.

We shall obviously watch what happens to the subsidiaries of the water plcs with great care, and no doubt there will be more opportunities to return to this subject. I am therefore content not to press the matter, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Madam Deputy Speaker, I wanted to ask the Minister a couple of questions——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who moved the new clause, has withdrawn it.

New Clause 20

EXERCISING OF ANY TELECOMMUNICATIONS DISPUTE RESOLUTION FUNCTION

'The Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971 shall be amended as follows—

(1) In section 10, after "Foreign Compensation Commission" there shall be inserted "or the Director General of Telecommunications";

(2) In section 13(1), after "28(b)" there shall be inserted "30B";

(3) In Schedule 1, after paragraph 30A there shall be inserted—

"30B The Director General of Telecommunications and any prescribed person, arbitrator or arbiter, in respect of the exercise of any dispute resolution function under the Telecommunications Act 1984 (c. 12), and any member of the Director's staff authorised to exercise those functions under paragraph 8 of Schedule 1 to the Telecommunications Act 1984.".'.—*[Mr. Hain.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Hain: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I do not make these remarks in an adversarial spirit, and I may even spare the Minister the sort of peroration for which he chided me in an earlier debate—most unfairly, I thought.

That is not to say that the new clause does not represent a serious issue; it is an extremely serious issue, as I shall suggest later. However, in Committee the Minister showed a fair degree of sympathy with the thinking behind the new clause, saying:

"I shall certainly reflect further . . . and . . . give more information on Report".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 17 December 1991; c. 383.]

I trust that we will not be disappointed this evening, given that expression of intent.

The new clause deals with a serious anomaly in the Bill, which is that the regulator has a quasi-judicial power, yet no clear legal obligation to give reasons for his decisions on disputes such as those over billing, charging, bad debt,

deposits and so on. That leaves the public in the dark and it leaves British Telecom—or, for that matter, any other designated operator—in the dark over policy standards. If there is a dispute between a customer and British Telecom, surely BT should be fully aware of the reasons for the regulator's decision on the dispute, so that it can then change its policy, alter its standards and ensure that the mistake is not repeated. Similarly, the customer should be aware of the reasons for the regulator's decision.

If the tribunals legislation is applied in the way that the clause suggests, section 12 of the Act would require the director general to give reasons for his decision. The new clause would accomplish that task and remove a serious anomaly. It would also allow a right of appeal to the courts which is presently denied to any complainant who feels that he has been unfairly treated by the regulator or by a designated telecommunications operator such as BT.

The application of the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971 to the Director General of Telecommunications would allow an appeal on a point of law in the High Court against the director general's decision. Under the Bill, the director general's decision is or could be final and would preclude an appeal on a point of law, although the question of a judicial review may remain open. The Minister has said:

"Let me first reassure him that the director generals will give reasons. Were they not to do that, the decisions could be subject to judicial review."

He also said:

"I think that regulators should give reasons, and will have to do so under the Bill. If they do not, they will have the sanction of judicial review."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 17 December 1991; c. 382-83.]

Far be it from me as a humble Back Bencher to disagree with the no doubt eminent advice of the vast ranks of the Minister's civil servants, which no doubt include learned civil servants. However, I have taken legal advice, and I am told that the Minister's statement is wrong in law on two counts. First, there is nothing in the Bill to oblige the director general or the arbitrator to give reasons for his decision. Accordingly, the Minister must be relying on a purported statement of general law.

Secondly, there is no general rule of administrative law obliging regulators and other administrative officials carrying out judicial-type functions to give reasons for their decisions. If there were such a general rule, it is accepted that failure to give reasons would be a ground for judicial review. I am also advised that the Minister is wrong to say that failure to give reasons would attract the sanction of judicial review.

Statutory tribunals listed in the Tribunals and Inquiries Act are required to give reasons, unless they are covered by one of the exceptions in the Act. There are cases which suggest that a court could hold that a statutory tribunal not listed in the Act must give reasons for its decisions. However, there is no general rule of law that tribunals, or administrative authorities which are not called tribunals but carry out judicial-type functions, such as the Director General of Telecommunications, must give reasons for their decisions.

It is important for the Minister to define a tribunal in this context, because it is not defined in general law. When he is resolving a dispute in this manner is the Director General of Telecommunications acting as a tribunal on, for example, a request for a deposit? That issue can be satisfactorily settled only by including a specific provision in the Bill that the director general is a tribunal in this context and has a specific obligation to give reasons for his decisions.

The essential point is that, although it is possible for a court to be persuaded to hold that a director general was acting as a tribunal and may also be persuaded to hold that he was a formal tribunal of the kind that the law recognised as obliged to give proper reasons for its decisions, there is no certainty that a court would so hold. It is wrong for there to be uncertainty about the director general's duty in this respect. It should not be left to British Telecom or a customer or a complainant against BT who is dissatisfied with the director general's decisions, but has received no reasons for them, to have to test the law by seeking a judicial review to find out whether the director general is obliged to give reasons for his decisions.

The issue should not be left to that complicated internecine process but should be made specific in the legislation and should not rest on the say-so of a Minister in Committee or in the House. It is almost an insult to the intelligence of consumers, if not to the House, to say that somebody who is not satisfied with the director general's decision should have to rely on a judicial review. The whole process of such a review is extremely complex and consists of a number of stages. To stop frivolous applications one has first to apply for permission to apply. It is time-consuming and costly and, as far as I am aware, there is no entitlement to legal aid for those seeking leave to appeal to a judicial review.

It is not a realistic option for a consumer who is not satisfied with the director general's decision. A dissatisfied consumer or a company such as BT should not have to resort to judicial review. It is nonsense. The legislation should stipulate that the director general should give reasons for his decisions in resolving disputes. The Minister must concede that this is a basic matter of a consumer rights.

Mr. Redwood: As the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) says, I undertook in Committee to provide more information if the Council on Tribunals came to a stronger view on dispute resolution by the regulators. The council has done so because it has concluded that it should seek supervision over adjudication functions of the regulators. The implications of that are that the council would wish to oversee the setting up and operation of procedures which might involve oral hearings of a tribunal type. The council is not looking at the complaints procedures of any of the utilities, as the Opposition previously implied. Under the tribunals legislation, it would not provide relief in a particular case. It is concerned with procedures.

In the light of the council's view, the Government are now considering how best to proceed. Departments are considering their position with their regulators, because each one raises somewhat different issues. They will liaise with the council and decide on each of the regulators. I shall look at telecommunications with an open mind and in the light of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

If Departments reach agreement with the council which necessitates formal supervision to be stated, that will be done by the Lord Chancellor's Department as an order under the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept the promise that we are reviewing the matter in the light of the council's statement. He might agree that the route that we suggest is a better legal route than an amendment. I cannot say that our legal

[Mr. Redwood]

advice is the same. The views that I expressed in Committee obviously depended on legal advice to the Government, and our view is still that these matters could be subject to judicial review in the way that I then described.

Mr. Hain: I thank the Minister for his sympathetic response. However, I think that the advice that I have been given is stronger than the Minister's response and I do not wish to withdraw the clause.

Question put and negatived.

New Clause 21

COMPETITIVE PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION

'After subsection (2) of Section 20 of the Gas Act 1986 there shall be inserted—

"(2A) The Director shall not allow such shorter period if in his opinion—

(1) The construction of this pipeline constitutes an anti-competitive practice or an abuse of a dominant position in the market.

(2) The public gas supplier has prior to giving notice under subsection (1) above made application to a local planning authority for planning permission for that pipeline and that application will inhibit potential competitors of this supplier from executing any works for the construction of a pipeline to serve a similar market.

(3) The intention of the public gas supplier in giving notice under subsection (1) above is to inhibit potential competitors of the supplier from executing any works for the construction of a pipeline to serve a similar market.

(4) The investment in the pipeline is inconsistent with the public gas supplier's duty under section 9(1)(a) above.".'.—*[Mr. Tim Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

8 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The term "level playing field" is much used, but it best describes what my new clause seeks to achieve. Until quite recently, British Gas was the monopoly constructor of pipelines. There are now other companies that wish to compete with British Gas in constructing pipelines and they are finding planning and other difficulties in their way. The object of the new clause is to give additional powers to the Director General of Gas Supply so that he can deal with the problem.

I do not want to delay the House by going into great detail. This is a technical matter, but the principle is simple enough. I am glad to say that the principle has the support of the Director General of Gas Supply, who I was glad to see was knighted in the new year's honours. I believe that he does an excellent job in combating the monopoly which is British Gas. He has written to my hon. Friend the Minister to say that he supports the principle behind the new clause.

Timing is important. The director general explains in his letter:

"There has been no competitive pipeline construction in the gas supply area for many years. There are ten new power stations on the planning path at this time . . . as a consequence pipelines will be required to carry the gas to the sites."

That means that timing is critical. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister may be waiting for agreement within the European Community on two important directives that will impact upon these matters. My plea to him is that the matter is more urgent than that, for the reasons that I have given. I hope, therefore, that he will give serious consideration to the principle behind my proposal.

Mr. Morgan: We were rather worried that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) would not move the new clause, and we are pleased that he did. It raises some interesting considerations about the way that the Government, with the support of the Director General of Gas Supply, see the evolution of a competitive gas market. As we said in Committee, a competitive gas market could take two different forms. There could be one set of pipelines with different suppliers pushing gas through them. There could be two sets of pipelines. There could be two sets of long-distance tranmission lines and only one local distribution network. As the Minister agreed in Committee, there is a possibility under the Government's proposals that there could be two sets of local distribution pipes as well as two sets of long-distance transmission pipes from the gas fields or the beachheads in East Anglia, Morecambe bay, north Wales or wherever.

I shall explain why the Opposition cannot support the new clause, even though we think that it contains some interesting ideas. We think that the ability to break ground, as it were, for long-distance transmission and transmission pipes requires much more consultation with local authorities, which will have to give planning permission. We entirely agree, however, that it should not be possible for British Gas to abuse its monopoly position. That may or may not be covered adequately by article 85—I think that that is the relevant article—of the treaty of Rome. I believe that that provision deals with dominant position. We are not completely happy that enough work has yet been done with the local authorities.

We do not know what the reaction of the general public will be to the idea of two or possibly more companies having the right to break streets. We said in Committee that it has occurred only once in the context of the British gas industry, and that was in Edinburgh before the first world war. We think that residents would not be comforted if two entirely separate gas networks were to evolve.

There are some possible health and safety implications that we have not yet sufficiently explored. Gas is an extremely combustible commodity. If a public-spirited citizen is taking his dog for a walk and he smells gas, or thinks he does—it is often a badly cleaned sewer, and in both instances there is methane—and decides to telephone the gas supplier, he will look for "G" in the telephone book and make a call. To be fair, there is usually a response within 20 minutes and something is done. If there are two or three sets of gas suppliers or networkers, can we be sure how we would organise emergency services?

Mr. Tim Smith: I might be able to reassure the hon. Gentleman. As far as I am aware, the companies that are interested in competing in British Gas are not interested in competing to supply gas to domestic consumers by digging up the streets and having two or three lines running underneath the pavement. They are more interested in supplying the industrial market over long distances.

Mr. Morgan: Unfortunately, the implications of opening two ownerships of long-distance transmission gas pipelines and of owning local distribution networks is that

two gas companies will run lines down the middle of the street and compete for supply. That which happened in Edinburgh before the first world war was not excluded by the Minister in Committee, and I assume that he will not exclude it when he replies on behalf of the Government, unless he has had a change of heart. Therefore, there is the possibility of two separate street-breaking rights for local distribution gas suppliers. That is possible given the way that the Government envisage the long-term development of transmission. If the Minister wants to say that that is completely off, that it is out of court and that he has changed his mind since Committee, fair enough. If that is the position, we shall listen. We need to know, however, exactly how the health and safety requirements would be implemented, bearing in mind that gas is such a highly combustible and explosive commodity.

We do not think that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield has considered sufficiently how the emergency services would work if there were actual or suspected gas leaks or distribution leaks. The public respond extremely well if there is a whiff of gas, and we must ensure that they would be able to respond in the same way if there were two or more suppliers. We do not know what the reaction of local authorities and the general public would be if two or three additional gas suppliers had the right to break streets to provide a supply or repair a supply. Local authorities would have to be consulted before we could be sure of their reaction. We cannot give our support to the new clause at present.

Mr. Redwood: The Government are sympathetic to the concerns that have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) about inequalities in the laying of gas pipelines. We remain firmly committed to the introduction of the level playing field that he is seeking. We need to take account of existing European Community legislation on the environment and the revised Seveso directive, when it is adopted.

My hon. Friend's new clause contains provisions on anti-competitive or predatory behaviour. That can already be tackled by the Director General of Fair Trading under existing competition legislation. Anyone with evidence of such behaviour should make a complaint to the DGFT. I encourage those who think that such practices may be taking place to do just that. I am not convinced that the Director General of Gas Supply requires new powers in this area in addition to the powers that already lie with the Director General of Fair Trading.

In the longer term, the best way forward is to ensure that a fully competitive market exists in the supply of gas. This objective is being actively pursued. I do not find myself in agreement with the defence of monopoly that comes from the Opposition Benches. The Bill introduces new powers to end the monopoly of British Gas, and it is welcome for that. We recognise that the new clause takes up a genuine concern. The Government are therefore considering what legislative changes—especially planning changes—may be needed to create a level playing field to ensure that competition develops in the construction of gas pipelines. I cannot accept my hon. Friend's new clause. I do not think that it is in the right form, and I think that he might agree with me.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. I understand that he recognises the difficulty and that he is prepared to consider it further. In the light of that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 3, line 14, after 'performance', insert

'including household penetration services for the disabled, and the balance of regional infrastructure development.'.—*[Mr. Morgan.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 45, Noes 145.

Division No. 40] **[8.00 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
George, Bruce
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McAvoy, Thomas
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Nellist, Dave
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Reid, Dr John
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Stephen, Nicol
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

NOES

Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hordern, Sir Peter
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*

Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 6

BILLING DISPUTES

Mr. Redwood: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 7, line 35, after 'sheriff', insert—

'( ) Except in such circumstances (if any) as may be prescribed by regulations under this section—

(a) the Director or an arbitrator (or in Scotland an arbiter) appointed by him shall not determine any billing dispute which is the subject of proceedings before, or with respect to which judgment has been given by, any court; and

(b) neither party to any billing dispute which has been referred to the Director for determination in accordance with regulations under this section shall commence proceedings before any court in respect of that dispute pending its determination in accordance with the regulations.

( ) No designated operator may commence proceedings before any court in respect of any charge in connection with the provision by him of any relevant service unless, not less than 28 days before doing so, the customer concerned was informed by him, in such form and manner as may be prescribed by regulations under this section, of—

(a) his intention to commence proceedings;

(b) the customer's rights by virtue of this section; and

(c) such other matters (if any) as may be so prescribed.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 13, 14, 53 and 22.

Mr. Redwood: The amendments put it beyond doubt that resolution of a billing dispute by the director general should be available instead of, and not as well as, going to the county court. The amendments aim to prevent simultaneous actions going on in the two arenas, with the confusion that that would cause. In addition, the amendments would forestall the possibility that a utility might start debt proceedings in court against a customer who had disputed the bill and had referred that dispute to the director general. If the utility wants to take a customer to court it must give 28 days' notice and tell the customer of his right to go to the director general instead. Amendment No. 53 is clarificatory.

Mr. Morgan: May I ask for further clarification of exactly how the Minister envisages that the arrangement would work? I am concerned about how practical a measure it is in real life. I am worried that it would invite the public utilities in the first place to initiate debt proceedings, to issue the warning specified in the four clauses that we are offered as amendments affecting the regulatory set-up for the four utilities.

The utilities would say, along with the warning, "Instead of the debt proceedings continuing, you can have the matter referred to the director general—not as a complaint but for arbitration." Most people would then decide that they would have a better chance with the director general than with the county court because he sounds less threatening, and they would go to the director general, as provided under the new powers.

The Minister is trying to present this as a two-sided dispute, involving, as well as billing disputes in which the public utility is the injured party, or believes it is—because of late payment, non-payment, a bouncing cheque or whatever—billing disputes in which the aggrieved party is the customer. In common, I am sure, with other Members on both sides of the House, I get complaints about, for example, the withdrawal of the four meter readings per year. Such billing disputes always produce deep suspicions when bills are estimated only three times a year. Some electricity companies read meters even less often than that, and people tend to believe that whether the bills are overestimated or underestimated, the companies are cheating them. That may or may not be so, but it leads to suspicions.

In some billing disputes, the aggrieved party is the customer rather than the utility, and if this is to be an even-handed, 50:50, "citizens charter" style improvement in consumers' rights vis-a-vis monopoly utilities, the legislation should be drafted so that, if public utilities reduce the number of meter readings from four to three per year—or from eight to five over a two-year period, as some are now doing—the customer should be able to say, "I will initiate a form of protest or complaint against you."

The only way in which the measure before us can work is when companies say, "We wish to recover a debt from you, but, short of a county court procedure—threat, threat; nudge, nudge; wink, wink—if you like we shall not contest the bill but will refer it to the director general for arbitration." In the letter, that will seem an attractive proposition. They will say, "We could take you to the county court for debt, but one way out of this for you is

to refer the matter to the director general, or an arbitrator appointed by him, not for a complaint but for final arbitration."

The threat of the county court frightens the life out of most people, especially elderly people, and it would still be there. There would simply be one alternative: "If you do not want to go to the county court, you can have a final arbitration by the director general." How much of a satisfactory additional right would that be for the average customer, if it becomes an excuse for the 20 odd utilities in the regulated monopoly sectors to litter the country with threats of county court action? There will be nothing to stop them, and they will be able to provide the little let-out that people may wish to obtain a final resolution through the director general or his arbitrator. I am not sure whether that is fair for consumers.

Mr. Redwood: The form of the amendments is clear and clarifies the position so that the issue will be resolved either by the court or by the director general. It is important that there should be an either-or choice. The customer gets the advantage, as the hon. Gentleman said in his disquisition, of being warned, with 28 days' notice of the intention to open court proceedings, and he will have the opportunity to enjoy his rights under the Bill. I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have welcomed that. Surely the Labour party agrees that we do not want parallel actions going on, with the chance that each might come to a different decision, with the extra costs, delay and hazards that that would involve. There should be an either-or choice. The clauses must be balanced, and the amendments achieve just that. I commend them to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 17

BILLING DISPUTES

Amendment made: No. 13, in line 34, at end insert—

'( ) Except in such circumstances (if any) as may be prescribed—

(a) the Director or an arbitrator (or in Scotland an arbiter) appointed by him shall not determine any billing dispute which is the subject of proceedings before, or with respect to which judgment has been given by, any court; and

(b) neither party to any billing dispute which has been referred to the Director for determination in accordance with regulations under this section shall commence proceedings before any court in respect of that dispute pending its determination in accordance with the regulations.

( ) No public gas supplies may commence proceedings before any court in respect of any charge in connection with the provision by him of gas supply services unless, not less than 28 days before doing so, the customer concerned was informed by him, in such form and manner as may be prescribed, of—

(a) his intention to commence proceedings;

(b) the customer's rights by virtue of this section; and

(c) such other matters (if any) as may be so prescribed.'.

—[Mr. Redwood.]

Clause 21

BILLING DISPUTES

Amendment made: No. 14, in Page 19, line 37, at end insert—

'( ) Except in such circumstances (if any) as may be prescribed—

(a) the Director or an arbitrator (or in Scotland an arbiter) appointed by him shall not determine any billing dispute which is the subject of proceedings before, or with respect to which judgment has been given by, any court; and

(b) neither party to any billing dispute which has been referred to the Director for determination in accordance with regulations under this section shall commence proceedings before any court in respect of that dispute pending its determination in accordance with the regulations.

( ) No public electricity supplier may commence proceedings before any court in respect of any charge in connection with the provision by him of electricity supply services unless, not less than 28 days before doing so, the tariff customer concerned was informed by him, in such form and manner as may be prescribed, of—

(a) his intention to commence proceedings;

(b) the customer's rights by virtue of this section; and

(c) such other matters (if any) as may be prescribed.'.

—[Mr. Redwood.]

Clause 24

INFORMATION WITH RESPECT TO LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE

Mr. Win Griffiths: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in line 6, at end insert—

'(6) In arranging for the publication of an information under subsection (4) above, the Director shall have regard to the need to include, so far as practicable, any matter which relates to—

(a) the health or physical well-being of consumers of water supplied by the undertaker concerned; and

(b) (in consultation with the NRA) the well-being of the environment, flora or fauna, or any amenity.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 7, in clause 25, line 16, at end insert—

'(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above, each water undertaker shall include on each annual bill issued to customers a statement of whether drinking water supplied by the undertaker to the customer concerned has on every day during the previous twelve months fulfilled quality standards presented by or on behalf of the European Community and in force on the day concerned.

(3) Where on any day to which subsection (2) above is applicable such quality standards as are therin referred to have not been fulfilled, the undertaker shall include in the statement made under that subsection details of—

(a) the dates on which the standards were not fulfilled;

(b) the substances and amounts of such substances in respect of which the standards were not fulfilled;

(c) the principal health effects of the substances referred to in paragraph (b) above;

(d) the reasons which in the view of the undertaker caused the failure to fulfil standards; and

(e) the steps which it proposes to take to improve drinking water quality in the area concerned'.

No. 8, in clause 27, line 40, after 'performance', insert '(including the quality of river and other inland waterways and beach water into which sewerage treatment plants discharge)'.

No. 9, in line 22 at beginning insert—

'(5) Subject to subsection (6) below, where on any day to which subsection (2) above is applicable such quality standards as are therein referred to have not been fulfilled, the undertaker shall include in the statement made under that subsection details of—

(a) the dates on which the standards were not fulfilled;

(b) the full details in respect of which the standards were not fulfilled;
(c) the possible health effects of the failure to meet these standards referred to in paragraph (b) above;
(d) the reasons which in the view of the undertaker caused the failure to fulfil standards; and
(e) the steps which it proposes to take to improve sewerage services in the area concerned'.

No. 10, in line 35 at end insert—

'"(6) In arranging for the publication of any information under subsection (4) above, the Director shall have regard to the need to include, so far as practicable, any matter which relates to:—
(a) (in consultation with the NRA) the health or physical well-being of people, and especially children, served by the undertaker concerned and
(b) (in consultation with the NRA) the well-being of the environment, flora or fauna, or any amenity."'.

No. 11, in clause 28 line 45 at end insert—

'(1A) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above each sewerage services undertaker shall include on each annual bill issued to customers a statement of whether these services supplied by the undertaker to the customer concerned has on each occasion tests have been carried out during the previous twelve months fulfilled quality standards prescribed by or on behalf of the European Community and in force on the day concerned.'.

Mr. Griffiths: The purpose of the amendments is to bring home to the public the issues relating to the quality of the tap water that they drink, the water at the bathing beaches on which they may seek to enjoy themselves and of the rivers and waterways of England and Wales.

We want two types of information to be available. We have touched on one element in earlier debates—that is, the publication of general information by the director general on the quality of tap water and the quality of bathing beach water, in as much as that relates to the way in which the water companies and sewerage undertakings provide a service to deal with sewage. That service must ensure a high quaality standard in the waters around our shores.

First I shall deal with tap water quality and the European Community directive. I have already mentioned lead pollution, and I shall not go into much detail on it now. Almost a quarter of our water zones have pollution levels that exceed the 50 micrograms per litre permitted under the EC directive. We know that lead in water definitely damages our health, and a large part of the country is affected by that type of pollution. More than 2 million people are at risk.

There may also be problems concerning aluminium, which is sometimes naturally present in our water and is sometimes added by the the water companies to help make the water clear. Again, about 2 million people are affected. They drink water which sampling procedures show to be above the EC permitted level of 200 micrograms per litre. Just over 10 per cent. of water zones do not meet the level set in the European Community directive.

8.30 pm

We all know that not long ago the Medical Research Council studied 80 districts in England and Wales and found that the risk of Alzheimer's disease was one and a half times higher where the mean aluminium concentrate exceeded 110 micrograms per litre, than in areas where it was 10 micrograms per litre. That level of 110 microgrammes is well below the permitted EC level. Yet there is strong evidence of a link between aluminium and Alzheimer's disease. I am pleased that some water companies have stopped using aluminium to help keep the water clear.

Several other damaging chemicals and substances are present in water in the United Kingdom. Almost 2 million people drink water which has nitrate levels above those permitted by the EC. Almost a third of water zones in England and Wales exceed the permitted levels. Some 298 water sources exceed the maximum admitted concentrations of pesticides. That probably affects more than 1 million people. Friends of the Earth took Thames Water to the European Court over pesticide pollution. I am pleased to say that the court case has been withdrawn and Thames Water and the other water companies have agreed to install treatment plants to prevent pesticide concentrations in our water.

Another issue of serious concern is groundwater pollution. Some 30 per cent. of our water supply comes from aquifers, wells and the like. Yet 10 per cent. of the supply has concentrations of cancer-causing solvents higher than the limits recommended by the World Health Organisation. The National Environment Research Council has expressed fears about the contamination of our groundwater. Doctor Stephen Foster is head of the NERC British geological survey hydrogeology research group. He said in a press notice:

"Groundwater is under threat from an ever increasing number of soluble chemicals from urban and industrial activities and modern agricultural practices . . . Groundwater pollution takes place stealthily, almost imperceptibly and the slow movement of water from the land surface to deep aquifers means that it will take many years after a persistent chemical has entered the ground before it affects the quality of groundwater supplies. By the time the danger is realised large amounts of pollutants are already present . . . we can no longer take high quality groundwater for granted."

I am pleased to say that the NERC is looking into the problem, but we already know that it is a growing problem.

The EC allows 800 grams per litre of trihalomethanes to be present in the water. Yet Germany has adopted an even lower limit of only 20 grammes per litre. The United States has a permitted level similar to that of the EC, but proposals have been made to reduce it, because research there has indicated a highly significant relationship between chloroform and cancers, particularly of the bladder, colon and rectum. So moves are afoot to deal with that problem.

I have already referred to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. In Britain 4 per cent. of our water zones have concentrations above the permitted maximum. We have other problems such as cryptosporidium, of which there have been serious outbreaks in Oxford, Swindon, Hull and Scotland. The ones in the Oxford and Swindon areas lasted for three weeks in 1989. People suffered severe vomiting and diarrhoea. It is an ever-present problem. Unfortunately, it has become more of a problem simply as a result of cost-cutting methods of filtering water. That is an issue of which consumers need to be aware.

It is amazing that the Government have allowed relaxations of the permitted amounts of pollutants which present health dangers in excessive amounts in our water. Unfortunately, the EC has agreed to the relaxations. Thames Water is protected from prosecution on cryptosporidium pollution. North West Water, Severn Trent Water, Northumbria Water, Yorkshire Water and Welsh Water are all permitted to exceed lead levels. In the

north-west, there is as yet no date set for ending the relaxations. South West Water is permitted to exceed trihalomethane levels. Many water companies are allowed relaxations on faecal bacteria. Many companies have relaxations for aluminium. There are relaxations on the nitrate and pesticide levels for Anglian Water and Severn Trent.

So here we have the Government conniving to allow pollutants in our water at levels above those which are publicly acknowledged to pose a danger to health. That is why we believe not only that it is the responsibility of the director general to publish information on tap water but that such information should appear on water consumers' bills.

Last year, *Which?* magazine did a survey of the water companies and asked some of its members to write around to the water companies for information about the quality of their water. It found that 21 of the 44 water company responses did not supply information on the maximum levels of substances allowed in water; 17 of them gave no data which allowed comparisons to be made; nine of them gave data based on only three months information or less; 10 of the respondents gave the information in different ways to different customers who made the inquiry.

So there is no doubt that a great deal still needs to be done, despite what the Secretary of State said yesterday when he lauded the quality of British water as the best in Europe. I would not want to question that assertion, but what I am very concerned about is that, while making the assertion, the Government nevertheless allow pollutants in our water which are a danger to public health.

Let us take Wales as an example for some of the pollutants that I have already mentioned. As regards lead, samples have been taken in the county of Gwent, in the Brecknock district of Powys, in the Dynevor district of Dyfed, in Cardiff, in the Rhymney Valley district of Mid-Glamorgan, and in a whole swathe of territory from the north of Carmarthen bay across to Wrexham, where the lead levels are in excess of the EC maximum.

Trihalomethanes are also present in parts of Wales, and aluminium above recommended levels is to be found across the whole of Wales. I said earlier that I would refer in a little more detail to information supplied to me by Welsh Water on lead levels in south-east Wales. My inquiry of them showed that, in the city of Cardiff, for example, in Cardiff, North-West, 20 per cent. of the random samples taken exceeded permitted levels; in the Llanishen area 10 per cent.; in the Caerau/Fairwater area 25 per cent.; Cardiff-Docklands 25 per cent.; Cardiff, East 20 per cent.; Cardiff-Llandaff/Whitchurch 10 per cent.; Cardiff-Canton/Riverside 20 per cent.; and outside Cardiff, in the large town of Barry, in the Romilly Park-Wenvoe-Colcot areas, 15 per cent. Yet Welsh Water could not tell me exactly which houses were affected. That is why I believe it to be right that the water companies provide this information at least once a year on bills to consumers.

Welsh Water boasted about the availability of information to the public on the quality of their water. They said in a press release issued a few months ago:

"A register can be viewed during normal working hours at the company's offices at Aberaeron, Bangor, Brecon, Haverfordwest (Withybush), Hereford, Mold, Nelson, and Swansea (Kingsway)."

The citizens of Cardiff, where, as already shown, there is a serious lead problem, do not have access. The nearest office is an hour or more away on public transport, in Nelson. In Committee, I explained that my nearest office would be Swansea, a city that I might visit two or three times a year and then generally not in office hours.

So although, as the Minister will tell us, the information is available and different organisations publish it, it is not accessible to the customer. I should have thought that, under the impetus of the citizens charter, the Government would be keen to have this information available to consumers.

8.45 pm

Turning briefly to the water quality arising out of the provision of sewerage services, it is somewhat ironic that the Government have chosen to blow the trumpet of the effectiveness of privatisation in speeding up the improvement in the quality of these services by denigrating their own record in the priority that they gave these services in the 12 years that they were in power before privatisation; but that is the fact. Unfortunately, in all respects, privatisation has not pulled off the trick, because we find that, only at the end of last year, when the National Rivers Authority's report on river quality appeared, the quality of our river water over the preceding five years had gone down; 15 per cent. of the rivers and inland waterways had been downgraded and 11 per cent. upgraded, leaving us with a 4 per cent. deterioration. In Wales, there was a 17 per cent. deterioration.

In 1989-90, there were almost 27,000 pollution incidents, of which over 3,000 were serious, but it is interesting to note that there were only 309 successful prosecutions and that often these prosecutions resulted in fines which can only be described as minimal. In the Welsh Water area, for example, there were 17 prosecutions which resulted in fines amounting to £19,000, when the companies being fined had pre-tax profits of over £100 million.

A Friends of the Earth survey of the quality of Welsh beaches showed that 20 or 30 popular Welsh beaches contravened the EC's freshwater fisheries directive, and 10 of the 30 broke the EC's dangerous substances directive, mainly because of the cadmium levels present in the inland waterways.

On sewage treatment works, while it is true that the position has improved, there have nevertheless been many instances—hundreds—where the sewage treatment works have failed to meet even the relaxed standards allowed when the Government privatised the industry.

There are here important public health issues. To their credit, the Government continue to sponsor research into the public health effects of the pollution of our popular bathing beaches. There was the Blackpool study carried out by Lancaster university, which showed clearly that children were three times more likely to suffer from vomiting and five and a half times more likely to contract diarrhoea if they went in the water than if they remained on the beach. A study in Ramsgate showed a small increase in the reporting of gastrointestinal and diarrhoeal symptoms in bathers compared with non-bathers, at a beach which did not meet EC standards, whereas at Langland bay in Swansea, a beach which did meet the standards, no increase in gastrointestinal and diarrhoeal symptoms were reported.

The Government are therefore continuing the research, and I am pleased about that, but customers have the right to know whether the beaches in their area meet these

standards. Again, I should have thought that the Government would want that information to be publicly available to the water companies' customers.

The Minister said earlier and in Committee that we were expecting too much of the director general. As other bodies, such as the National Rivers Authority, made it their business to report on river and beach water quality, and the drinking water inspectorate reports on tap water standards, he said that there was no need for that information to be brought together and provided to customers.

I am pleased to be able to say that the Water Services Association does not believe in that philosophy. In my post this morning—and I expect in the post of most hon. Members—was a fat book on all aspects of water quality —tap water, river water and beach water. If it can produce that, why cannot the director be given the duty of ensuring that customers have direct access to such information and do not have to travel up to 70 miles, as is the case for some customers in Wales, if they want to get to one of the offices where Welsh Water's information on water quality is available.

I hope that the Government, in the name of the citizens charter, are prepared to accept that customers have the right to know what is in the water that they drink and what is in the waters of our rivers, inland waterways and beaches, which may harm public health. I hope that the Government will be prepared to accept the amendments.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I shall speak briefly in support of amendment No. 6 and the others in the group. It is consistent with the policy behind the Bill that the public should be better informed after this legislation has been passed about services previously provided by either public or quasi-public utilities, as well as about other services.

As hon. Members who have been following the Bill will know, part I provides that information should be made available about water supply and levels of performance. That is right. People want to know about profitability, investment and the rest. However, one of the best tests of performance is quality.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State made it clear that, if we are to achieve good water quality, bills will have to increase by 50 per cent. in a relatively short time. That is a significant increase, but water is not a cheap service and I am not saying that it should be. I am one of those people who accept that, to get the investment needed if the water industry is to produce the best quality water, additional capital will have to come in and the public will have to pay for that service.

People naively think that the water industry is simple, but it is not. There is a lot of work between the heavens and the tap to ensure that people have no cause for complaint.

I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will be sympathetic to the idea that the information is exactly the sort that could be well used and well distributed. The amendment seems to be straightforward, especially when judged by the tests already established.

The European Community has established standards, and it is a collective sadness that we in Britain do not achieve them. Targets on drinking water quality were set for us to meet by 1985; we have failed to comply with them. As regards drinking water quality, we are the most persistent offender in matters pursued by the European Commission and taken through the legislative process. There is still a long way to go.

A few weeks ago, I and my colleagues produced a report. I do not know whether the Under-Secretary saw it. It was called, "The Water We Drink." Based on the only figures produced by the inspectorate last year, by doing a simple mathematical multiplication, taking each water zone and the levels of excess chemicals or materials in the water in it—for example, lead or nitrates—we worked out the number of people who were potentially affected in all those zones by pollution in water. It amounted to more than 10 million users.

One cannot say that those figures were accurate in detail. They cannot be. One would have to study each zone. The water companies have to record where there is a breach on a certain component of the water in a zone. Therefore, one can only establish how many zones there are in a water authority area, how many people live in each zone and thus how many people are potentially affected.

The water industry was resistant to and critical of that form of calculation. No doubt I shall discuss that with the industry at my next meeting and I am happy to do so. None the less it is a valid argument that, judging from the drinking water inspectorate's evidence and report, and from the water industry's own methodology, many people in this country are at risk because they are drinking water which, when tested, shows a higher incidence of harmful components than is allowed in legislation agreed by us in the European Community.

The water authorities' methodology for testing water can be disputed. Some of us believe that they do not test sufficiently comprehensively to ensure that quality characteristics are adequately presented. We can debate that in the context of the water industry, but the simple proposition in the amendment is that, when one bills customers, one should tell them how good the quality of their water is.

There is no doubt that the quality of air and water is increasingly of concern to the public throughout the country. That is a characteristic of an advanced society. We expect better quality air and water now than we did 30, 50 or 100 years ago. We have the technology to quantify and judge quality and we are able to tell the customer. If we believe in open government and in the citizens charter, we must accept that citizens need information. Citizens should be the arbiters of the performance of public services, whether in public or private hands, and of the monopoly suppliers. Often water can be supplied only by a monopoly supplier, even though in the private sector.

I support the amendments in the group. Such information should be included on bills. Although the usual formula will probably be used and the Under-Secretary will probably say that there is some technical flaw in drafting the amendment so that he cannot accept the amendment tonight, I hope that he will accept the principle behind it, and that before the Bill goes on to the statute book, we can ensure that the public can find out what is going on—from information put through their letter boxes, rather than having to go to the library or to the offices of the water companies.

Recently an interesting experiment was carried out when some journalists went with the drinking water inspectorate to Severn-Trent water authority to find out what processes were carried out. One is allowed to go and demand certain information and look up the records. I

think that I am right in saying that they found—irrespective of the water quality result—that the public are not availing themselves of the right to go and look for the information. That is not surprising when the place where one might have to go may be miles from where one lives.

I send my water account from south London to Swindon because that is where the Thames Water billing office happens to be. I have never inquired whether I would have to go to Swindon to discover facts and figures about the quality of Thames water. If so, I would rarely make that journey, unless I could get off at that station on my way to somewhere else. It would be much simpler for the public to be given the information through their letter boxes by the supplier than for them to go hunting for it. I hope that the Minister will be positive and that we can make this progressive, though modest, Bill better as a result.

Mr. Baldry: We had a fair concession this evening from the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). We will have to look with care at its exact formulation in *Hansard*, but I think that I heard him agree that we in Britain probably have the best quality water in Europe. I think that that is what I heard him say, but I shall wish to check it in *Hansard* tomorrow. If he did say so, that would be an honourable statement on his part. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was wrong in asserting that Britain is among the worst offenders within the European Community. It is among the top four countries in compliance with European Community directives.

9 pm

Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Bridgend spoiled a fair concession by repeating the litany of disaster that we heard in Committee. He managed to condense it today into 27 minutes; I think that it took an hour and a half in Committee, when he went through everything, including blue-green algae, which he did not mention today.

If hon. Members keep talking down the industry, it causes people to be apprehensive about drinking tap water which has to go through 57 tests, and causes them to drink more mineral water which they have to buy in supermarkets. The irony is that that product has to go through fewer tests.

I hope that we can all agree that the drinking water inspectorate undertakes a rigorous number of tests. In 1990, there were 3·3 million tests, 99 per cent. of which were within the legal standards.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Minister has touched on two points which perhaps he can amplify. First, does he accept that the drinking water inspectorate is insufficiently staffed to do its job properly? I think that it has 19 staff who go once a year to each water authority. Secondly, the Minister made the valid point that there is far less regulation of the mineral water industry than of tap water. Does he accept that the Government should consider that, and that the customer is entitled to the same control of bottled water, which is often grandiosely described, as of tap water, as was amply demonstrated by a recent television programme?

Mr. Baldry: On the first point, the drinking water inspectorate carried out 3·3 million tests during 1990.

Mr. Win Griffiths: We need clarification on that point. It is not the inspectorate which carries out the tests, but the water companies themselves. A very small number of those tests are checked by the inspectorate.

Mr. Baldry: Of the 3·3 million tests carried out on drinking water during 1990, 99 per cent. were within the legal standards. The drinking water inspectorate undertakes an exercise which ensures that those tests are carried out properly and fully. A total of 3·3 million tests seems to be a substantial number. Of course, the drinking water inspectorate is a good regulatory authority which we have introduced, just as we established the National Rivers Authority and the Director General of Water Services.

The inspectorate is adequately staffed to carry out its functions. Its first year report is testimony to its ability to discharge its responsibilities. The chief inspector concluded that water supplied to consumers is of a high quality, and is often of an exceptionally high quality. I think that is evidenced by the facts.

As to water sold in shops, consumers must draw their own conclusions. My point is that it is ironic that, by talking down the quality of our drinking water, some Opposition Members are scaring people into drinking water which may not have been tested to such rigorous standards.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 10 show that there is misunderstanding about the involvement of the various regulators in the industry. We may have so many regulators that it is difficult for the Opposition to keep up with them in their determination that the interests of consumers and the public are protected.

The director general does not have a direct interest in the quality of water supplied, though he obtains information on remedial action that undertakers have in place. Should he become aware of anything not already being pursued by the National Rivers Authority or the drinking water inspectorate, he would bring it to their attention. It is appropriate for the National Rivers Authority and the drinking water inspectorate to collect and publish information, as they have the overall picture. So amendments Nos. 6 and 10 would duplicate work already being done quickly and properly by other regulators.

As for the remaining amendments, the requirement for water undertakers to provide information on water quality would increase the costs of administering the billing system, but would not make available any new information to consumers. Water undertakers are already required by the water quality regulations to maintain a record of drinking water quality, which includes details of all water quality samples taken in accordance with the regulations.

They are also required to inform each customer at least once a year that records of water quality may be inspected by the public free of charge, giving the address, telephone number and hours of opening of at least one of the offices at which such inspection may be made. That information is provided with each customer's water bill. So it would be burdensome to require sewerage undertakers to provide information on sewage discharges. Likewise, the National Rivers Authority is responsible for setting standards on discharges from sewerage works in line with European Community standards, where appropriate, and enforcing compliance with those standards.

[Mr. Baldry]

Under the Act, the Government have made available to customers far more information about water quality than ever before. One of the central tenets of everything that we have done is that there should be the maximum openness, with the maximum information being made available to consumers on environmental matters. I believe that the present arrangements are sufficient to ensure that consumers are properly informed about the quality of their water and of sewage discharges. The amendments would simply add to the costs—which, in due course, would have to be reflected in bills to consumers—without giving consumers any extra information or advice.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I am disappointed with the Under-Secretary's reply, since we are asking simply for a logical conclusion to everything about which the Government are trumpeting on the availability of information. Like all hon. Members, the Minister knows that probably fewer than 1 per cent. of customers would be likely to visit water company offices to check the details for themselves. Like him, I do not have an estimate of the cost of our proposal, but I am sure that it would not be prohibitive as part of water company costs. Indeed, I believe it to be a cost that the consumer would be prepared to pay.

Information is available because, generally speaking, the press covers pollution incidents when they occur. The Minister must accept that hardly a week goes by without a serious incident being reported. There has been evidence that water companies have tried to get away with it in the past. The Camelford incident was the most notorious in pre-privatisation days, but, even post-privatisation, companies have faced the dilemma of whether an incident is serious enough to warrant the issue of a warning to customers, and in one incident in north-west London, when the company decided belatedly to warn consumers to boil their water, there is evidence that some people suffered ill health because they drank water before the warning was issued.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that putting information on customers' bills would not deal with the type of incident to which he has just referred. Whether a water company should advise consumers about an incident as it occurs may or may not require to be done immediately. But they will need advice, if at all, before the next quarterly bill is issued.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I do not dispute that. I am simply pointing out that water companies have not always been anxious that their customers should know about these things. If, once a year, there were enclosed with the bill a note giving details of water quality and of the standard of the sewerage service, it could do no harm.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 25

INFORMATION TO BE GIVEN TO CUSTOMERS ABOUT OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Amendment proposed: No. 7, in page 21, line 16, at end insert—

'(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above, each water undertaker shall include on each annual bill issued to customers a statement of whether drinking water supplied by the undertaker to the customer concerned has on every day during the previous twelve months fulfilled quality standards presented by or on behalf of the European Community and in force on the day concerned.

(3) Where on any day to which subsection (2) above is applicable such quality standards as are therin referred to have not been fulfilled, the undertaker shall include in the statement made under that subsection details of—

(a) the dates on which the standards were not fulfilled;

(b) the substances and amounts of such substances in respect of which the standards were not fulfilled;

(c) the principal health effects of the substances referred to in paragraph (b) above;

(d) the reasons which in the view of the undertaker caused the failure to fulfil standards; and

(e) the steps which it proposes to take to improve drinking water quality in the area concerned'.—*[Mr. Win Griffiths.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 36, Noes 138.

Division No. 41] **[9.10 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dixon, Don
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
George, Bruce
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McAvoy, Thomas
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Nellist, Dave
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Stephen, Nicol
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Robert Wareing.

NOES

Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kilfedder, James

King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 31

REFERENCE OF CERTAIN DISPUTES TO THE DIRECTOR

Amendments made: No. 46, in page 26, line 4, leave out subsection (4).

No. 16, in page 26, line 23, leave out 'satisfied' and insert 'complied with'

No. 17, in page 26, line 30, leave out 'satisfied' and insert 'complied with'.

No. 18, in page 26, line 45, leave out '(3)' and insert '(4)'.

No. 19, in page 27, line 1, leave out '(3A)' and insert '(4A)'.

No. 20, in page 27, line 4, leave out 'or'.

No. 21, in page 27, line 6, at end insert

'or

(c) whether any excess is repayable, or any expenses are recoverable, by the undertaker under subsection (4) above, or the amounts of any such excess or expenses,'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 32

BILLING DISPUTES

Amendments made: No. 53, in page 27, line 36, at end insert

'by the carrying out of'.

No. 22, in page 28, line 11, at end insert—

'( ) Except in such circumstances (if any) as may be prescribed—

(a) the Director or an arbitrator appointed by him shall not determine any billing dispute which is the subject of proceedings before, or with respect to which judgment has been given by, any court; and

(b) neither party to any billing dispute which has been referred to the Director for determination in accordance with regulations under this section shall commence proceedings before any court in respect of that dispute pending its determination in accordance with the regulations.

( ) No relevant undertaker may commence proceedings before any court in respect of any charge in connection with the supply of water for domestic purposes or (as the case may be) the provision of sewerage services other than by the carrying out of trade effluent functions unless, not less than 28 days before doing so, the customer concerned was informed by it, in such form and manner as may be prescribed, of—

(a) its intention to commence proceedings;

(b) the customer's rights by virtue of this section; and

(c) such other matters (if any) as may be prescribed.'. —*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 33

THE 25,000 THERM LIMITS

Amendment made: No. 23, in page 28, line 38, leave out from 'substituting' to end of line 40 and insert

(a) where the limit is for the time being expressed by reference to a number of therms—

(i) such lower number of therms as he considers appropriate; or

(ii) such lower limit, expressed by reference to a number of kilowatt hours, as he considers appropriate; or

(b) where the limit is for the time being expressed by reference to a number of kilowatt hours, such lower number of kilowatt hours as he considers appropriate.'—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 35

INSET APPOINTMENTS

Amendments made: No. 24, in page **29**, line **29** [*Clause 35*], leave out

'In section 36(3) of the Water Industry Act 1991' and insert——

'.—(1) In section 7 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (continuity of appointments, replacement appointments etc.), in subsection (4), for "company; or", at the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted—

"company;

(bb) the appointment or variation relates only to parts of that area and the conditions mentioned in subsection (5) below are satisfied in relation to each of the premises in those parts which are served by that company; or".

(2) In section 7 of the Act of 1991 the following subsections shall be added at the end—

"(5) The conditions are that—

(a) the premises are, or are likely to be, supplied with not less than 250 megalitres of water in any period of twelve months; and

(b) the person who is the customer in relation to the premises consents in writing to the appointment or variation.

(6) The Secretary of State may, after consulting the Director, make regulations amending subsection (5)(a) above by substituting for the quantity of water for the time being specified there such smaller quantity as he considers appropriate."

(3) In section 8 of the Act of 1991 (procedure with respect to appointments and variations) the following subsection shall be added at the end—

"(7) The Secretary of State may by regulations impose such additional procedural requirements as he considers appropriate for any case where the conditions mentioned in section

7(5) above are required to be satisfied in relation to an application for an appointment or variation replacing a company as a relevant undertaker."

(4) In section 9 of the Act of 1991 (duties affecting making of appointments and variations), in subsection (3), after "(4)(b)" insert "or (bb)".

(5) In section 36(3) of the Act of 1991'.

No. 47, in page 29, line 40, at end insert—

'( ) In section 158 of the Act of 1991 (powers to lay pipes), the following subsections shall be added at the end—

"(8) Subsections (9) and (10) below apply where—

(a) an appointment or variation has been made under section 7 above replacing a company as a relevant undertaker,

(b) the appointment or variation relates only to parts of the area to which the company's appointment as relevant undertaker related, and

(c) the conditions mentioned in subsection (5) of that section were required to be satisfied in relation to each of the premises in those parts served by that company.

(9) Where the company which has replaced the relevant undertaker has done so as water undertaker, in the application of this section and section 159 below in relation to that company any pipe supplying, or intended to supply, any of the premises referred to in subsection (8)(c) above with a supply of water which exceeds, or is likely to exceed, 250 megalitres of water in any period of twelve months shall, for the purposes of subsection (7) above, be deemed to be a water main.

(10) Where the Secretary of State makes regulations under section 7(6) above amending section 7(5)(a) above he shall by regulations make the corresponding amendment in subsection (9) above.

(11) Where the company which has replaced the relevant undertaker has done so as sewerage undertaker, in the application of this section and section 159 below in relation to that company any pipe draining, or intended to drain, any of those premises shall, for the purposes of subsection (7) above, be deemed to be a sewer.".'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 36

CONNECTIONS WITH WATER MAINS AND COMMUNICATIONS WITH SEWERS

Amendments made: No. 25, in page 29, line 41, leave out from '1991' to end of line 12 on page 30 and insert—

'(which imposes on a water undertaker a duty to make a connection with one of its water mains where the premises for which a supply of water is required are in the undertaker's area), the words "in the undertaker's area" shall cease to have effect.'.

No. 26, in page 30, line 13, leave out from '1991', to end of line 31 and insert—

'(which gives the owner or occupier of any premises in the area of a sewerage undertaker a right to have his drains or sewer communicate with the public sewers of that undertaker), the following subsection shall be substituted for subsection (1)—

"(1) Subject to the provisions of this section—

(a) the owner or occupier of any premises, or

(b) the owner of any private sewer which drains premises,

shall be entitled to have his drains or sewer communicate with the public sewer of any sewerage undertaker and thereby to discharge foul water and surface water from those premises or that private sewer.".'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 37

BULK SUPPLIES OF WATER

Amendments made: No. 27, in page 30, line 32, leave out first 'section' and insert 'sections'.

No. 28, in page 30, line 37, leave out 'this Part' and insert

'securing the efficient use of water resources, or the efficient supply of water,'.

No. 31, in page 31, line 20, leave out from 'section' to 'unless' in line 21.

No. 54, in page 31, line 24, leave out from 'desirability' to end of line 29 and insert

'of-

(a) facilitating effective competition within the water supply industry;

(b) the supplier's recovering the expenses of complying with its obligations by virtue of this section and securing a reasonable return on its capital;

(c) the supplier's being able to meet its existing obligations, and likely future obligations, to supply water without having to incur unreasonable expenditure in carrying out works;

(d) not putting at risk the ability of the supplier to meet its existing obligations, or likely future obligations, to supply water.'.

No. 52, in page 31, line 29, after 'capital.', insert—

'Variation and termination of bulk supply agreements.

40A.—(1) This section applies where, on the application of any party to a bulk supply agreement—

(a) it appears to the Director that it is necessary or expedient for the purpose of securing the efficient use of water resources, or the efficient supply of water, to vary the agreement or to terminate it, and

(b) the Director is satisfied that that cannot be achieved by agreement between the parties to the agreement.

(2) The Director may by order—

(a) vary the agreement by—

(i) varying the period for which the supply of water is to be given; or

(ii) varying any of the terms or conditions on which that supply is to be given; or

(b) terminate the agreement.

(3) Before making any order under this section the Director shall consult the NRA.

(4) Where an order is made under this section the agreement concerned shall have effect subject to the provision made by the order or (as the case may be) shall cease to have effect.

(5) An order under this section may require the payment of compensation by any party to the agreement to any other party.

(6) The obligations of a water undertaker under subsection (5) above shall be enforceable under section 18 above by the Director.

(7) In exercising his functions under this section, the Director shall have regard to the expenses incurred by the supplier in complying with its obligations under the bulk supply agreement and to the desirability of—

(a) facilitating effective competition within the water supply industry;

(b) the supplier's recovering the expenses of complying with its obligations by virtue of this section and securing a reasonable return on its capital;

(c) the supplier's being able to meet its existing obligations, and likely future obligations, to supply water without having to incur unreasonable expenditure in carrying out works;

(d) not putting at risk the ability of the supplier to meet its existing obligations, or likely future obligations, to supply water.

(8) In this section—

"bulk supply agreement" means an agreement between one or more water undertakers for the supply of water in bulk and includes—

(a) an order under section 40 above which is deemed to be an agreement by virtue of subsection (4) of that section; and

(b) any agreement which has been varied by order under this section; and

"supplier", in relation to a bulk supply agreement, means any water undertaker which is required by the agreement to provide a bulk supply of water.'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 38

LARGE SUPPLIES OF WATER TO CUSTOMERS OUTSIDE UNDERTAKER'S AREA

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 31, line 30, leave out Clause 38.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 39

AGREEMENTS WITH RESPECT TO THE DISPOSAL ETC. OF EFFLUENT FROM PREMISES OUTSIDE UNDERTAKER'S AREA

Amendment made: No. 33, in page 32, line 32, leave out Clause 39.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 40

NEW CONNECTIONS WITH PUBLIC SEWERS

Amendment made: No. 55, in page 34, line 44, leave out from 'desirability' to end of line 49 and insert—

'of—

(a) facilitating effective competition within the sewerage services industry;

(b) the existing undertaker's recovering the expenses of complying with its obligations by virtue of this section and securing a reasonable return on its capital;

(c) the existing undertaker's being able to meet its existing obligations, and likely future obligations, to provide sewerage services without having to incur unreasonable expenditure in carrying out works;

(d) not putting at risk the ability of the existing undertaker to meet its existing obligations, or likely future obligations, to provide such services.'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 47

CORRESPONDING PROVISION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendment made: No. 35, in page 38, line 38, leave out 'and 12' and insert 'to 13'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Clause 49

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT, ETC.

Amendments made: No. 36, in page 39, line 1, leave out '(4)' and insert '(5)'.

No. 56, in page 39, line 9, after '34' insert

', 35, *(The domestic supply duty)*, *(Transitional provision with respect to replacement appointments)* and 36 to'.

No. 57, in page 39, line 10, leave out 'section' and insert 'sections *(Conditions for connections with water mains and for supplies of water)* and'.

No. 37, in page 39, line 10, after '45;', insert—

'(cc) section 46(2) to (4);'.

No. 38, in page 39, line 14, after '47;', insert—

'(ab) subsections (1) to (4), this subsection and, so far as is necessary to give effect to paragraph (b), subsection (6);'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Schedule 1

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 39, in page 40, line 26, at end insert—

'. In section 4 of the Gas Act 1986 (general duties of Secretary of State and Director), the following subsection shall be inserted after subsection (3)—

"(4) Subsections (1) and (2) above do not apply in relation to the determination of disputes by the Director under or by virtue of section 14A, 15A or 33A below.".'.

No. 40, in page 40, line 27, leave out 'Gas Act' and insert 'Act of'.

No. 41, in page 41, line 38, at end insert—

'. In section 8 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (procedure with respect to appointments and variations)—

(a) in subsection (2)(a) and (4)(b) "the NRA" shall be inserted after "appointee"; and

(b) in subsection (5)(b) "the NRA and on" shall be inserted after "on".'.

No. 42, in page 41, line 40, leave out 'Water Industry Act' and insert 'Act of'.

No. 43, in page 42, line 8, at end insert—

'. In section 52 of the Act of 1991 (the domestic supply duty), in subsection (3)(a) for "a water main" there shall be substituted "one of the water undertaker's water mains".'.

No. 48, in page 42, line 28, at end insert—

'. In section 98(4) of the Act of 1991 (breach of duty of sewerage undertaker to provide public sewer) for "water" there shall be substituted "sewerage".'.

No. 44, in page 42, line 29, leave out paragraphs 18 to 21—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Schedule 2

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 45, in page 43, line 20, column 3, at end insert—

	'In section 45(1), the words "in the undertaker's area",
	In section 52(2), the words "and which are situated in the area of the undertaker".'— *[Mr. Redwood.]*

Title

Amendment made: No. 49, in line 13, after 'suppliers', insert

'to make a minor correction in section 98 of the Water Industry Act 1991;'.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Redwood.]*

9.23 pm

Mr. Henderson: I have the impression that the House is keen to make progress quickly. I do not know whether it is wise to speak for five minutes, which might encourage others to speak, or to proceed for a little longer.

May I make one or two quick points to sum up the Opposition's view of the Bill? The Government led the country to believe that privatisation would solve all the problems of our utilities. They led them to believe that

[Mr. Henderson]

with regard to telecommunications, gas, electricity and water. The country's experience in the past five or six years has—as the Government now admit—led them to different conclusions. They now realise that privatisation in itself does very little to change the level of service provision or the prices charged for those services by what are effectively monopoly utilities, and that the key test is the sensitivity of a utility to the needs and demands of the public.

There has been growing recognition during the Bill's progress that one of the best ways to ensure that public needs and demands are represented is through a regulator. The test of whether the Bill is effective is whether it is sufficiently tough to be able to achieve what all hon. Members have agreed is essential in relation to the provision of the utility services, whether it is tough enough to give the utilities the opportunity to develop along the correct lines for the country's needs and whether the regulation is tough enough to protect the consumer.

The Bill is an improvement on the current position, in that it covers the need to set standards of performance and to give information to consumers on the extent to which those performance standards have been met, the need to establish effective procedures for dealing with complaints, the need to examine procedures to prevent unnecessary disconnections of public utility services, the need to promote efficient use of gas and electricity and the need to guarantee water quality.

On the down side, in Committee and on Report, the Government have shown themselves to be short on positive action and many of the clauses appear more concerned with public relations than public protection. If the Government were serious about setting standards of performance in telecommunications, they would have accepted the amendments tabled in Committee and on Report which dealt with questions of telephone penetration across the country, of the balance of resources throughout the regions and of additional facilities for disabled and aged people in the provision of those services.

If the Government were serious about regulation, they would have accepted amendments relating to gas and electricity which link price regimes with performance in energy efficiency and amendments linking water prices to water quality.

As the Opposition have said during debates at all stages of the Bill, we support the need for tougher regulation and for the principle behind the Bill in that regard. We shall not deny the Bill a Third Reading, but I give notice that we shall pursue the aspects of the Bill with which we are unhappy this side of the general election and promise that we shall continue to pursue them beyond that.

9.28 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I wish to ask the Minister whether he will reconsider a number of issues before the Bill goes to another place. I am a shareholder in British Telecom and in Cable and Wireless which is the owner of Mercury, and I advise the Telecommunication Managers Association, so I must declare an interest.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): How much do you get?

Mr. Bruce: Would you like a cut?

I welcome the Bill and the way in which it fulfils many of the promises made in the citizens charter. However, I am concerned that it should include all customers. I should have thought that business customers were included in the requirement—or pledge—in the citizens charter that,

"where elements of monopoly remain, regulation protects the consumer."

"The consumer" must mean the business consumer and the single line user. The inclusion of all customers would make it much easier for British Telecom to conform to all the requirements that will be placed on it by the regulator.

It is a little strange that BT should resist that idea, because it stressed in all the documents that it sent to Committee members that it already supplies all the statistics and levels of service that it expects to have to supply under the regulations. BT claims that, in the offer-for-sale document that the Government put out when selling their shares in BT, the additional requirements extended to multi-line users would affect profitability—but that does not add up. Indeed, BT's own briefing does not suggest that.

The very clause titles in the Bill—"Standards of performance", "Information with respect to levels of performance", "Information to be given to customers about overall performance"—show that BT cannot possibly say that it will not provide multi-line users with the same level of service as single-line users in these areas. It is foolish of BT to resist applying the same standards to everyone, because that will cost more—trying to differentiate between single and multi-line users in its statistics, for instance. I suspect that it will be a nightmare for the regulator to deal with statistical information that differentiates between single and multi-line users.

Such differentiation will also lead to a nightmare when trying to decide how to reach the standards required. The cost of reaching those standards is nil, because it is much better for shareholders if BT provides a service for 99 per cent. of the time, since it is then receiving revenue for that time. BT has already adopted a compensation code for larger users, so we might as well ensure, under this Bill, that small and large users are dealt with in the same way.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has asked BT whether all this will affect its profitability, but I believe that BT will be foolish if it continues to resist the idea of serving all its customers under the same set of regulations.

Telecommunications is different from other forms of monopoly because under this legislation we are setting up a real free market. In such a free market, I am sure that a self-regulating body and an ombudsman will have to be appointed by the industry itself. Given that we are establishing a statutory regulator and ombudsman for only part of the industry, Mercury, the cable operator and others who have entered the field will be at a marketing disadvantage because they will be able to claim that they are subject to regulations different from those that govern BT.

We should include all telecommunications operators in the same system. If it proves too onerous for an operator who is just starting up to reach the required market share for inclusion, perhaps such operators should be required to achieve only 5 per cent. or 10 per cent.—not 25 per cent —market share before being included.

We want a true citizens charter for all telecommunications users. Everyone should know that the Government are regulating his telephone service and what is happening

in the marketplace. We know that cellular operators are excluded already. They have one of the worst records of providing the service that they promise to their customers.

If BT decided to use service retailers to sell communications in the high street, those retailers might find themselves insulated from the Act and find that BT, like them, was not covered by it.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will recall my mentioning that we should include data transmission services in the list of relevant services in new section 27L(a). Can they be included? Why should they be excluded?

BT needs to see the light. Quality regulation is good for it and good for its customers and shareholders. The Government should think again before taking the Bill to another place, because I rather suspect that, if these points are not picked up before then, their Lordships will want to press the Government further on them.

9.34 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Bill is a step in the right direction, but it is also an example of the Government trying to tidy up their act after the dogma has bolted. They rushed into a series of Bills which, it was alleged, would open monopolies to competition, but in many cases they simply changed a state monopoly to a private monopoly. The philosophy has been entirely misconceived. It is perfectly proper to say that, as a natural resource, gas is a state asset and to allow as much competition as possible in its exploitation. We have argued for greater competition in the gas industry than the Government have ever sought to provide.

All the artificial constraints of maintaining a regulated monopoly mean that it is not in the best interests of the consumer. Greater competition would require less regulation, but that will have to wait until after the election. In the meantime it is better to have tough regulation than none at all, and the consumer must have someone who can intervene on his behalf more effectively than in the past. The best intervention is that which is facilitated by information which places the remedy in the customer's own hands.

As the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) said, the Bill has missed an opportunity by not allowing the customer to know more about the quality of services. We had a debate earlier about the quality of water. Information on that could have been supplied as part of the information on the accountability of the service. An opportunity has also been lost in telecommunications; if the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) speaks in this debate, I think that he will address that. The Government are still lily-livered in that respect.

The Government could have scored a few points and won some political friends. They lost the opportunity. The great grey army out there, the growing number of pensioners, saw the legislation as an opportunity to lower unfair standing charges. They also saw it as a chance to reduce the cost of the basic services on which they rely —the telephone, gas, electricity and water. If the Government had wanted to make the Bill an election winner, they would have seen that political advantage. They have lost that opportunity, and it will not come again this side of the election. Perhaps they will live to regret that. At best, the Bill is a marginal improvement. To suggest that it is in any way a radical new Tory revolution for the 1990s is far from the truth.

9.37 pm

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) were dead right when they said that the Bill is a lost opportunity. That is certainly true in the context of telecommunications and, more specifically, in premium rate services. Six years of misery have been caused by these utilities. I have raised the matter many times and while Ministers agreed that legislation was needed, they said that there was no time for it.

The services should not operate under the present system, which is a blight on the industry. The Government have consistently wrung their hands and said that in the past the services were awful. Parliamentary time has been made for the Bill and for amendment of the 1984 legislation. Ministers have consistently related the Bill to the citizens charter. If any part of that charter could be addressed in that context, it would have to be the part that deals with choice and redress and various other such matters.

I have been sought redress for people damaged by the utilities, but over the years the Government have pushed my pleas to one side. Choice has not been considered in premium rate services. There are no more excuses for Ministers. By allowing the Bill to pass through the House unamended in respect of premium rate services, they are condoning everything that is being done by those who for the past six years have been offering pornographic "services".

These so-called services will continue. They will abate only slightly as a result of the recent rules that have been introduced by the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Telephone Information Services and by Oftel. Real opportunities have been missed by rejecting our suggestion that a supervisory statutory committee should be formed, rejecting the idea of choice to opt into these "services", rejecting the proposal that the worst of these "services" should be removed and by rejecting the simple principle of direct billing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) got it right when he said yesterday that Ministers will be regarded as wearers of dirty raincoats before very long.

Since Second Reading, I have received 150 letters on pornographic telephone "services". They have been written by organisations and individuals including the Women's Institute and the soroptomists. I shall refer to one or two constituents, and the significance of them will not be lost on the Minister. From Bury, North, I received two letters from organisations and four from individuals. Two organisations and two individuals wrote from Bury, South. From Bolton, West I received letters from two organisations and 11 individuals. Two organisations and 17 individuals wrote from Bolton, North-East. From Bath, I received one letter from an organisation and one from an individual. From Oxford, West and Abingdon it was one and four. It was three and six from Stockport. One organisation wrote from Nottingham, South. It was three and one from Wallasey and one and 12 from Congleton. I hasten to say that the organisation was a Labour party branch.

The public recognise that there has been an opportunity to clean up what they regard as offensive and unnecessary "services". Blame for the continuation of the "services"

[Mr. Lewis]

will be pinned on the Minister and his colleagues. Organisations and individuals in the many Tory marginals to which I have referred will know by the end of next week exactly who is responsible and where responsibility lies. I shall ensure that their names are added to all the complaints that I have been making. As I say, they know exactly who is responsible.

9.42 pm

Mr. Morgan: It is always a privilege to speak from the Opposition Dispatch Box, especially towards the end of a Third Reading debate. Relative to the other opportunities that I have had to speak on such occasions, however, this is a lower grade privilege because the Bill has been extremely boring. It is one of those Bills about which it is said, "Where is the beef?" So many hon. Members, including Conservative Members, have told the Minister that the Bill is a great missed opportunity that he may, at last, have got the message. If the Bill is meant to be the beginning of a revolution in the standard of public services to embody the Prime Minister's so-called big idea of a citizens charter, it is a pretty poor start.

The Minister must realise that the public are not that interested in boring details about procedures—for example, about whether a public utility is supposed to take a maximum of two weeks or three weeks to reply to a letter of complaint. They are interested in why they are paying such a high price for a service and why the company or companies providing it are making enormous profits when they are in a protected monopoly. It is the one-sidedness of privatisation of the monopoly public utilities that has been so apparent since the process started with British Telecom in 1985 that so deeply offends ordinary people throughout the country.

The Government have created what could be called Frankenstein private monsters. They are not responsible to the general public. They are not bodies against which, through the regulator, members of the public feel that they can secure redress. If they dream up a bright profit-winning idea, even if it involves walking in the dirty waters of pornography as the 0898 service does, the Government are unable or unwilling to do anything about it, even over a six-year period. The Government believe that, if an idea will reduce the profits of a privatised company, it should not be carried out.

I am afraid that the Government do not have straight in their head the idea that the public will be determined, through a different Government, to obtain proper redress for their complaints against excessive prices or dirty little ideas such as the 0898 service, which was introduced six years ago after the privatisation of British Telecom.

This is a sad day for the final part of the Bill to be passing through the Houses of Parliament. It has been reported in the press today that gas regulation is in disarray. It involves one of the few regulators that have shown some teeth in standing up to the powers that have been conferred by the Government on privatised British Gas. That regulator, James McKinnon, was knighted on 1 January and kicked in the teeth on 15 January. The Secretary of State for Energy has allowed British Gas to appeal over the head of the regulator, to his fury, because of the difficulty in sorting out the conflict over whether freeing up the industrial market for British Gas will create higher prices for domestic consumers. Ofgas is furious about that, but the Secretary of State for Energy has said, "Oh, that's all right. If you have problems with Ofgas, come to me and I will sort them out." That is the atmosphere in which the Government are determined to work. In the end they will have to give way to a Government who will not work in that way.

The Government's beer orders were intended also to create extra competition for drinkers, a better standard of service in pubs, more choice and lower prices. They are now in disarray and landlords are being evicted, there is less choice, and beer prices are higher.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) said, when Alaric the Goth attacked the Roman empire in 410 AD, he found that it was a piece of cake to sack Rome because the use of lead piping had softened the brains and determination of the Roman establishment. As a result of the problems of lead piping and the other problems mentioned by my hon. Friend relating to the privatisation of the public utilities, the Tory empire will shortly fall and will be replaced by a proper representative Government of the British people.

9.47 pm

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) spoke about British Telecom standards and service for business and other users. I am sure that those remarks will be read by British Telecom. I think that it was advice to BT, rather than to me.

My hon. Friend wanted to know about data transmission services. Some of those will be covered by the proposals in this legislation. Data sent by residential and very small businesses will normally be sent on the usual voice line. Therefore, standards set for the voice line will apply. Dedicated data circuits and private circuits, primarily used by large businesses, remain outside the scope of the Bill. They are subject to much more competitve pressure.

The main data service used by residential and small businesses is fax. That is already mentioned, and specific standards can be set for it. Integrated services data network—ISDN—which provides more than one channel of communication via the same line, can transmit voice and data simultaneously. It is still using a line that provides voice telephony, so standards set for the voice line will apply. I hope that that goes some way to meeting my hon. Friend's points.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) thinks that our legislation is a step in the right direction. I believe that it is entirely the right direction. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) asked whether the regulatory powers are tough enough. The answer is yes, they are. The regulatory powers can and will do the job. I give the House that assurance.

There is no shortage of measures in the legislation. The new proposals on water competition were introduced following our discussion in Committee, and they go a long way to improving competition in the water industry. There is also the response to our duopoly review, and many companies are now coming forward with sizeable investment projects and are seeking licences. When those licences are granted and the investments are made,

competition will build up and we will see choice in the marketplace improving and the benefits of competition coming through.

Many of the amendments tabled by the Opposition fail to recognise the duties and regulatory powers in existing legislation and in the licences. Sometimes they even fail to recognise the powers proposed in the Bill.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) that this is a lost opportunity on premium rate services—although I hear a rumour that one of the more questionable 0898 lines—the Labour party line—has been withdrawn. That may show that the new tougher regulation is biting. I shall give way if Opposition Members wish to deny that, but I believe that it has happened.

The hon. Member for Worsley knows that many improvements have been made to the regulatory system.

Mr. Lewis: I do not know a great deal about the Labour party 0898 line, but I know that the complaints that I have made for many years to the Minister and his predecessors have been not about Neil Kinnock but about the serious pornographic messages that I believe have contributed significantly to the crimes of violence against women that take place outside on the streets. I am convinced that the one-to-one services whereby perverts phone women at night have led to people going out and committing acts of sexual violence against women. The Minister should be taking note of those services.

I am also convinced that the 10 million abusive calls that BT now admits are made to women every year are the overspill from the 0898 numbers. The Minister should be dealing with that, not making cheap jibes about innocent telephone lines.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman knows that hon. Members on both sides of the House share his concern about certain kinds of service. Some such services are illegal, and many are against the rules in the toughened regulation. What is needed is enforcement. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as and when abuses are drawn to the attention of the regulator or the prosecuting authorities, the correct action will be taken, as has been happening in recent months.

I resent the implication that we do not care about those disgraceful services. We do care, and we have taken action. More action will be taken on enforcement under the rules and laws set out. If the hon. Member has more information about illegal services, he should pass it on to the proper enforcement authorities.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) summed up the Opposition's position well. In Committee and on the Floor of the House, the Opposition have made a series of spending pledges with other people's money, and pledges to slash the profits of industries that need profits in order to invest.

The Opposition have made pledges on free phones and loft insulation—and only today we heard that they proposed to cut the profits of the electricity industry by 37·5 per cent.

Mr. Henderson: May I bring the Minister back to the discussion that took place in Committee? The Opposition have made absolutely no commitment to provide free phones or to increase public expenditure on telecommunications infrastructure in any way. Our argument was that British Telecom and the other operators should be negotiating with the regulator to make sure that the necessary infrastructure commitments are met.

Mr. Redwood: Either public money will be spent, so there is a different policy among Opposition Members, or it will not—in which case they agree with our policy. If the hon. Gentleman says that all the costs have to be borne by BT, that will simply mean an even bigger reduction in BT's profits and a bigger increase in its investment programme. It is always the same with Labour Members—down with profits and up with investment, with no comment on where the money is to come from. If they believe that by cutting the salaries of two or three people at the top of the operation they can pay for all those goodies they are living in cloud cuckoo land. They are talking about investment programmes costing hundreds of millions of pounds, compared with salaries in six figures, not seven or eight figures.

The Bill does the job that it was designed to do. It will deliver the promises made in the citizens charter to extend the powers of the four regulators of the privatised utilities. It is the individual customer who is most vulnerable when competition is lacking, and the Bill concentrates on improving his position and on giving the regulator more powers to stand up for him when he has disputes with the regulated utilities. The Bill puts the customer first by giving stronger powers to the regulators of telecommunications, gas, electricity and water. It provides for the setting of guaranteed service standards and for customers to know the service that they will receive. It provides for compensation where individual performance standards are not met. Would not Opposition Members like to have thought of that idea and put it through in legislation?

The Bill ensures that there is a clear complaints procedures should things go wrong. Fair competition offers the best guarantee of good services, low prices and choice. The ever-increasing competition in telecommunications is a good example of that process at work. The Bill builds on that by introducing greater competition in gas and water supply services. The combination of greater competition and better regulation will provide the benefits that customers need. The Bill is the right Bill for the job and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

STAMP DUTY (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS) BILL

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of Bills brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions, more than one stage of the Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill may be taken at any sitting of the House.

That, in respect of the Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Child Abuse (Teachers)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

9.55 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I am glad to have the chance at a comparatively civilised hour to draw attention to the particular problems facing teachers dealing with allegations of child abuse. I should make it clear at the outset that I act as a parliamentary consultant to the Professional Association of Teachers and that much of what I shall say tonight will be based on the practical experience of PAT members. I should also convey the regrets of the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) that he cannot be present this evening. He also advises PAT but is presently abroad carrying out his duties in the Council of Europe. Nevertheless, he has asked me to make it clear that he strongly supports the case that I seek to make.

In considering the problem of child abuse, we all have the same starting point. Nothing must stand in the way of the safety and well-being of our children. Any acts of ill treatment, harm or abuse must be detected quickly and properly punished. Teachers clearly have an important role in relation to child abuse. They can become personally involved in any of three ways. First, a teacher may discover evidence of non-accidental injuries or other abuse of a child at school. Secondly, a teacher may witness, or be told about, an act of child abuse by a colleague at school. Thirdly, and most seriously, a teacher may be accused of abusing a child under his or her care at school.

On the first issue, teachers are obviously in a crucial position to detect cases of abuse of children in their care. They are well placed to see the changes of behaviour that may indicate abuse, as well as to observe any physical evidence. Children see more of their teachers than any other adults, apart from their parents. Teachers are often highly respected and children will confide in them. Above all, teachers are trained to listen and to talk to children. After all, that is their job.

Nevertheless, figures provided by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children suggest that the number of child abuse cases reported by teachers remains comparatively low. Between 1983 and 1987, schools and educational welfare officers were responsible for initiating only 12 per cent. of total registrations of child abuse cases. From 1985 to 1987, only 10 per cent. of all registered children, 14 per cent. of physically abused children and 10 per cent. of sexually abused children were initially referred by schools.

Clearly, the effective training of teachers to deal with child abuse issues is crucial. The experience of PAT, which seems to be borne out by the NSPCC, is that, while some authorities provide excellent training, others seem to do virtually nothing.

There is a particular need for teachers with special responsibility for child protection to be trained in multi-agency working and procedures. Many teachers simply do not feel integrated into local child protection networks. The demands for in-service training generated by the many needs of the Education Reform Act 1988 may well have overshadowed the need for training in child protection. There is a real concern that local management of schools will add to these pressures and that training in child protection will be given only low priority.

In 1989, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children published a "Guide for Teachers", which said:

"A child sitting in class today could be 'tomorrow's tragedy'. Teachers must be helped to recognise abuse and have the confidence to know what to do about any concerns."

Sadly, that remains as true in 1992 as when it was written in 1989.

That brings me to the next area of concern. A teacher who suspects that a colleague has acted improperly towards a pupil must not be deterred from disclosing his or her concern because of fears about the effect on employment prospects. Protection against unfair dismissal is available only to employees with two years' continuous service; anyone dismissed before then has no recourse to an industrial tribunal——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Mr. Cartwright: Anyone dismissed before then has no recourse to an industrial tribunal, either to claim unfair dismissal or to require the employer to provide written reasons for dismissal. The Professional Association of Teachers has produced details of a particularly disturbing case in which a teacher in the independent sector was summarily dismissed very rapidly after making serious allegations against a colleague. Despite the support of parents, of fellow teachers, of priests and even of two hon. Members, one from each side of the House, that teacher was refused a hearing before the school governors and had too short a period of service to seek the support of an industrial tribunal. That may have been an extreme and, I hope, isolated case, but it underlines the need to ensure that teachers are not deterred from voicing concerns through fear of reprisals.

I now turn to the third and what I think is the most worrying issue, the position of teachers falsely accused of abusing children in their care. PAT has drawn to my attention a number of cases of teachers whose professional and personal lives have been virtually destroyed as a result of allegations made against them by children, allegations either subsequently withdrawn or shown to have absolutely no foundation.

The comparatively limited publicity that this debate has already generated has meant that a number of other cases have been brought to me, and the factors in all those are very similar to the ones given to me by PAT.

The teachers' accounts of what happened to them make disturbing reading. In two recent cases, the first that the teachers involved knew about the accusation was when the police arrived at their homes without warning, searched the premises and took away quantities of personal possessions. That surely cannot be right. I ask the Minister to consider what impact that has on innocent people and their families.

In every case that I have examined, the police were involved at a very early stage, before any serious attempt had been made either to assess the reliability of the allegation or to give the accused teacher a chance of refuting it.

In two cases, the matter was given swift local publicity. I quote from the graphic account of the wife of a teacher who suffered a false accusation of this kind:

"An article about the allegation appeared in heavy type on the front page of the local newspaper and the headline was on

the hoardings outside the newsagents. The article gave no names, to protect the child, but my husband was quickly identified. In a town twenty miles from the school the story was that he was guilty and had been sacked."

In every case the accused teacher suffered a lengthy period of suspension before being told that the allegation had been withdrawn or that no proceedings would be instituted against them. All the personal accounts that I have read convey a sense of isolation, an absence of professional support, and the sheer despair generated by this experience.

All the accounts underline how difficult it is for a teacher to return to work after such a traumatic experience. As one of them put it:

"Teaching is all about trust between an adult and children. That relationship must be different now after the experience of being arrested and held in jail for 10 hours."

Nor should we overlook the impact on the wives and families of accused teachers. One teacher put it graphically:

"Fortunately we have a secure relationship. Had this not been the case it could have resulted in an empty house for me to return to and a divorce eventually."

None of the teachers whose cases I have examined are seeking any special protection for teachers; nor is the Professional Association of Teachers. Clearly the safety and well-being of children must be paramount, but it is simply not acceptable that a teacher accused of something as abhorrent as abusing a child in his care should be assumed to be guilty, unless or until his or her innocence can be proved. All allegations made by children, either directly or through parents or another teacher, must be considered seriously. To do less would be a dereliction of duty.

However, we must also accept that children can distort facts. Not only are children capable of fantasising about reality in an amusing way; young minds are also capable of making serious and damaging allegations against adults. Anyone accused in that way is surely entitled to expect, at an early stage in the investigations, some basic testing of the child's evidence. For example, quick but reliable checks could be made on the basic aspects of the complaint. Details such as the date, time and place of the alleged incident ought to be checked. Such basic initial assessment should be carried out before there is any question of the police being brought in.

If, as is almost inevitable, the accused teacher has to be suspended, that ought to be confirmed in writing, with the reasons set out. There should also be a clear statement that suspension is without prejudice and does not imply any presumption of guilt.

There must be strict confidentially. That is an absolutely essential protection for all concerned. Newspaper stories can be both distressing and inflammatory. As we all know, it is all too often the case that the initial accusation is given lurid headlines, while the subsequent clearing of a teacher's good name goes totally unreported.

Teachers accused of child abuse should be offered support and counselling during what may be a distressing and lengthy period of suspension. Anyone reading the accounts of teachers who have been through that appalling experience cannot fail to be affected by their feeling of being totally abandoned and of their resulting frustration and bitterness. It should be possible for the local education authority to arrange such support, either directly or through a specialist agency, rather than merely ignoring an employee in his or her hour of need.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman and linking what he just said to his statement earlier that 14 per cent. of referrals had come from schools. Is he suggesting that the 14 per cent. of referrals from schools were the result of alleged abuse on the part of a teacher? Surely that cannot be true. Have I misunderstood?

Mr. Cartwright: The hon. Gentleman is confusing the source of the reporting rather than the source of abuse. I was relating the fact that teachers are in a good position to see abuse that occurs in other situations. It would be a great mistake to suggest that the teacher who reports abuse is responsible for causing it. That is exceedingly unlikely.

The sort of elementary rights which I have described ought to be laid down in child protection procedures. I appreciate that the Department of Education and Science takes the view that such matters are best left to education authorities or to governing bodies. However, PAT experience has been that, all too often, there are no special arrangements locally to deal with complaints of child abuse. The procedures are all too often simply those which relate to normal staff discipline cases. They are not adequate, especially given cases in which teachers are accused of abuse and found to be innocent.

It is true that the DES has published revised guidelines about the role of the education service in child abuse cases. Those are laid down in the booklet, "Working Together Under the Children Act 1989", which was published last October. That advice does not tackle the concerns which I have been trying to outline tonight and which PAT expressed during the consultation exercise last summer. I regret that.

Teachers feel that they are in a vulnerable position on this issue. One teacher, who was subsequently cleared of all charges, was told by the detective inspector who brought him the good news: "You must change your teaching methods. It's the kind of world we live in. You have to watch your own back." If that is true, it is a sad reflection on our society. I hope that the Minister will be able to offer some hope that teachers accused of something as abhorrent as child abuse will be able to depend on the system of natural justice.

I conclude with the final comment of another teacher cleared of all allegations because it is so typical of all the sad cases that I have examined:

"There was no apology, no public clearing of my name, not even any compensation for the nightmare we had lived through. According to the DES it is an unfortunate consequence that a teacher suspected of child abuse is suspended and subjected to a long wait while investigations are carried out, but if the allegation is a false one, then everything will be put right when the teacher is reinstated. I am now expected to return to teaching as if nothing had happened. But every area of my life has been tainted. A stain has been put on my character; my integrity has been questioned and that will remain with me for the rest of my life."

That strikes me as an appalling indictment of the way in which we handle an admittedly difficult problem.

If these injustices are not to be repeated, we must have clearly laid down procedures which ensure that "innocent until proved guilty" is fully honoured in practice as well as in principle.

10.10 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I congratulate the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on raising the subject and for doing so very sensitively. As one with teachers in my immediate family and a close involvement with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, I venture to say a few words.

Alas, there are cases such as the hon. Gentleman has described where children fantasise with the distressing and sometimes tragic results that the hon. Gentleman has told us about. Clearly, every step should be taken to minimise that. Sad to say, there are still thousands of children who are abused by their parents and by relatives. Teachers have an important role to play in identifying children who appear to have been subjected to abuse—physical abuse, sexual abuse or sometimes emotional abuse which is difficult to identify—or simply children who are at risk of such abuse.

Teachers see a great deal of children. They can spot minor injury, the poorly clothed child, the underfed child, the child who seems reluctant to go home, or the child who has few friends. There are also children with learning difficulties which may have been caused by some form of abuse. I am not suggesting that learning difficulties are caused automatically by abuse, but sometimes that may be a symptom.

Is the Minister satisfied that teachers receive training in how to recognise signs of child abuse, and do they know what steps they should take in such cases? I am sure that my hon. Friend will be aware that the NSPCC provides literature, including the guide to which the hon. Member for Woolwich has referred. The NSPCC also runs training courses for teachers and others on this difficult and specialist subject.

I simply ask the Minister to urge all local education authorities to ensure that all their teachers have adequate training in how to recognise possible cases of child abuse and that they follow the correct procedures in such cases.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) for affording the House the opportunity to consider the issue of child abuse. Over the last few years, the Government have taken a strong lead in improving the efforts to protect children from abuse. The relevant Departments—notably, the Home Office, the Department of Health as well as my Department—work very closely together, mirroring the co-ordination of effort at local level between the police, health, social and education services.

The "Working Together" doctrine, to which the hon. Member for Woolwich referred, embodied in published central Government guidance with that title, is widely known and respected. For my Department's part, we made very firm recommendations to the education service in 1988, at the time of Lord Justice Butler-Sloss's report on child sexual abuse in Cleveland. Our paramount concern was then, and has continued to be through various further measures since, with protecting children.

The hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) raised a number of points about training, to which I shall reply in detail in writing, because I wish tonight to concentrate on the particular matter to which attention has been drawn, the position of teachers accused of child abuse.

Naturally, I have every sympathy for the innocent teacher who suffers personal agony and blight as a result of unjustified suspicion of having perpetrated abuse on a child, and I recognise that that can be a deeply unpleasant experience. But we must start from the position that, sadly, there have been instances where individual teachers have betrayed the trust placed in them and have committed child abuse.

Where a child makes an allegation, it must be investigated and the correct procedures followed. It is sensible in cases involving an allegation of serious misconduct for the member of staff to be suspended pending full investigation of the case. I am happy to confirm that such suspension is not, and need not be seen as, a disciplinary penalty. It is a prudent measure allowing time for a proper and dispassionate investigation of the charges that have been made.

I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman that it is in everyone's interests for allegations to be investigated without delay, and conclusions reached as soon as possible; but it may be necessary to call on the skills and expertise of a number of different agencies and individuals. In complicated cases, investigations may often—for the best of reasons—take some time. The interests of the individual teacher are best protected if there is a thorough and careful examination of all relevant aspects of the case.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West) *rose*——

Mr. Fallon: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way.

Those are matters for the employers of teachers and for the investigation agencies. It is for the employer to decide whether disciplinary action is to be taken and, if the offence is serious, for the police to decide whether a prosecution is to be brought. For maintained schools, the Education Reform Act has clarified and simplified lines of management, notably the arrangements that must be followed when a teacher is dismissed.

I agree that, when a teacher has been suspended pending an investigation—and may be wholly innocent of the charges that have been levelled—it behoves the employer to consider what support and counselling that teacher needs, and perhaps whether alternative work can be found, not involving direct contact with children, while the matter is investigated. But that is a matter for individual employers in the light of the circumstances of the case.

I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that, in cases of that kind, ill-informed press reporting is extremely regrettable and can be very damaging indeed. Careless or salacious press reports can cause untold misery. A teacher may subsequently be cleared of the charges laid, but what remains in the public mind, nationally and locally, are the original allegations and innuendos. I hope that certain newspapers will consider much more carefully the wider implication of the way in which they report these cases. If they pander to prejudice and idle gossip and smears, they can do untold damage.

The Secretary of State takes extremely seriously his particular responsibilities in relation to the protection of children in schools. Where independent schools are

concerned, under the Education Act 1944 the Secretary of State has power to serve a notice of complaint if he is satisfied that the proprietor of the school or a teacher employed there is not a proper person to be the proprietor or to be employed as a teacher at a school. He can also serve a notice of complaint if he is satisfied that the proprietor is failing in his duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at boarding schools.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Fallon: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not giving way. I have a lot to get through.

We have examined carefully the procedures for protecting children in independent schools following the Crookham Court case and some other widely publicised cases in residential schools. Much of that was in preparation for the full implementation, last October, of the Children Act 1989, but I would also wish to give credit to Ms. Esther Rantzen's programmes about Crookham Court school, which have done much to bring to everyone's attention the horrors which can be perpetrated on schoolchildren. Her campaign on behalf of children at risk of abuse influenced the amendment of the Children Act to impose a duty on proprietors of independent boarding schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils.

Just before that, in April 1990, the Department's registrar of independent schools wrote to head teachers and proprietors reminding them of their statutory obligation to report dismissals or resignations of teachers on grounds of misconduct. That letter gave guidance about the arrangements for checking the possible criminal background of prospective employees and repeated the Department's strong advice that all schools should make use of the facilities.

The Education (Particulars of Independent Schools) Regulations have been amended to require proprietors of schools to report the dismissal or resignation, on grounds of misconduct, of non-teaching staff as well as teachers, so that the Department can also consider barring them. The effect of this will be to widen the net to include staff other than teachers who come into close contact with children.

The Department continues to work closely with the Department of Health to make effective the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils placed on proprietors or those responsible for running independent schools with boarders. In particular, social services department inspectors, during their inspections of schools under the new provisions of the Children Act, which came into force in October, now look for evidence that appropriate checks have been made on the appointment of new staff.

My Department is today sending all boarding schools copies of the social services inspectorate's practice guide on the implementation of the new welfare duties under the Children Act. It contains further, practical guidance on all aspects of pupils' welfare—including the prevention of child abuse. It emphasises proper training for staff in this matter, as in all other matters.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Fallon: I am sorry, but I shall not give way.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fallon: Records are also being kept to monitor the volume of inquiries from independent schools about the confidential list of barred teachers. This information, together with the records kept by the Department's teachers misconduct division, will in future give us a clearer picture of the use that independent schools make of the facilities to check new staff.

Where it comes to the notice of the Secretary of State that there is immediate concern about the welfare of pupils at an independent school, we now also consider bringing the known facts to the attention of all parents or of agencies that place pupils in the school. Those measures should help considerably in tightening up on possible child abuse in independent schools.

The Secretary of State does have a direct role to play in individual cases of misconduct by teachers, but that is different from the employer's role and comes at a later stage. His responsibility is to consider individual cases of misconduct reported to the Department and to decide in each case whether it would be appropriate to exercise his power under the Education (Teachers) Regulations 1989 to bar the person concerned from teaching and from work within schools or the youth service involving regular contact with children.

If a person is barred, his or her name is then added to the Department's list 99. That is a confidential list of people who have been barred by the Secretary of State, which is circulated to local education authorities, organisations representing independent schools, and other bodies concerned with the employment of teachers. At present, there are about 1,500 names on it.

All cases of misconduct reported to the Department are given very careful consideration. That is particularly true of cases of offences, or alleged misconduct, involving children. That is only right. Parents have a right to expect that their children will be safe when they send them to school, and the protection of children must be a paramount concern. However, I agree with the hon. Member that that concern must be balanced with the right of the teacher concerned to a fair and objective decision, taking full account of his or her representations and all relevant information about the matter.

The Department's procedures are very carefully designed to balance the need to ensure that children are protected from unsuitable persons with the need to ensure fairness for the teacher and to observe the rules of natural justice. The Department is not an investigative agency—that is the role of the police and, where appropriate, local social service departments—but where barring is a possibility, we always attempt to obtain as much information as possible about the offence, or alleged misconduct, from those agencies or from the teacher's employer.

An individual being considered for barring is entitled to submit written and oral evidence and may submit a medical report. These procedures inevitably take time, but teachers who are faced with the prospect of being barred —perhaps for many years—from their chosen profession must have a full opportunity to put their side of the case to the Secretary of State.

It is also important to recognise that the Secretary of State cannot, and does not, bar anyone without proof. Where the teacher has not, in fact, been convicted of a criminal offence the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the allegations of misconduct are substantiated. He cannot act on the basis of unsupported accusations or

[Mr. Fallon]

suspicions. We need firm evidence to support or corroborate the allegations as a basis for action. But where there is such evidence, and where the allegations are substantiated, we do not hesitate to bar the individual concerned from teaching and from work involving regular contact with children. This is, as I think the hon. Member acknowledged, a difficult and often time-consuming business and I would like to give the House a brief glimpse of it.

Mr. Skinner: Before we get on to that point, what redress has Kay Black, who worked at an independent Catholic school in the county of Derbyshire, who made allegations about child abuse and who was sacked within six months? There were police inquiries and she has had no redress. The Department of Education has had the case; it has done nothing whatsoever to help her. We have all these glossy booklets, but Kay Black is without a job. That happened in March 1989. She still has no employment. She is in Derby city hospital now having an operation.

It is high time that the Government were prepared to do something instead of waffling on. They should do something for Kay Black who, because of the Government's own employment laws, was not able to complain of unfair dismissal as a result of making allegations about child abuse. Having made those allegations, she has finished up without a job. The Government must get something done and let us have legislation to allow people like Kay Black to get jobs.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Member has made his point and packed a number of allegations into it.

Mr. Skinner: It is all true.

Mr. Fallon: It may well be. I shall certainly look into that matter.

Each year, we receive about 350 reports of misconduct, of which about a fifth concern offences or alleged misconduct involving children. Each is investigated as thoroughly and as fairly as possible by a small team of officials in the teachers' misconduct division. I pay a tribute to them for their dedication and commitment to what is often quite unpleasant work. As a result, in the year ended March 1991, some 54 people were barred from teaching, 41 of them for misconduct involving children.

I hope that the House will accept that no system, however conscientously and thoroughly it is applied, can be guaranteed either to prevent misconduct or to prevent allegations from being falsely and unfairly made. Our procedures have been considerably tightened up over the last two years, partly in the light of the Children Act 1989 and partly in the light of a specific number of cases, mainly in independent schools and, indeed, mainly in boarding schools.

I fully accept the statement by the hon. Member for Woolwich that those procedures must be fair, and must be seen to be fair, to the teachers concerned. Equally—and I think that the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst reminded the House of the balance to be struck in these matters—we have to put in the forefront of our minds the paramount concern in these matters, which is the protection of the child. In the way that the agencies co-operate on the ground, in the way that we liaise with the other Departments in Whitehall and in the way that we investigate these cases and apply the procedures that I have outlined, we seek to be as fair as possible to all concerned.

I can give the hon. Member for Woolwich the assurance that, during each investigation, the interests of the teacher are borne in mind. We always remember that there is a career at stake, a chosen profession at stake; and each case in which an individual is considered for barring comes for ministerial decision. I can assure him from my own experience over the last year and a half that that is not a decision that is taken lightly. It has to balance the interests of the teacher, the seriousness of the allegations, the investigation that has taken place and the interests of the child.

10.29 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): A teacher who makes allegations about child abuse in an independent school such as the one to which I referred earlier is treading dangerously. I am sure that Kay Black decided to try to make it clear to the people concerned that something needed investigating. But because she worked in an independent school, the LEA could not intervene.

In the last minute of this debate, the Minister should state that any future legislation will cover independent schools as well as LEA schools so that people like Kay Black can get redress——

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 17 January 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Asbestos

9.34 am

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, I wish to present the humble petition of Richard Jackson, the organiser/secretary of the Hull Asbestos Action Group and the humble petition of numerous residents of Great Britain, there being the massive number of 4,413 from the great city of Kingston upon Hull alone.

The petition

Sheweth:—a humble plea requesting the banning of all asbestos in Great Britain.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House might bring forth a Bill prohibiting the importation, manufacture and use of all asbestos in Great Britain, at the earliest possible date.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Kashmir (Human Rights)

9.35 am

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): I have the honour to present to the House a petition signed by some 500 of my constituents in which they express deep and understandable concern about the very worrying situation in Kashmir which I believe should be resolved in accordance with the United Nations resolutions of 1948 and 1949 and the Simla agreement of 1972 between India and Pakistan.

My constituents call upon the House in the following terms:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will condemn the systematic mass murders, torture, arson and rape by the Indian forces of occupation in Kashmir; promote international efforts to help refugees fleeing Kashmir and to relieve the hardship and suffering of the people who remain in the territory;

demand that India permit Amnesty International and other independent human rights agencies to enter Kashmir, with a view to investigating and reporting on human rights violation;

and calls for the withdrawal of the Indian armed forces and security forces from the State of Jammu and Kashmir and their replacement by an interim United Nations Administration, with the task of restoring law and order and, as soon as possible, conducting the said plebiscite.

To lie upon the Table.

Education (Ealing)

9.36 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I have the honour to present a petition signed by Christine Eborall, Maggie Dimakopoulos, Helen Burns, Anthony Whitford and nearly 400 of my constituents to the honourable House of Commons of the United Kingdom, of Great Britain and of Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

This is the humble petition of the Friends of Compton first school and the Home school association of Gurnell middle school in Ealing W13, which shows that in the case of the London borough of Ealing proposals for the reorganisation of primary, secondary and tertiary education have not yet been decided by the Secretary of State for Education and Science and that such a decision is urgent. My constituents' children will not know until that decision is taken the precise school for their children next September. Teachers will also not finally be in post until the decision is taken.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will press the Secretary of State for Education for an immediate decision on the merger of these two schools and on the decision relating to the remaining Ealing schools, to ensure that teacher recruitment and building alterations can be completed by September 1992. This decision is vitally important to the morale of the teaching staff and the well-being of the children.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

I beg leave to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

National Lottery Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: In view of the large number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 11.30 am and 1 pm. I hope that the hon. Members who are fortunate enough to be called before that time will bear the limit in mind.

9.39 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am delighted that the Bill has attracted so much interest and enthusiasm from my parliamentary colleagues that, unusually for a Friday, a 10-minute time limit on speeches has been proposed. I shall endeavour to comply, but I cannot guarantee that I shall be able to conform. I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will not insist that I limit my speech to 10 minutes.

I hope that the House will think it appropriate that, having won the lottery of the private Members' ballot, I should devote the proceeds of my good fortune to a more glorious lottery. I look forward to the time—very soon, I hope—when a national lottery, so big that it will attract millions of players and tens of millions of pounds every week, will breathe considerable new resources into areas of British life which the taxpayers' money barely reaches—to the arts, to sport, to our national heritage, to charities and, of course, into the pockets of the lucky winners. The aim of the Bill is nothing less than to raise the quality of life in Britain to even higher levels.

When the political air is alive with the conflict of party politics, it is a real joy to be able to introduce a measure which has the enthusiastic support of Members on both sides of the House. I pay tribute to the Bill's distinguished sponsors.

Every country in Europe has a national lottery, except one—Albania. I say nothing against that fascinating yet unhappy country, but I do not recall any other area of national life in which we have claimed to be the equal of Albania. In all, 116 countries, at the last count, are known to have national lotteries. Why? It is because a large enough lottery raises huge sums which can be used to do a huge amount of public good.

A Gallup poll taken in October told us that 72 per cent. of the adult population of Britain would play a national lottery if we had one. If other national lotteries are anything to go by, we could expect to raise about £3 billion a year from 25 million to 30 million players. We could for example, split that sum three ways. We could say that a third would go to the beneficiaries—the Bill specifies the arts, sport, heritage, and charities such as medical research —a third could go to the prize winners, and the other third would be for operating costs and for the taxpayer.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawrence: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Minister might say that the taxman will not be interested in the lottery, in which case its beneficial results would be so much the greater. But I am not as confident as I should like to be about the Government's attitude, so I have taken the precaution of incorporating in the Bill an opportunity for the Consolidated Fund to work its way.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Lawrence: I see that I am about to receive the support of the hon. Member; I welcome that.

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that, although a distribution into thirds may be the going rate, in the United States, where there are lotteries, some of the money finishes up in the pockets of politicians? In one recent case, a senator got done for corruption because he had been lining his pockets with money from lottery schemes.

Will the hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the people behind the move towards a lottery in Britain are in no way connected to the United States lottery schemes that have been lining the pockets of politicians there? Apparently, money has been offered to the people who want to operate the lottery scheme in Britain. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give us an assurance today that no money has been received from the United States for the campaign and that no such money will be used in future? Many suggestions have been made in United States newspapers that that is taking place already.

Mr. Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman brings his well-known anti-Americanism even into a debate on a private Member's Bill on a lottery. In presenting the Bill, I am not in a position to give any undertaking about details that still have to be worked out. I do not know whether Americans are involved in any offers that may be made in the course of the tendering.

However, I am sure both that the integrity of British public life is beyond question and that when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary makes the necessary choices and formulates the necessary regulations for the national lottery regulatory authority he will certainly not do anything to encourage any kind of dishonesty or malpractice. We can all be confident of that—that is, all of us except the hon. Member for Bolsover, (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): May I make a more constructive point than that made by the hon. Member for Bolsover? I very much support my hon. and learned Friend's Bill. He said that the lottery was likely to raise £3 billion. I wonder whether he has considered the findings of the Peacock committee, which in 1985 considered the possibility of a lottery for funding the BBC. It estimated that £500 million was the outside figure that might be raised. Grossed up in today's terms, that could mean £1 billion. I wonder whether that thought might allay the fears of the pools promoters. The lottery would open up a new market, so the football pools—with the good that they, too, do—may not be damaged as much as some apprehensions suggest that they might.

Mr. Lawrence: My hon. Friend has made a helpful point, and I am grateful for all such help. I cannot confirm anything about broadcasting history or public opinion polls of 1985. I shall try to explain to the House how we came up with our figure.

We have observed a number of other national lotteries elsewhere in the world, especially in Europe. We have seen how popular they are and brought our estimates into line with that, and with the Gallup poll that suggested that 25 million to 30 million British people would take part, and told us the sort of price that they would be prepared to pay. Two rather good estimates have been made. The lower estimate—made by the Sports Council—is that £2 billion would be raised. Another estimate—that £4 billion would be raised—was also made by a reputable body. In my normal, moderate, middle-of-the-road way, I have taken the middle path and used a figure of £3 billion.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawrence: I shall give way to one of the most distinguished sponsors of the Bill.

Mr. Howell: I need to deal with the regrettable interference of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), and the suggestion that he made. I must declare that I am a director—unpaid, as we all are—of the National Lottery Promotion Company. In view of the suggestions that have been made, I wish to tell my hon. Friend that no director has received a penny from our activities, nor intends to do so. Our purpose would be at an end if a lottery were promoted. Secondly, no American money has come forward for the promotion of the national lottery. It is true that £20,000 has been paid towards our expenses, but that pales into insignificance compared with the expenditure on the other side. It was paid by a British company which is a subsidiary of an American company—*[Interruption.]* I am telling the House frankly what has happened. If my hon. Friend says that there is anything wrong in British companies operating in this country supporting the cause, he has an extraordinary sense of values. I hope that that clears up the matter and that the debate can now proceed normally.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I should tell the House that interventions will be a factor taken into account in determining who will catch my eye later.

Mr. Lawrence: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell). Those comments could not have come from a more authoritative source than a former Labour Minister for sport. I am only sorry that, when I have come here in a spirit of ecumenicalism, expecting that there will be no conflict between the Labour and the Conservative sides of the House, it seems that our Labour friends are falling out among themselves. Please, gentlemen, maintain that spirit of ecumenicalism, which I want to encourage today.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I hope to develop some arguments later, if I catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye. On a point of fact, does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the net consumer spend on gambling and gaming is about £3,300 million a year? My hon. and learned Friend's estimate of £3,300 million being spent on a national lottery would be either an addition, thus doubling the amount of gaming and gambling, or a substitution.

Mr. Lawrence: I do not agree. It seems that the Treasury is not quite sure how much money it gets from gambling. There is a discrepancy of £3·5 billion between the figures at the end of 1990 and the figures at the beginning of 1991. I am sure that we can work rather more on that matter during our debate. For the moment, I say that my hon. Friend is wrong in suggesting that there will be no element of new money and no element of increased money to the Treasury, if the Treasury decides to take money from the national lottery.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My hon. and learned Friend is very patient. I must tell the House that I act as adviser for the National Association of Bookmakers, as my hon. and learned Friend knows. He will recall that the Select Committee on Home Affairs produced a report on the effects of the levy which bookmakers pay to the Government. The figures in that report and Home Office figures often differ considerably. Will my hon. and learned Friend describe the impact of clause 2 on the licensed betting offices, which run gambling in a proper and regulated way and which have a genuine and understandable concern that the Bill will have a serious impact on their livelihoods?

Mr. Lawrence: I have nothing but the best regard for licensed gamblers. From time to time I have advised them on a legal basis and I must declare that interest. Some of my best friends are bookies. On the question of the Bill's effect on a particular interest, I am unwilling and unable to give an answer, simply because the Bill is an enabling measure. Everything is to be played for and everyone's interest is to be competed for. I have no reason to think that anyone's interest is likely to be excluded.

There is an important point for hon. Members of all parties about the financing and taxation of gambling. The figures show that the return from the sporting and gambling industry to the Exchequer outweighs the money that the Government spend on sport by about 8·5:1. The more money that the Government put into sport, the more —eight and a half times more—will come back.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my hon. and learned Friend underline the fact that, worthy as bookmakers may be and wealthy as they may be—the Rolls-Royces on the racecourses testify eloquently to that —the money paid under the Bill will come to the public good?

Mr. Lawrence: I know that it is sometimes to the public good that people win large sums with the national bookmakers. Let us not fall out over that. I think that the Bill will please everybody—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am sure——

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawrence: Having given way on half a dozen occasions, I am sure that I have your support, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in asking to be given the opportunity to make progress. In due course, I may give way to the hon. Gentleman when I feel like having a breather.

Why should the arts, sport, heritage and charities be the beneficiaries of the Bill? My answer is that they are areas of British life which are important to the character and reputation of our nation and to the quality of life, but which are not sufficiently well funded by taxpayers' money.

France has 20 times as many covered tennis courts as we have. Germany has 20 times as many covered

[Mr. Lawrence]

swimming pools and 96 more opera houses. Our 50,000 competitive swimmers have to share only 12 Olympic pools. More amenities would not be just plain indulgence.

How many more of our children would spend time in sporting activities if there were more and better facilities for them? What is the curse on our children today? It is sitting in front of television sets and being subject to boredom. Most of us are parents and know that boredom leads to crime. It is no coincidence that the peak age of criminality is not the twenties and thirties, involving those who are unemployed, but the middle teens. Those kids are bored out of their little minds and find mischief to do. If we give them better swimming pools, better and more football pitches, more and better athletic grounds and gymnasia, and more local theatres and musical instruments to engage their interest and vitality, there is likely to be a reduction in juvenile crime. That is one way in which such expenditure would help British society.

That is why the Bill is backed enthusiastically by the Arts Council, the Sports Council, the Amateur Boxing Association, the Amateur Swimming Association, the British Music Society, the British Olympic Association, the British Ski Federation, the National Youth Orchestra, the Musicians Union, the Scottish Arts Council, the Welsh Arts Council, the great museums, the great orchestras, the operatic and dance groups, the National and Tate galleries, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and English Heritage. The list is almost endless. I give way to the great champion of the arts.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I am in favour of the principle of a lottery, but I find myself in a dilemma. I cannot support a Bill that proposes giving more money to the arts. It is clear that the arts get more than enough from the public purse. The weakness of the Bill is that it proposes spending money on the arts. I accept sports, but not the arts which get too much. I have had a letter this week from the great and good Sir Richard "call me Dickie" Attenborough asking for my support for the Bill. However, unless my hon. and learned Friend can guarantee that the arts aspect will be withdrawn, I will vote against the Bill.

Mr. Lawrence: As long as my hon. Friend votes for the closure, I do not mind whether he votes for or against the Bill. In the hope of winning over my hon. Friend, I must point out that few measures are 70 per cent. as we should wish them to be. Even if provision for the arts were deleted, the other 70 per cent. must involve matters of which he is in favour.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My hon. and learned Friend knows that I support the Bill strongly, especially on the question of money going to arts and charities. Does he think that he has got the percentages right? I should like a little more to go to charitable purposes, especially to help disabled people who have rather a raw deal in life.

Mr. Lawrence: I have not broken down the percentages except to suggest that 90 per cent. of the funds should go to art, sport and heritage in whatever proportion the Home Secretary or the national lottery regulatory authority decides. Up to 10 per cent. would be for charity. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) that there are problems. One is that many big charities do not want me to rain on their parade. They do not want to ask for money and then to be told that, because the national lottery will provide all the money, their finely tuned and dedicated activity will be less welcome.

On the other hand, I want something to go to charity, because the charities are concerned that some of them may be threatened, and I want to ensure that any likely threat is more than compensated for by what goes to them from the lottery. I quite understand my hon. Friend's feelings about these matters, however, and I am sure that they will be taken into account.

I reiterate that this is a skeleton Bill. It is an enabling Bill—in a sense, the worst possible kind of Bill to have to try to defend against the suggestions and attacks of others. But there is good sense in bringing an enabling Bill to the House because the concept is pretty simple—one is either for a national lottery or against a national lottery—and if I do not go into too much detail, many of the arguments and, perhaps, possible interventions can be avoided so that we can get on with the debate.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman explain why he thinks that our experience in the United Kingdom should be different from that in the Republic of Ireland, where the emergence of the national lottery has severely hit the funding of charities?

Mr. Lawrence: That is an unusual intervention from the right hon. Gentleman, who usually makes very sensible contributions. With great respect, I draw to his attention the fact that, although it may be perfectly true that, since the introduction, in point of time, of the national lottery in Ireland, there has been a fall-off there in charitable contributions, there has been a similar fall-off in charitable contributions in Northern Ireland, where there is no national lottery. The one conclusion that one can draw from that is that one cannot draw the conclusion that the right hon. Gentleman suggests. There is probably no link whatever between the two facts; otherwise why has the same thing happened in Northern Ireland?

I shall come back to charities a little later; for the moment, I am dealing with the first limb of the Bill.

Mr. John D. Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Lawrence: I am sure that the House will look forward to hearing the right hon. Gentleman's answer when he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to be the only hon. Member to speak in the debate and I have already spent the best part of half an hour giving way and answering interventions. I hope that the House will be considerate and allow me to get on and develop my argument.

With such a fund, our cathedrals, churches, national monuments and works of art could be protected from destruction by the ravages of time and weather and from purchase and removal from Britain by foreign buyers.

Some people have asked why the Bill does not help the national health service, which it does not do directly. There has been much fuss about keeping the national health service a state concern and, although it is not remotely possible, and has been denied vigorously, that the Conservatives or anyone else will privatise the national health service—there is no merit in the suggestion at all

—the very idea makes people very angry. It is clear, therefore, that everyone wants the national health service to be funded by the taxpayer and only by the taxpayer, and funding from a private lottery would be a strange way of maintaining a state health service, especially as we spend £33 billion of taxpayers' money a year on the NHS and the lottery would raise only 3 per cent. of that.

Nevertheless, the Bill will help the nation's health. First, it will help charitable research foundations such as the Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust, with which I am particularly closely concerned. There are also research trusts for diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and multiple sclerosis, which depend largely upon private contributions, and those would benefit from the £100 million a year that would be allocated to charity under the Bill, if the figures that I have put before the House are right.

Secondly, there is the money that the Exchequer will take from the national lottery—possibly hundreds of millions of pounds—which could be used to help to fund the national health service or to relieve the taxpayer of liabilities that give him a big headache and make him sick.

Thirdly, an improvement in the nation's health would inevitably result if we had more sports facilities such as squash courts, running tracks and football fields—the list is very long.

That is the first way in which the income of the lottery could be split between the beneficiaries.

In addition, the prize winners would obviously benefit. Many hundreds of millions of pounds a year—with my model, up to £1,000 million a year—would go to them. That would make a lot of people happy and would considerably improve the quality of life.

Mr. Graham: Would the money go only to private clubs, running private facilities, or would some of it go direct to local councils which provide sporting facilities? Will the hon. and learned Gentleman explain whether his Bill would channel any money into local government? And can the hon. and learned Gentleman tell me whether he gambles himself and what form of gambling he knows all about?

Mr. Lawrence: On the hon. Gentleman's first question, nothing has been ruled out. The local authorities have everything to play for in making their bids for the various activities involved in the national lottery, so I do not wish the hon. Gentleman to lose heart.

My own gambling proclivities are very modest and I have placed no bets on the outcome of today's debate, although I think that I can say that I am certain of success in the long run.

Mr. Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what gambling he does himself?

Mr. Lawrence: I do not do very much gambling of any kind.

Let me give some examples of benefits to the prize winners. In France, the lottery, now 15 years old, is a national institution, with draws twice a week, televised at peak viewing time, and an average stake of 80p per person. Some 50 per cent. of the population play and *Today* tells us this week that last year's big winners walked away with a £5·5 million jackpot.

In Italy, the Government raised £1·5 billion from gambling. Italy has 13 lotteries, and 40 million tickets are sold at £2·50 a time.

In Ireland, 60 to 65 per cent. of all adults play regularly, spending about £3 a week—the cost of one newspaper a day—and £250 million has been raised over four and a half years. Yesterday, Ray Bates, the Irish lottery secretary, told a meeting in Committee Room 13, to which all hon. Members were invited, that a nun in full regalia—so much for religious objections—won £50,000 and a weekend for two in Paris, which she raffled to raise more money for her order.

In Spain, players spend £3 billion to £4 billion a year on the lotteria nacional, with a pay-out one Christmas reaching £115 million. I read this Christmas that a department store's employees—64 of them—won £16 million between them, or £250,000 each. The only person who did not join in was the English manager. If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can imagine what a sick parrot looks like, you can imagine how that gentleman must have looked when the lottery result was announced. In addition to the arts, sport, heritage, charities and health of the nation, ordinary men and women from one end of the nation to the other would gain from a national lottery.

The third way in which the national lottery income would be split would be among the operators and their workers, the taxpayers and the Exchequer. If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor wanted, several hundred million pounds could go to help to relieve the burden on the taxpayer or be used to improve the welfare state.

Some have said, "With so much good, where is the catch? Are not there any losers?" What objections are there to a national lottery, and how valid are they? The short answer is that, provided that a national lottery is properly, fairly, efficiently and honestly run, the only losses are the amounts voluntarily and freely placed in the purchase of tickets that do not win. Society still benefits, however, and one cannot really call the players losers in the sense that they have been harmed by the national lottery. I have heard some very feeble objections advanced by self-interested groups over the past few weeks. I have also heard some very old-fashioned ideas. No doubt we will hear more of them today as there are some very old-fashioned Members on the Opposition Benches and, perhaps, also behind me.

I have heard it said that the state should not engage in gambling or encourage it in any way. However, it already does that with regard to premium bonds, which are state controlled and state run. That is not the purpose of my national lottery. There are also quite lowly taxed gambling events such as horse racing and casinos. Low taxation is a form of encouragement for gambling by the state. I am afraid that the pass about the state's encouragement or otherwise of gambling has long since been sold.

A state lottery is not hard or addictive gambling. It is harmless gambling and it is fun. It is a very different kind of gambling.

I have also heard it said that the poor must be protected from the temptation to abuse their charity and that they must be saved from fecklessness. What outdated paternalism that is for the 1990s. It seems that people cannot be trusted to spend their money as they wish and that people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale must be deprived of entertainment and the chance to win prizes.

I am pleased to say that the Church of England no longer adopts that dated approach. It has a very laid-back attitude to the Bill and, as I am instructed to say by those who are knowledgeable about these things, the Church of

[Mr. Lawrence]

England claims that the Bill is a matter for individual conscience—as indeed it should be. The Catholic Church exists side by side with some of the biggest national lotteries in the world.

If hon. Members are still in doubt about this, let me point out that in 1978 the royal commission on gambling, which examined all those matters and considered all the lotteries operating at the time, concluded:

"We have neither heard nor seen anything to suggest that its remarkable success"—

that is, the national lotteries in other countries—

"has been accompanied by any socially harmful events."

We have all been deluged with literature of a sort from the pools lobby—as unself-interested a body as it is possible to meet. I have nothing against the football pools or the pools promotion companies. Long may they all flourish and prosper. However, they should not insult our intelligence by claiming that a national lottery would kill off the pools in a few weeks. It has not killed off the pools in Italy or in any other country in Europe where football is a strong national game and where the pools are well run and efficient.

Why do our pools companies fear competition? Are they so feeble and weak that they will disintegrate if any other group is after their money? If they are weak, perhaps they should have spent more money on spectator facilities and less on high-priced players. I have advice for the pools companies. The picture of weakness and incompetence which they are apparently painting will not stand them in good stead when they bid to run the national lottery as an operator which they have said that they will if such a lottery is instituted, and as Vernons already does with other state lotteries in the United States.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is the hon. and learned Gentleman aware that the Treasury received £309 million from the pools last year? Is he aware that the pools give £40 million to football and £20 million to the arts and other facilities? Is he also aware that 6,000 jobs in Liverpool are at risk because of the lottery? Is he further aware that in Belgium the pools collapsed three weeks after a national lottery was introduced, that in Greece the takings went down by two thirds and that in Australia they fell by 50 per cent? That is the effect that a national lottery would have.

Mr. Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman has made several points on behalf of the pools promoters and I will deal with them seriatim. With regard to Belgium and any other country in which the pools have gone down, if those countries do not have a strong tradition of football—as those countries do not—and if their pools are weak and inefficiently operated, of course they will go out of business. However, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) cannot be suggesting that that applies in Britain.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Does my hon. and learned Friend accept that the football pools in Belgium and Greece were not based on the internal football matches of those countries in the way that pools are run in this country? Therefore, it is hardly surprising that there should be less interest in the pools in Belgium and Greece when there is a more attractive alternative. As we have a strong and fine tradition of football in this country, a lottery would not have the same effect.

Mr. Lawrence: As I expected, my hon. Friend has made the point so much better than I did. I hope that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw will be reassured. Indeed, I can reassure him further. If the pools promoters had bothered to commission Gallup or any other public opinion poll —although they do not always say the same thing—to carry out a poll on the threat to their survival, they would have discovered the following facts: first, 92 per cent. of pools players will continue to play the pools even if there is a national lottery. Only 8 per cent. of pools players would spend less on the pools. Secondly, only one in three people play the pools—fewer than one in five of women —while 72 per cent. would play a national lottery as would a much higher proportion of women. Why should women be discriminated against? They are as important in society as men and they have as much right as men to ease of access. Not all women are as interested as men in filling out complicated football pool coupons.

Most of the national lottery payments would be— *[Interruption.]* Due to the ribald behaviour of Opposition Members, I had better repeat that point. Most of the national lottery payments would be new money. The pools have little to fear, especially if they are planning to run the new lottery.

The pools promoters have also warned—and this point was supported by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw—that they would lose 6,500 jobs. No doubt many hon. Members will oppose the Bill because their local football clubs have written to them claiming that jobs would be at risk because of the lottery. However, the football pools have been losing jobs steadily over the past few years without a national lottery and they will continue to lose jobs as they modernise their systems and install on-line computers in place of people. Let the pools promoters deny that they have such plans.

Had the pools promoters and the hon. Member for Bassetlaw consulted the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, they would have been advised that once the national lottery achieves a turnover of £3 billion after three or four years, 85,000 jobs—and not 6,500— would be created.

Just think of the people who would benefit from a lottery. It has been suggested that there may be 25,000 outlets. Those may be in corner shops or village stores. Small business people would be grateful for an extra £100 a week to ensure that they remained in existence. What about the new employees in sport, the arts, heritage and related areas? Those people would not simply be working for the lottery office. Many more jobs would be created, and that is another answer to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw.

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): With regard to outlets, my hon. and learned Friend may be interested to learn that my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) and I met the senior management of Post Office Counters earlier this week. Post Office Counters has about 20,000 outlets, 19,000 of which are sub-offices. If a national lottery was introduced, Post Office Counters would be very keen to participate. That is an indication of the scale of the potential.

Mr. Lawrence: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee), who has done sterling work in support of this cause. He knows more about it than I do, and I am happy to rely on his advice and experience.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am sure that, during his researches, the hon. and learned Gentleman has come across the cautionary tale of Skillball, which was also to install computer terminals in every corner shop, post office and village store, as a result of which the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was to preside over a fund which also was to dispense millions of pounds to good causes. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman confirm from his researches that the founder of Skillball decamped to Barbados with a rather large sum of money, and that the right hon. Member for Chingford did not dispense a single penny to charity as a result of those terminals being installed?

Mr. Lawrence: I do not wish to discuss Skillball, about which I know nothing. Of course it is very important that the national lottery should be properly monitored and properly policed so that no possible element of fraud or dishonesty can be allowed to enter. I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary—he has sent me a note saying that, unfortunately, he cannot be present today, although he wanted to be, and I am most grateful for that—will be most astute to make sure that the regulations that he lays down and the people who are appointed to the national lottery regulatory authority will be of the greatest integrity, and will be sure to maintain that none of that criticism can arise. If the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has any doubt about those matters, perhaps he should convey them to his hon. Friends who support the national lottery and are not dissuaded in any way by the hon. Gentleman's point.

The pools promoters have warned us—the hon. Member for Bassetlaw touched on this point—that they may not be able to manage the £60 million they give to sport and the arts if their income is weakened. I pass over the fact that that money is largely taxpayers' money, anyway—it is the 2·5 per cent. tax reduction deal that they struck with the Government last year, less tax and the money to sport and the arts. I have already said that, if they are more efficient, they will not be weakened.

In any event, is not it extraordinarily selfish—I am surprised that the pools promoters are not ashamed to make this point—to suggest that £60 million will be of more benefit to art and sport than the £600 million that they are likely to get from the national lottery? Also, the pools give nothing to the heritage, and the lottery will give a further £100 million a year specifically to charities. That is the answer to the points that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw has made.

I have heard—doubtless we shall hear it again—that the national lottery would be the ruination of charities. I have already dealt with the Northern Ireland point—the Irish point—which is very ill founded. The connection between charities and a national lottery, as suggested, is manifest nonsense. Other countries with successful lotteries do not appear to have had their charities obliterated. Why is that? It is because they are two different kinds of spending. One gives money to a charity —we play the lottery. That is a very different mental process, and it is very different money.

If I go up to somebody and say, "Will you buy a lottery ticket, or will you give to the local church group?", he or she is not likely, in common sense, to say, "I am sorry, I have already bought a ticket, because I am playing the national lottery." If I go up to somebody and say, "Will you help to stop water coming into the local scout hut or mend its windows and give some money to the lottery for that?", they will not say, "I am sorry, I have already given to the national lottery." The same applies to people who raise money for local hospitals. People who are committed to a particular form of charity will not say, "I am sorry, I am not going to give because I am already playing the national lottery."

The national lottery will not affect corporate giving to charity, which has risen by 50 per cent. over the past five years. It will not affect the giving of those who have never given to charity. In fact, 56 per cent. of the population do not give to charity. However, the national lottery will channel more money to charity. Charities that find that their income may have been adversely affected can put in their bids to the trustees for further charitable giving. I am very sorry that whoever it was from some kind of charitable body or institution who circulated a letter to every Member of Parliament last week—I do not have the letter with me—said that there is no provision in the Bill for charities. They simply have not read the Bill. It behoves everybody who circulates letters to Members of Parliament to make an important point to know what on earth they are talking about; otherwise we will never be able to trust such circulars again.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I wish to comment on the figures that the hon. and learned Gentleman presented before he started to talk about charities. We should recognise that no hon. Member knows what revenue will emanate from a national lottery. We do not even know whether it will be viable because we do not know what tax regime will be in operation. We do not know what possible regulation will be in operation. We need also to take into account the fact that Britain is rather different in the sense that there is a far wider range of gambling opportunities here than in many other countries. Hon. Members must refrain from pushing figures on what we would like to spend, because none of us knows.

Mr. Lawrence: Of course I concede that nobody knows precisely the detail, but one conclusion to which we can come is that it will be a jolly good thing for everybody to whom I referred. Perhaps my figures are wildly optimistic, although they are tied to the Gallup poll findings and to what happens in other countries. I have already given an account of the massive incomes in other countries that are no more sporting-oriented than we are. Perhaps it is wildly pessimistic to assess that we can raise very much more money than I have postulated. I said that I have taken the middle line between the £2 billion figure and the £4 billion figure. If it is £2 billion, it will still be a fantastic advance in raising the quality of life in Britain. If it is £4 billion, it will be even more fantastic.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Lawrence: I am sure that my hon. Friend will make his contribution. I must come to the end of my speech. I hope that he will forgive me. When he was at the Dispatch Box, he had many opportunities to be interrupted. From time to time, he had to take a hard line and refuse to accept interventions.

In summary, much of the criticism of the Bill is ill-informed, unsubstantiated and downright unlikely, and splendid examples of special pleading against the wider

[Mr. Lawrence]

national interest. No one is perfect, and certainly no Bill is without fault, least of all mine. My Bill is enabling legislation. I doubt whether the Government will like it very much because it is enabling legislation. I have no doubt that that is why the Government have decided not to send Ministers into either Lobby: they are leaving the matter to us. This is a real Back-Bench day. I hope that Back-Bench Members will show the Government precisely how they feel about this matter.

This enabling legislation clearly sets out limited aims for the national lottery to help arts, sport, heritage and charities, and I have explained why that is so. It establishes the framework of the national lottery regulatory authority, which, under regulations to be made by the Home Secretary, will agree the kind of lottery, the proportion of prizes, the kind of game, the granting of an operator's licence, the selection of the operators, and the policing of the operation. I do not intend that that body should comprise civil servants because that would make it a state enterprise, which is not what I foresee. It must be totally private. However, I have no objection to a member of the civil service being on the authority to ensure for the taxpayer that the scheme is properly policed.

The Bill establishes that the lottery will be conducted by operators under regulations made by the Home Secretary. It sets up a board of trustees to allocate the revenue—90 per cent. to arts, sport and heritage and 10 per cent. to charities. It lays down requirements for monitoring activities and for ensuring that that monitoring comes before Parliament and the Home Secretary. It also provides for the Treasury to extract its share.

I have drafted the Bill in such a way as to avoid arguments and limitless interventions and interruptions —*[Interruption.]* It is not sensible to go into detail at this stage. Everybody's representations will be heard in due course by the Home Secretary and the regulatory authority. There must be more specific rules and regulations, and I recognise immediately that that means that there will have to be consultation and discussions between the interested parties. Everybody must have the chance to make his or her pitch. Those who are interested in running or taking part in such a lottery will have nearly everything to play for and can make their representations in due course.

What I want of the Government today is for them to face up to the necessity for a lottery and to the need to resolve its complexities speedily. Not only are we almost alone among the enlightened nations in not having a national lottery; if we are not careful, foreign lotteries will flood into the country in a few months, taking British money for other countries' good causes. I want to see—I expect that the House will want to see—British money going to British causes to improve the quality of British life.

Why might we lose out if we do not move soon? There are moves afoot in the European Community to harmonise the service industry. I know that the Government are not enthusiastic about giving up any British powers, and I want to ensure that that eventuality is narrowed, although, of course, sometimes we can do very little about the efforts that are made in the European Community. If hon. Members are not sure that that is what is happening in the European Commission, I refer them to a letter written by the Vice President of the European Commission as recently as 1 August 1991. It stated:

> "Lawful gambling activities are considered service activities. The transfer of winnings linked to a lottery is therefore a current transaction and thus liberalised according to relevant provisions of the Treaty and Directive".

The Vice President of the European Commission is saying that, as far as he is concerned, such activities are very much a matter of the removal of barriers because there will be a restraint of trade if the barriers remain. Even now, a committee is sitting to consider how far forward that point can be taken.

I realise that the Government do not propose to lose control of the area, but, if the Commission and our other colleagues in the European Community decide to dismantle the barriers and to allow the free play of lotteries, will they say, "No, this is a matter of such fundamental importance to the survival of Britain as a nation that we shall not go along with it or make that concession for the purpose of being communautaire"? I doubt very much whether this is the sort of issue on which the British people would expect the Government to stand up to the rest of the Community.

If foreign lotteries are to be available in Britain, the only effective way of dealing with that is to have our own domestic national lottery. If the Government feel that their position on this issue is stronger than some of us believe, I have two warnings for them. First, when asked in a Gallup poll whether they would buy foreign lottery tickets if they were available and if British tickets were not, 40 per cent. of people said that they would. That is strong evidence that the British public want to buy foreign lottery tickets if we do not have our own national lottery.

Secondly, because Denmark had been so slow to establish its own national lottery after international lotteries had been allowed into the country, even a year or two after the establishment of the Danish national lottery, 10 per cent. of the Danish money that is spent on lotteries still goes to the Germans. Even if European lotteries are not to be allowed in by law, who can stop them coming in illegally? Last year, our police and Customs and Excise confiscated 3 million lottery advertisements. They were not just for European lotteries, but for the United States and Canada where there are substantial lotteries. Who knows how many British people even now are playing foreign lotteries illegally, perhaps blissfully unaware that it is illegal? How many foreign lottery tickets are being sold in Britain? How much money is currently going abroad that could be used to raise the British quality of life?

Mr. Lee: My hon. and learned Friend might be interested to know that I have with me a totally unsolicited letter that was recently posted in Brussels, containing details of the Australian national lottery. Such things are circulating freely.

Mr. Lawrence: While getting this Bill together, I have seen very many foreign lottery tickets that have not been stopped from entering the country by Customs and Excise. About 3 million tickets have been stopped, but many have not. I have heard stories of people playing foreign national lotteries, although that is unlawful.

For more than 200 years, lotteries have played an important part in the public life of Britain.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I have waited to intervene until it became clear that the hon. and learned Gentleman

was concluding his speech because I have been expecting him to tell us where the £3 billion that his lottery would raise is being spent at present, but he has not done so. Will he enlighten us on this important point?

Mr. Lawrence: Perhaps I can answer the hon. Lady quickly with this statistic. An average of 27p per head of the population in Britain is now spent on the football pools. The average spend in Europe is £1 per head on lotteries and similar forms of gambling. Unless this country is a lot less sporting than European countries and a lot less liable to engage in a flutter, that means that there would be 73p per head of the population to be spent on the national lottery for a start. It would be new money. All our experience shows that, if people are presented with a sensible, rational and inviting alternative, they can and do find the money for the causes that they think are right.

I am trying to come to my conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Ashton: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lawrence: I have given way many times. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw may well say, "Hear, hear", but I have spent about half of my speech answering the inane points that he has made on behalf of the Pools Promoters Association. If the hon. Gentleman had not made those points, I should not have had to deal with them.

For more than 200 years, lotteries have played—*[Interruption.]* Let us be ecumenical. For more than 200 years, lotteries have played an important part in public life in Britain. In 1569, a national lottery raised money to repair the Cinque ports. The British Museum was built with lottery money. Manuscripts and art collections have been purchased by public lotteries, which have numbered the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker of the House of Commons among their patrons. From 1709 to 1824, a national lottery was authorised by Act of Parliament to raise money for public works. It was removed from the statute book by 19th century moralists, who are much reviled by Opposition Members, because it was thought to be a temptation to the indigent poor to be offered a lottery against which it was necessary to protect them and everyone else in our society.

Now the time for a national lottery has come again. It will be good for the poor and everyone else. It will strengthen the parts of our quality of life that taxes do not reach. It will be popular. Recent press reactions since I published the Bill proved that. The number of letters from the public proves that. The arguments put against the Bill, as the royal commission concluded as long ago as 1978, are feeble. There is no longer any excuse for not reviving the national lottery. In addition—I say this in all seriousness to my hon. Friend the Minister—a national lottery will be a vote winner for whichever party is in government and implements it.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to make a clear and unequivocal commitment to the principle of a national lottery now and to give the House a copper-bottomed undertaking that it will be implemented soon. If he does not like my Bill—and I will understand why—let him say to the House that the Government intend to introduce a national lottery through their own Bill as speedily as can be arranged, following consultation and the acceptance of representations from all the interested bodies. As my offering to assist in achieving that end, I commend the Bill to the House and invite it to support it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May I remind the House of Mr. Speaker's earlier appeal for brief speeches? A large number of right hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Towards the end of today's proceedings it is likely that the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) will move the closure of the debate. I hope that you will bear in mind that Deputy Speakers and others take into account the nature of the debate, and the fact that a Member takes up 20 per cent. of the time in moving the Bill, in deciding whether a closure is warranted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We shall deal with matters if and when they arise, not hypothetical matters.

10.41 am

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): The Bill is a dog's breakfast of a scheme and I am opposed to it. I hope that the Bill will be disposed of, not merely because I come from Liverpool, but because it is based on a string of fallacious propositions. The arguments made either today or in any of the lobbying briefings that I have received have not changed my mind one iota. It is argued that billions would be raised for art and sport and that no damage would be done to the pools, the lotteries or the general gambling industry. It is argued that somehow we shall be flooded with European lottery tickets post-1992, if not before.

It is argued that we shall get out of a lottery grand public works catering for sport, the arts and so on. It is understating the case to say that the various projections of income from a national lottery are open to question. To put it mildly, they are confusing. In his letter of 16 December, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) said that the lottery might raise as much as £1 billion. The Sports Council briefing note claimed that the lottery would raise at least £2 billion. Not so long ago we were being told that the scheme would raise £3 billion. There is no guaranteed return on a national lottery and it is misleading to suggest otherwise.

Mr. Lawrence: I would not like the hon. Gentleman to make a bad point and I am sure that he would not want to do so either. If he reads my letter carefully, he will see that I said that £1 billion would be liberated for arts, sports and heritage. The total take would be £3 billion.

Mr. Kilfoyle: With respect, that is exactly what I am saying. But it still confuses the issue. The various parties that support the Bill cannot agree on the exact figure. The amount is limited. That is an important point to make. Not so long ago the hon. and learned Member for Burton suggested that somehow there is an unlimited amount of gambling take to be spread about. That is just not true. It is possible to speculate about what income would be generated for sports and arts projects, but it would be merely speculation.

The Sports Council is a strong supporter of the Bill. In its briefing note it could not even decide on the basis of its own projections whether sport and the arts would receive £600 million or £800 million from the scheme. The whole idea is based on over-optimistic and simplistic analysis of what people might spend on gambling in the future. Any national lottery scheme would have a devastating effect on other lotteries and the gambling industry in general.

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

There is widespread opposition to the Bill among responsible bodies. We were given a list of people who support a national lottery but not of those who are against it, such as the Lotteries Council. The Lotteries Council represents bodies as diverse as the Children Nationwide Medical Research Fund, MIND, and the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals. Professional rugby, football and cricket clubs are vigorously opposed to the Bill.

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): The Lotteries Council is not against a national lottery. I speak as president of it. The council is against this Bill because it believes that it would not help it.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The Lotteries Council is against the Bill, not a national lottery. Nevertheless, we are dealing with the Bill this morning.

Equally implacable in its opposition is the Betting Office Licensees Association. It is a major employer in Britain. Some 50,000 people are employed in betting offices around Britain. But obviously my particular anxiety is the effect that a national lottery would have on the pools industry. I make no apologies as a Liverpool Member of Parliament for arguing that industry's corner.

In Liverpool we have more than 4,500 people employed in the pools industry. Most of them are women. Indeed, some of my relations are employed or have been employed in the industry. An awful lot of those women are the only breadwinners in their household. In my constituency we already have the highest number of unemployed women in Britain. I do not want to see any addition to that number. I am absolutely convinced that a national lottery would have a devastating effect on the pools and would cost those women their jobs.

We are told that a national lottery will not impact on the pools industry. To me it is nonsense to suggest that. I was in Australia when the soccer pools were devastated by the national lottery scheme—Tatts Lotto. Anyone who suggests that one does not have an effect on the other is talking nonsense. Soccer pools in Australia were destroyed by the national lottery. Without a shadow of a doubt, exactly the same thing would happen to the pools industry in Britain. That has been independently confirmed by Coopers and Lybrand Europe. It was engaged recently by the European Commission to do a study on gambling in the Community. It was in no doubt about what the Bill would do to the pools industry. It said:

"A UK national lottery would effectively kill off the football pools in a period of weeks."

It gave the example of what happened in Belgium. I have heard the contrary argument put this morning about that. Belgium's pools industry was killed off within three weeks. Coopers and Lybrand was particularly pointed about the effect that a national lottery would have on the pools industry in Britain.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall speak against the Bill, if I catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye, but it is probably worth saying on the football pools point that because many people go in for a blanket entry, a national lottery could not possibly have the immediate impact that the hon. Gentleman suggests. Whether it would have an impact in the longer term is a matter for genuine debate. It is a weak point to claim that the pools would disappear so fast.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Gentleman may think that it is a weak point, but I am convinced that Coopers and Lybrand has a comprehensive view of the effect that a national lottery would have. It seems to be convinced that the effect would be fairly immediate. Certainly, the effect on soccer pools in Australia was immediate. All the statistics show that.

Gambling currently generates more than £1 billion in tax and duty for the Government. Obviously, that includes the element from the football pools. I believe that much of that will be imperilled by the scheme, especially if the football pools and small lotteries are damaged and the betting industry generally is damaged. I am sure that the Treasury would not want to lose the money that it already rakes in from the gambling industry.

Mr. Ashton: Is it not a fact that the vast majority of pools coupons are collected? Would not those collectors push state lottery tickets instead of collecting the pools? Is not that the reason why the pools would suffer instantly?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can only assume that there would have to be some collection system——

Mr. Ashton: On commission.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Yes, on commission. I assume that that is what hon. Members are talking about when they mention all the jobs that will be generated by a national lottery. The only alternative is to have on-line terminals of the sort promised with the Skillball game—or whatever it was called—which never came into being. I can see no other way round that and it will obviously cost those jobs.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that only 10 per cent. of pools entries are standard forecasts—where people do the pools several weeks in advance—negates the argument of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) a few moments ago?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Absolutely. Also, it can be argued that some skill is involved in the pools. It is not the simple gambling trick that a lottery would be.

I am sure that the Treasury would want to make up any lost income. Surely, that will affect the portion set aside for tax anticipated in the briefing notes that I have seen. That would mean that less money would be left to be disbursed on the arts, sport and heritage. They cannot have it both ways—it is a finite piece of cake.

I am less than optimistic about the running costs and profit margins of such a scheme. The hon. and learned Member for Burton did not really answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I am concerned about the involvement of American companies such as Reebok and Control Data in promoting the proposals. We ought to know exactly how they are funding the campaign behind the Bill and what their future role will be. They do not put money in unless there will be some return for them. It is all very well and good to make snide comments about the pools industry. I want to know the exact position of those companies as regards the proposals. One thing that I am sure of is that if those companies have a future role of any sort in a national lottery, they will want a far higher return than the 3 per cent. which the pools companies take.

Those in favour of a national lottery say that we are about to be overwhelmed by foreign lottery tickets. A few

moments ago, the hon. and learned Member for Burton said that that was happening already. Yet the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd), confirmed to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 12 March 1991 that that was not the case. Foreign tickets will not be allowed into the country. Whether the law is being broken now is immaterial. It was suggested that post-1992 we would be flooded by such tickets. On 12 December the hon. Member for Fareham confirmed that there would be no change in the Government's policy and that gambling controls are matters solely for national authorities.

Following the aforementioned Coopers and Lybrand report for the European Commission, it is clear that most European Community member states are totally against any cross-border sales of lottery tickets. Each fears the consequences for its own national lottery.

On 12 December the hon. Member for Fareham stated to the House in a written answer that a range of measures had been taken here and abroad to prevent the importation, promotion and sale of foreign lottery material. In short, the argument about post-1992 and the flood of foreign lottery tickets is unsustainable.

Despite the figure of 27p which was mentioned earlier, as a nation we spend far more on gambling than France, Germany, Italy or the Netherlands. In Europe, only Spain, Ireland and Greece spend more on gambling. Home Office figures that I have seen suggested that £4·50 per week is spent for every man, woman and child in the country. I do not believe that that amount can be substantially increased; nor ought it to be. That begs the question where the extra income will come from. The hon. and learned Member for Burton skirted round that. There is no doubt that it will come from other forms of gambling, whether from the pools, racing or small local lotteries. That is why many people have argued that this is a bad scheme. It will have a devastating effect on fund-raising activities at a small, local level. That must be unacceptable to the House.

There has been no mention of the potential effect of the Bill on football, our national game. Research at Leicester university shows that, on average, 10 per cent. of football's income comes from small lotteries. The smaller the club, the more dependent it is on lottery income and the more vulnerable it will be to competition from a national lottery. I want to know whether supporters of the Bill have taken that into account. Have they thought of the devastating effect that it will have on football clubs?

The game as a whole receives more than £40 million from pools-related sources. It has been computed that if the scheme went ahead, the Football Trust alone would have its income slashed from £33·8 million to just £6·5 million by 1994-95. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that that money would be replaced by a national lottery. It would be merely one of many interests competing for money from the proposed scheme. There will be no guarantee that our national game would have any prior claim to any part of it.

I am also sceptical about the grandiose claims that have been made about the benefits of the scheme for sport and the arts. The Sports Council has produced a long list of worthy projects to be funded by the scheme—it hopes. Frankly, I find it a sign of desperation that such organisations are seeking funds in that way. They recognise that grants in aid have declined in real terms and that local authority expenditure on sport and recreation has been slashed by more than 25 per cent. in the past five years, due to what they euphemistically describe as pressures on public finance.

The Government waste billions of pounds on the poll tax, yet cannot provide sports and arts facilities commensurate with a civilised society. We want them to go and I hope that the Bill will go with them.

10.56 am

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) represents a Merseyside constituency and one would expect him to speak on behalf of football pools, but he did not do the promoters of the pools a great service by what clearly was a gross exaggeration about what might or might not happen. No hon. Member knows precisely what the effect of a national lottery will be on overall levels of gambling and how it might affect the football pools. To state that there will be a mass decimation of the football pools—which is what I think that he was implying—must be a gross exaggeration and does not do a proper service to the discussion of this issue. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that football pools and national lotteries co-exist in many countries successfully and examples have been given by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence).

I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton most warmly on his decision to introduce the Bill and on the way in which he has presented it, on his great good humour—which was much needed when dealing with some of the neolithic tribesmen who opposed him—his approach to the Bill, his profound hard work on it, his research and the rational case which he produced so sensibly and fully for the House. He has done a great service and I am proud to be one of the sponsors of the Bill.

Like the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), I should declare an interest, although it is unremunerated, as I am a member of the Lottery Promotion Board. It is a good thing that the board exists to collate all the facts and to put forward evidence about the advantage to the country of a national lottery.

My reasons for supporting the Bill go back to my experience as Minister for the Arts for five years. After two or three years I came to the view that it was vital to find new ways to finance the expansion of the arts in our country, and that it would not be right to depend solely upon the taxpayer or potential benefactors to support the arts and cover all the requirements of the arts in the long term. Bearing in mind the constant pressures and needs of our national health service, education system and road system as well as all the other areas which the Government are obliged on behalf of the taxpayer to support with public expenditure, I came clearly to the view that one had to look at new ways to find support for the arts and sport. The arts and sport need a substantial injection of extra resources, particularly capital sums to improve facilities, buildings and our heritage. That can be illustrated clearly. Above all, we need a large injection of capital funds to improve facilities. We need to follow the American example and establish endownment funds as the basis of funding and, in the long term, of running costs of many arts bodies.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Would the right hon. Gentleman support the concept of income from

[Mr. Tony Banks]

a national lottery being ring-fenced? I am a sponsor of the Bill, but many of us have reservations. A problem is that any Government will see the income as a replacement for central Government funding, so in the end the arts will not be a net beneficiary.

Sir Richard Luce: I understand that important point. The money must not be seen in any way as a substitute for public expenditure. It is important to find ways of strengthening that point in the Bill. It is absolutely essential that a national lottery should in no way be seen as a substitute for taxpayers' support. That is why it is right that as large a part of the proceeds as possible should be isolated for capital and endowment funds which are desperately needed in sport and the arts.

Many arts building were constructed in the 18th and 19th centuries and need refurbishment. We need new buildings, such as concert halls. Our theatres undoubtedly need refurbishment. The south of England is much in need of a new dance centre. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is not here. I know that he would not agree with that, but there is no doubt about the need and there is a great deal of discussion about using the Lyric theatre. Our cathedrals and churches need extra support, as do our national museums and galleries. The Museums and Galleries Commission estimates that we need capital expenditure of £300 million a year to get the fabric in good condition.

There is the whole question of works of art. There should be as much international free trade as possible, but it is absolutely essential to preserve some works of art for the nation. We cannot constantly make demands of taxpayers to save works of art. When one compares the price of a hospital with the price of a work of art, often the priority is to spend the money on the health service.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the present system has excellent rules, but has collapsed? Despite all his valiant efforts and those of his successors, the system is not working because the money is not there. Does he agree that a national lottery is one potential source of that money?

Sir Richard Luce: My hon. Friend, who knows so much about this subject and has been the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, makes an important point. This is exactly where a lottery could assist and help to save important objects for the nation, thus lifting the burden from taxpayers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Although I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), has my right hon. Friend seen table 32 on page 232 of the Rothschild report on the perceived appeal of a national lottery? It shows the groups most likely to take part and that 1 per cent. want to keep art treasures and stately homes intact and less than half a per cent. go to operas and theatres. I agree with my right hon. Friend that it is right that we should find the money for these good causes, but we should not go to a group where less than 1 per cent. wants the money to go to those destinations.

Sir Richard Luce: I know about the 1978 report, but I have not seen that specific page. More recent research by the Arts Council demonstrates widespread support for participation in a lottery, with money going to different types of arts and heritage causes. I have no doubt that that is the case.

Even if the predictions and forecasts are half true, a national lottery scheme would without a shadow of a doubt produce enormous extra sums which would help to improve the quality of life. The forthcoming millenium, with the targets set by Lord Palumbo and the Government that we should strengthen our heritage and the fabric of our buildings, is an added reason.

Many hon. Members will argue all the reasons why we need improved sports facilities, so I shall not detain the House on that. I believe that sport is as important as the arts. It is just that I have not had experience of sport.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): The right hon. Gentleman referred to sport. Would he care to comment on the local situation with Brighton and Hove Albion? The club says that it takes about £1 million gross in its bingo scheme, which is greater than the gate receipts from our joint local professional club and that that scheme would go by the wall if a national lottery came in. If that is the case, can he suggest another way in which we could jointly support our local professional club in Sussex?

Sir Richard Luce: The club should have regard to the views expressed by the Sports Council which strongly supports such a scheme because of the advantages that it would bring to sport. It has listed a whole range of facilities, from hockey to tennis and water sports to athletics, which would be advantaged.

It is important to keep our sights on the overall advantage to the nation of the introduction of a national lottery. Many people have, understandably, referred to the arts and sports foundation scheme. It is right that they should do so and right to welcome the scheme, but we need to look at the difference in scale. The money spent on that scheme is about £60 million, but a national lottery could bring benefits to the tune of £1 billion a year. We must keep our sights on the big issue. The scale of operation would be enormously enhanced and would bring dramatic benefits to the arts, sport and charities.

The arguments about football pools have been dealt with effectively. Of course there are fears and, naturally, we must abate them. The evidence from research that my hon. and learned Friend produced demonstrates that many people who do not take part in the pools would participate in a national lottery and that the vast majority who take part in the pools would also take part in a lottery. That is important evidence, as is the fact that in Italy, Spain and France the two schemes co-exist. We need to keep in perspective how a lottery might affect the other industries. Some competition is inevitable, but a great deal of complementary work will be done by the different methods of raising money.

Some charities have expressed concern because they operate local lottery schemes under the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976. About £23 million is raised in that way. It is right for us to have regard to that. My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right to provide in the Bill that 10 per cent. of the proceeds could be given to charitable causes. Certainly, it is important to monitor the effect of a national lottery on local lottery schemes to ensure that good charitable causes are not damaged. The Bill makes good provision to deal with that.

To suggest that the Bill would encourage gambling is sheer nonsense. As everyone knows, we are one of the biggest gambling nations. What could be better than to channel those gambling instincts—I do not believe that the lottery represents hard gambling—into beneficial causes from which the whole nation would gain?

I am delighted to support my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton and I hope that the Bill passes its Second Reading by a large majority. We must keep our sights on the overall benefit that a national lottery would bring to the nation. Therefore, we must support the Bill.

11.9 am

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I oppose the Bill and the principle behind it because I believe that it is a substitute for Government action.

The right hon. Gentleman for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) was a distinguished Minister for the Arts, but, during his term of office and beyond, expenditure on the arts has been cut. Local government expenditure on the arts and sport has also been reduced with a detrimental effect on the number of playing fields and other sports facilities available. In Salford and Greater Manchester, there have been devastating cuts in arts facilities.

Sir Richard Luce: I must stress that there has been a real increase in the resources available to the arts in the past 10 years. The right hon. Gentleman should be fair to local government and accept that, during the same time, it has also given more money to the arts. The right hon. Gentleman is not using a good argument.

Mr. Orme: I think that it is a good argument. The ballet company based in Manchester was virtually driven out because the Arts Council had insufficient money and, therefore, expenditure on it was cut.

If we have a national lottery, the Government will no longer be involved in a proper sense in the financing of the arts and sport through direct taxation. Such money will, in future, be distributed in an ad hoc manner.

In common with many of my hon. Friends, I have a strong interest in association football. I have seen the letter from the Lotteries Council, of which the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) is president. That letter suggested that the council was basically in favour of a national lottery, but, two thirds into it, the council then makes out a devastating case against it. The list of members of the Lotteries Council includes all manner of sports clubs and football clubs that exist because of the funds that they raise through their own small lotteries.

It is not just small clubs that benefit from small-scale lotteries. The development association of one of the wealthiest clubs in Britain, Manchester United, has provided facilities to make Old Trafford one of the finest grounds in the United Kingdom. The national lottery would put all that in jeopardy. It would threaten small clubs such as Bradford City, Bolton Wanderers and Darlington, which exist because of their development associations and lotteries. It is also important to note that Manchester United has not just creamed off the money for its own benefit, but has helped local associations, charities and hospitals.

Mr. Tony Banks: My right hon. Friend knows that I am a passionate supporter of Chelsea football club and we receive a substantial income from our pools. Probably all the people who support their local football club pools do so out of loyalty to the club, not because of the prizes offered. In many cases, the income to the clubs is vast in comparison with the relatively small prizes offered. I do not believe that such club loyalty would disappear with the introduction of a national lottery.

Mr. Orme: I accept that, but we will not know the effects until the national lottery is in operation.

Sufficient account has not been taken of the fact that there is only a limited amount of money available for spending on gambling. However, I accept that we spend a far larger percentage of money on gambling than any other European country. If there is only a limited amount to go round, something must give.

Other factors also come into play. The pools are now contributing more money to football and to the arts than they have ever done. That money has been given under pressure and those in control of the pools do not like it, but to jeopardise that money would be fatal. I believe that the Bill will prove disadvantageous to football.

The Sports Council has expressed enthusiastic support for the Bill. I wish that it would campaign a little bit harder on the basis that it provides facilities for our society, which should be financed by the state. The provision of those facilities should not be left to a national lottery.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) said that the introduction of a national lottery would not affect the financing of the health service as it will continue to be funded nationally by the state. However, he then said that some of the money could be given to the Medical Research Council. That is the thin end of the wedge. In the past people used to raise money for the NHS to provide such things as televisions or a room for visitors; now that money is used to provide medical equipment. The same thing has happened in schools. In the past people raised money to pay for extra-mural activities; now that money is spent on books. We must take that into account when considering the introduction of a national lottery.

The Bill takes us down the wrong road. I support small charities and the moneys that they raise. It is essential that their work continues. I would oppose anything that was done to damage them. Therefore, I shall vote against the Bill.

11.18 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I oppose the Bill because the gambling principle lies behind it. Put simply, that principle works on risking something more or less valuable in the hope of winning more than one has hazarded.

I do not believe that gambling enhances human life. We already have enough outlets for gambling without the Government sponsoring further gambling. Whatever one expects from one's neighbour without offering an equivalent in time or money is either the product of naked theft or the principle of gambling in operation. Lottery tickets come into the same category. That which professes to bestow upon someone a good for which one gives no equivalent is the principle that we should be debating. The gambling craze is no new sprite but an old transgression that has come down the centuries, bringing with it a thousand woes.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) said that, as a nation, we have already sold the

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

pass. I remind him that two wrongs do not make a right. He is now advocating that we should go all the way. I do not believe that that is a good policy.

The desire and aim to get money without doing the equivalent of necessary work strikes at the heart of the well-being of mankind. The man who works for what he gets is happy and contented. He is not shadowed with the frustration, disappointment, tension, agony and remorse of the gambler. A trade and occupation are ennobling things. They bring out, to the best advantage, the talents and energies of the individual. Anything that debases those talents and energies and puts them to a wrong use is not good for a person or humanity as a whole.

We are all aware—I am especially so from my pastoral work—of the power of the fever of gambling by mere chance. Even before the lottery begins, we have heard in the House charges of deception, cheating and corruption regarding its sponsorship. Whether those are real or unreal, they reflect what lies at the heart of the scheme.

Gambling tells against domestic happiness. The charms of the home do not satisfy the person caught up in this craze: he wants louder laughter, something to win or lose and excitement to drive the heart faster, fillip the blood and fire the imagination.

The Bill is serious because it would put the imprimatur of the nation on gambling. Some say that there are enough outlets and that enough is spent on gambling. Paraded by the other side is the fact that there will be a tremendous increase in gambling and that billions of pounds will be made available. I should like the House to consider what happens to those who do not retain their winnings. Often, a deeper craze grips them, so winning becomes a more entangling net.

What of those who do not hold the lucky numbers? They remain tied and fettered to the wheel of eternal fortune. I do not believe that a lottery is the way in which we should finance our arts, sports or any other part of our national needs. It is a poor community, surely, that cannot find a better way of obtaining money for those necessary matters. We should find a means of augmenting our national income that will do the decent thing by everyone.

Will these games help those whom we are told will benefit? I seriously doubt it. The additionality of EC moneys is a most controversial subject. Much of it is used to replace the contribution of the Treasury, not to enhance it. Will the Treasury further evade its responsibility by using money from the lottery kitty? The people whom I represent in Northern Ireland are aware of the cost of not getting EC money to take the measures that they need. Instead, the money is used by the Northern Ireland Office to finance its own programmes.

I ask the House and the sponsor of the Bill to consider some words of Holy Writ:

"He that getteth riches and not by right shall leave them in the midst of his days and at his end shall be a fool."

Hon. Members, including myself, should consider that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that speeches between 11.30 am and 1 pm are caught by the 10-minute limit imposed by Mr. Speaker.

11.24 am

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): I have already declared an interest that I have had for many years. It is the reason why I support the Bill, which I do not believe will go far in this Parliament. The vote, therefore, is not highly relevant, but the Bill offers an important opportunity for hon. Members to express their views.

The Rothschild committee on gambling was set up by the previous Labour Government, with whom I was involved. In 1968, it strongly recommended the creation of a national lottery. The Labour Chancellor included a lottery in the Finance Bill, but in a free vote it was turned down, mainly because of the arguments that we have heard today about small clubs and small lotteries. I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on introducing the Bill.

I want to meet head on the arguments advanced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), with whom I so often agree. I agree with him about the importance of Manchester United—second only to the importance of Aston Villa. If I thought for one minue that the Bill would affect its success or the interests of the workers in the sports industry, I should not support it.

The quality of life available to people is fundamental to a healthy social life. We must therefore promote sport, arts and our heritage. I agree with the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce), who is a former Minister for the Arts, that the need to develop sport, the arts and our heritage is overwhelmed by the financial size of the task. The hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), who is a former Minister for Sport, nods in agreement.

What do we want for sport? We want a national velodrome, a national ice skating rink, a national Olympic swimming centre and regional centres for athletics and football. A feasibility study is being carried out into Manchester's Olympic bid, which I have long said the Government should support and I hope that they will do so. But I ask my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East; even if Manchester gets the £900 million that it says it needs for the Olympic bid, who will take it over and meet the revenue costs of running it year after year? That cannot possibly be met by the Exchequer or local authorities.

The right hon. Member for Shoreham mentioned orchestras, ballets and opera, to which I would add street and community theatre and community art. We must maintain our cathedrals, historic houses and areas of natural beauty in good order. Our churches are falling down. No Chancellor of the Exchequer would be able to finance the colossal cost of meeting those needs and it would be false to say otherwise. The alternative is that we do not provide, unless we try to find other money.

Mr. George Howarth: Does my right hon. Friend seriously suggest that the long list of needs that he described would be funded by a national lottery?

Mr. Howell: Not at all, but there is a much better chance of getting £1 billion out of the £3 billion—or thereabouts—that is to be spent to help along the way. I agree that the task is gigantic, so let us start. The first step is very important.

I am sympathetic to local charities, as we all are. I am a member of two charities—Warwickshire cricket club and the Labour party—and I give to them out of conviction. It would not occur to me not to give to the Diabetic Research Association—I am a diabetic—or to Warwickshire cricket

or to the Labour party merely because I wanted to buy a lottery ticket. People give to causes out of conviction, but I am glad that the Bill states that charities should be included. I welcome that, but an alternative is for charities to become agents for the lottery and they would probably make much more money if they did.

The arguments made by betting and pools organisations are ludicrous. Many millions of pounds have been spent on opposing the Bill by people who have vested interests. I am not against people with vested interests expressing their views—I have a lot of vested interests and they are perfectly legitimate—but we must deal with the arguments.

The arguments for the pools are best stated by Mr. Paul Zetter in a letter to *The Times* in December which contains a colossal contradiction. He begins:

"If we started a national lottery the turnover would be minuscule compared with European competitors and the prize money insufficient to attract people."

Halfway through the letter, he states that a lottery would destroy the pools.

That is utterly absurd, but the absurdity is carried further by the Betting Office Licensees Association. That includes William Hill and Ladbrokes—they are good friends whom I have supported all my life and I shall continue to do so. The association said that the betting industry was delicately poised. When I see its accounts I cannot agree that there is any delicacy about the matter. The association also said that we should not be

"stimulating demand for betting and gaming".

Let us remember that the association includes William Hill, Ladbrokes and Coral. Every time I open the newspapers and see their adverts inviting me into their plush betting offices or to ring up to listen to their commentaries, it is not to encourage me to place a bet but to inform the nation who is winning the jockeys' championship or who has won the 2.35 pm at Sandown in which we have an academic interest. Let us put all such nonsense to one side and recognise the facts.

I am much more sympathetic to the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. That is why—as the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) knows—on behalf of the national lottery I met representatives of the pools industry and told them that if there is any danger to their workers in Lancashire—we want to site the national lottery there—we are ready to talk to them about their running it. That is a reasonable and generous offer, but they turned it down.

I followed up that offer by writing an article in *The Times* which I concluded by saying that, based on the Italian experience, I am certain that pools and lotteries can run side by side. The organisations should be talking to each other to ensure that we do not put anyone out of work. That suggestion was not taken up, but, as far as I am concerned, it remains on the table. I am encouraged by the fact that the pools organisations—or some of them—say that if they lose the argument, they would like to run the lottery, which is another extraordinary inconsistency.

I can offer the workers some assurances. When we were discussing the Labour party's policy document on sport and the arts—which the Labour party has honoured and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) will refer—we arranged that we should come out not now but after the election—to quote the leader of the Labour party—saying that more of the money made out of sports should be put back into sports. That must be an acceptable proposition to everyone. We would put everything in the pot and consider all the issues together, including betting and gambling. I have always supported the idea of a national lottery, but I go along with the Labour party's policy in that respect.

I believe that the Government will say much the same today. I prophesy that they will wait, but, according to the leak in *The Guardian*, they will say that they do not like the Bill, but that they accept the principle of a national lottery. If they do, we shall be saying the same thing—we must consider how to get more money from betting and gambling which is made out of sport back into sport—that should unite us all—and to give the protection that everyone wants.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I apologise for not being here at the start of the debate. Most of us have received letters from the Lotteries Council. I know that my right hon. Friend has a special interest in Birmingham City and Aston Villa football clubs. They are among the number of small charities—they are run by the supporters' clubs—that believe that a national lottery would virtually put them out business and rob them of a very important source of money.

Mr. Howell: My hon. Friend has only just arrived, but if he reads *Hansard*, he will see that I have dealt with that issue. I shall move on to the main argument, which involves Europe.

The Minister said previously that European lotteries cannot operate in this country. Gambling is the twelfth largest industry in Europe and, given the terms of the European Community, it is inconceivable that when the Commissioners have finished their current review—it is likely to be finished during the British presidency—they will say that competition should not apply in the twelfth largest industry. We know that it will apply and that is another good reason for the pools industry and its workers to anticipate their future.

There is no doubt that in two or three years the European lotteries will come into this country because they cannot be stopped under the terms of the treaty of Rome.—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends are entitled to their views, but that is what we shall find. At the end of the day, the European Court will uphold the purpose of the treaty. In such circumstances, the question to be answered will be whether we want lottery tickets that are sold in this country to benefit European sports and arts or whether we want British people to be paying for British sports, British arts and British heritage.

The arguments in the Bill are overwhelming. We can protect the pools' interests. As a long-standing friend of the pools and one who acknowledges their contribution to the sports—especially when I was a Minister—I want to protect them. We can also protect the interests of the charities. Indeed, these issues will be in hand if the organisations walk side by side.

I appeal to my hon. Friends to stop saying—as Paul Zetter said in his letter—that it is either pools or the lottery but not both. That is a mistaken approach. It is political advice and I hope that the House will see the common sense in accepting the Rothschild royal commission's recommendation of 14 years ago and proceed to a national lottery which the sports, arts and heritage of this country desparately need if we are to expand and promote their interests.

11.39 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on having won what is clearly the best prize of the many lotteries run by the House, in coming first in the private Members' Bill ballot. I congratulate him too, on his choice of a National Lottery Bill, which provides a long overdue opportunity for the House to debate gambling issues.

I understand, and have much sympathy with, the enthusiasm for a national lottery. However, on closer examination a number of factors argue against such a lottery, and Parliament must consider those before any lottery can begin. My worry is that if Parliament were to approve the Bill and set up the regulatory framework, that momentum would mean that we would end up with a lottery without proper regard having been had to the other crucial issues affected.

I shall examine some of the arguments in favour of a lottery—first, the European question. I do not believe that the flood of European lottery tickets is as certain as supporters of the Bill have suggested. Gambling is not covered by the single European market, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has often made clear. Even if the European Commission were to try to introduce a directive to free up the availability of lotteries and gambling opportunities across the Community, with this as with many other matters affecting society, the Government could argue the public good principle in order to prevent any lottery tickets from other countries from being readily available in this country.

There is much discussion about what can be provided as a result of a national lottery. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton spoke with his usual authority, and with considerable enthusiasm, about the many facilities that a national lottery could provide, and which many people, both inside and outside the House, feel need to be provided in Britain, and which are available in other countries, especially sporting facilities and support for the arts. I must tell my hon. and learned Friend that in Europe such facilities are often supported by central, local and regional government, not just from the proceeds of national lotteries. In fact, my hon. and learned Friend made a good case for our right hon. Friends in the Cabinet to look at our manifesto commitments on the provision of sport and leisure facilities. We should be doing more about that, although I accept that if a national lottery were set up it could provide a valuable source of funding.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is not here, because I wanted to tell him how much I disagree with him about support for the arts. The Sports Council and the Arts Council were set up as the result of an imaginative joint initiative by the Government and the pools promoters. How glad we were at Opera North to receive an endowment of £250,000 for which no other funding was ever likely to be available. That demonstrates the opportunities, and shows why a national lottery has such a great appeal.

However, there are objections, and perhaps my hon. and learned Friend dismissed those a little lightly. First, we must question how much more money is available from the pockets of the British people for gambling. It has been suggested that £3 billion may be wagered. There is some difference of view on how much existing betting turnover amounts to. The Select Committee on Home Affairs carried out inquiries, and we were left in no doubt that the gross amount already wagered is about £13·4 billion. I believe that that makes this country the biggest gambling nation in Europe.

Supporters of the national lottery say that we should consider the next spend after prize money. No doubt many regular betting shop punters have a purple patch when they win more than they lose, but it may concern the House that the sum of money wagered by one individual or one family can already be substantial. That is why the Home Office is right to have a general policy of non-stimulation of gambling, betting and gaming.

I have yet to see how a £3 billion turnover could be achieved without changing that policy. Advertising and promotion of a national lottery would be essential to achieve such a turnover in a short time. My hon. and learned Friend agreed that lottery tickets would have to be sold at a large number of outlets, which suggests a considerable relaxation of current policy.

Only last summer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary spoke to the Home Affairs Committee about outlets for the Tote. The Tote would like to run a national lottery, and, were that to happen, as its facilities are based in Wigan, Lancashire, the prospects of its being run from Lancashire are good. The Tote would like to locate betting terminals in high street locations, as does the French tote, the Paris Mutuel, which operates in cafes, bars and restaurants throughout France. In response to that idea my hon. Friend said:

> "I think the problem would come if there is the possibility of making bets from terminals in cafes, bars or restaurants, and that would certainly breach the rules over gambling which successive governments have had and of which the Home Office is the guardian."

The Select Committee has found many anomalies in gambling legislation which need to be re-examined. Betting shops operate under great restrictions. Evening opening of betting shops and Sunday racing are two issues affecting gambling legislation which Parliament should now consider. Pool betting on greyhound racing is not permitted either off-course or between greyhound tracks. Advertising and promotion of most forms of gambling is strictly curtailed. Lotteries used in sales promotion and those run under local authority licences face restrictions. In my constituency when a lottery was run by the Ryedale York rugby league football club, offering the prize of a motor car, the chap who won it was not allowed to have it because the prize was too valuable for a lottery licensed by a local authority. That was nonsense.

The Home Affairs Committee was in no doubt that all that needed to be examined afresh, and it made a sensible recommendation in its report on the Tote—that the Home Office should

> "undertake a thorough review of the legislation to ensure that controls on gambling keep pace with changes in society and in technology."

With regard to the effect on other forms of gambling and on charities, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) put his finger firmly on the issue when he said that none of us knows what the effects of a national lottery on other forms of gambling and on charities would be. Many of us have genuine concerns about that. They go beyond special pleading, and should not be lightly dismissed.

Current legislation on gambling urgently needs a wide-ranging review. There are too many anomalies for

comfort. Furthermore, the increase in the amount of money wagered that is contemplated by the proposals is of such magnitude that it could have an adverse effect on other charities, causing them to lose money. Some worthy causes could lose state support. Both those aspects must be considered before the House passes legislation for a national lottery, not afterwards.

11.49 am

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): A number of seductive but misleading arguments have been put by hon. Members, especially by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), to support the idea of a national lottery. I hope that by the conclusion of our debate hon. Members will have carefully considered the implications of a lottery, not least the implications for jobs, and will recognise that this is one gamble which the House should not take.

Before turning to my principal reasons for opposing the Bill, I will address some of the bogus arguments put in the debate. One country that has been quoted as a place in which a national lottery co-exists with the football pools is Italy. Taking Italy as an example, with the dubious base of gambling there, reveals the reason why the football pools and the lottery are able to co-exist. Presumably, along with importing Italian methods, we shall also bring in some of the Italian family-based companies from Naples and from Sicily.

For months, many hon. Members have said that we must have a lottery because, come 1992, the European floodgates will open and punters will desert the pools for French or German lotteries. Huge prizes will lure away the stakes and British money will be sucked into a European black hole. That argument has seduced hon. Members and charities. Despite its obvious appeal to xenophobia, the argument, if true, would have to be taken seriously. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which works for the under-privileged and those at risk, responded to the original inquiry about a national lottery by saying, not surprisingly:

"as the Common Market will allow other countries' national lotteries to sell tickets in this country, it would be as well to have one established as a defence."

In other words, if we are going to be bitten, it might as well be by a British snake rather than by a foreign one.

The myth that continental lotteries will flood the United Kingdom market needs to be destroyed once and for all. It was abundantly clear during the European Commission hearings on gambling that all member states were implacably opposed to the principle of cross-border trading in lotteries. Most lotteries are state monopolies, so it is hardly surprising that national Governments are extremely reluctant to put the proceeds of national lotteries which they run at risk in a single market. Our Government have endorsed that view, despite all that was said by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell).

We know the Government's view from the written reply that the Under-Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). As recently as 12 December 1991, the Minister said that the Home Office had no proposals to include gambling within the terms of the single market. A flood of continental lotteries—[HON. MEMBERS: "Liberal Democrat policy?"] I can tell hon. Members what Liberal Democrat policy is because it was discussed at our parliamentary party meeting last week. I am glad to say that we have come out against the principle of a national lottery. A flood of continental lotteries, 1992 and the European Community are all imaginary windmills at which the House will, I hope, tilt today.

The second myth is the dreamland of unimagined riches. We are told that hidden pots of gold will be produced to provide £3 billion for Sports Council projects. Let us think of a figure—£2 billion or £3 billion every year, depending on the person to whom one listens—for the sum that would flood into the Exchequer. That would be the equivalent of 1·5p off income tax. That is the scale of the fabulous windfall. If the figures were true, Treasury Ministers would be queuing up to speak in the debate today and would argue in favour of a national lottery. In a country in which more than £52 billion of consumer debt is currently outstanding and in which economists are concluding that people cannot afford to spend their way out of the recession, where will the money come from?

The United Kingdom gambling market is already the biggest in Europe. The country spends more per head of population on gambling than the rest of Europe—£4·50 per head per week. If the new money is to come through extra gambling, who will that affect? All the figures show that it will be lower income groups who will be milked. They spend the most. Why should they disproportionately pay for Covent Garden, the National gallery or the Sports Council? Even if the figures could be believed, they are based on a regressive principle which the House should reject. Those are the flawed arguments of those who promote a national lottery.

There are other reasons why the House should decline to give the Bill a Second Reading, and the first is jobs. In Liverpool, 71,601 people are currently unemployed. Some 15,000 women are unemployed in Liverpool. They are bread winners for the family and they do not receive pin money; it is their livelihood. As the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said when she came to open the new Vernons building in Liverpool, "three cheers" for the workers there, and for the excellence and standards maintained in the factory. Littlewoods, Vernons and Zetters employ more than 6,500 people in Liverpool, Glasgow, Cardiff and London. A further 70,000 are paid as agents collecting coupons every week.

By contrast, computerised and centralised national lotteries dispose of people. In France, just 400 people operate the national lottery, while in Germany one large lottery employs just 180 people. When we are told that jobs may come even to Wigan or to the north, let us realise that the substitute for jobs is a loss of almost 6,500 jobs compared with a maximum of 400 jobs needed to run the national lottery. At a time of increasing dole queues, is the House seriously going to gamble with the livelihood of more than 6,000 people?

Is not it also the height of irony that we have three successful private companies which will effectively face nationalisation without compensation if the Bill is successful today? That is what is coming from the champions of private enterprise.

In a letter to *The Times*, already quoted, on 26 December, Paul Zetter said:

"the choice is stark: football pools or a national lottery. You will readily understand why I oppose a national lottery."

Malcolm Hughes, the managing director of Vernons, says:

"It is not possible to find an example anywhere in the world of a National Lottery and a Pools industry thriving side

[Mr. David Alton]

by side. In case after case, arrival of a lottery has squeezed out Pools Games and the examples of Australia, Belgium and, more recently, Greece all bear testimony to this fact."

Malcolm Davidson, the managing director of Littlewoods, quoted from a letter to the financial director, Colin Thwaite, from Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte. We have already heard part of it. The letter says:

"A UK national lottery would effectively kill off the football pools within a period of weeks . . . A successful national lottery would act as a substitute for the football pools . . . as a result of this the level of employment within the industry will be dramatically reduced."

In a letter to me on 16 December, the Prime Minister confirmed that the Government see those implications. He said:

"I can assure you that we are very well aware of the potential implications for existing charitable lotteries and for the existing gambling industry, in particular the football pools who, as you say, are an important source of employment in the Liverpool area and who make payments to football and now more widely to sport and the arts via the new Foundation."

Apart from jobs, a national lottery would also hit existing football clubs' lotteries and charities. The letter from the Lotteries Council has already been quoted. It says that some lotteries would face extinction from a national scheme. The Irish experience, to which other hon. Members have referred, points to that. In July 1991, 16 leading charities wrote to the Taoiseach saying that charitable lotteries had lost half their income and that

"the situation has reached crisis point."

In other words, 50 per cent. of the money going into charities was lost as a result of the national lottery. Not only would our charities be hit, but sports, the arts and the Football Trust would stand to lose £100 million. The Treasury would say goodbye to the £300 million generated by the pools.

The third substantial reason for opposing the Bill centres on the undesirability of deliberately stimulating gambling as a way in which to finance public services and needs. If a hospital needs a dialysis machine, if a school needs a soccer pitch or if a community needs an arts centre, surely we should pay for it through taxation and voluntary effort, not by proliferating the modes of gambling.

By destroying the football pools, a national lottery gambles with people's jobs. It would undermine existing lotteries run by charities and football clubs. It would promise Alice-in-Wonderland gains, while risking the £300 million now generated by the pools. I hope that, in this pell-mell rush to a national lottery, the House will consider these matters and will vote against the Bill.

11.59 am

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on winning the ballot and on selecting this most important and interesting topic for legislation. I dare say that hon. Members who, like me, glanced at the sports page of *The Times* this morning, will have been worried to read the headline,

"England chances hit as Lawrence drops out".

Fortunately for the supporters of the Bill, the story referred to Mr. David Lawrence, the England bowler—although, as a cricket fan, I cannot say that that is good news for the England team.

The people of Britain are waiting for a national lottery whose time has truly come. A recent poll conducted by the Sports Council, one of the prime supporters of the Bill, showed that three quarters of the population want to participate in a national lottery and that 90 per cent. strongly support the idea that the proceeds from it should go to the arts, sport, heritage and charities. Those who talk the idea down should be aware that, in doing so, they could seriously hit the nation's expectations.

There has been much talk about how the Bill would extend gambling. The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) made much play of that, but a national lottery would not represent a form of high-level gambling that would corrupt our morals or our minds—rather, the spirit behind it should be seen as extending the fun of the flutter. In the minds of our people, that is perfectly right and proper, and we should not stand out against it.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does my hon. Friend agree that, because of the intentions of the lottery and the use to which profits from it would be put, it would be a benefit rather than negative in moral terms?

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend is right.

It is extraordinary to think that, if the House opposes the Bill and frustrates the expectations of the British people, we shall be putting ourselves in the same position as countries such as Albania. The rest of Europe has lotteries—indeed, in all, some 170 nations run lotteries.

Given the success of the lotteries run by our European partners and neighbours, we should be extremely shortsighted if we stood in the way of a lottery here or delayed its introduction. In Denmark, the result of the delay was that the country was immediately flooded with lottery tickets from neighbouring Germany. Despite what some hon. Members have said, those who run foreign lotteries are already taking a great interest in getting into the market in this country through the post, and even though we hear of attempts to prevent such letters coming in, that often does not happen. My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) produced a letter posted in Brussels inviting him to participate in an Australian lottery. I regularly receive letters from Amsterdam inviting me to participate in a European lottery, which I do not.

I believe that we should have a British national lottery contributing to British national stadia and to the British arts. I want to be able to contribute to that. In that respect, my attitude is four-square with that of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), one of my predecessors as Minister for Sport, and agree with him that we should not allow contributions to foreign lotteries.

During the past week, we have heard from a number of sporting personalities and leading figures in sport and the arts who feel that there is a need for an extra contribution, over and above anything that the national Government can produce, to fund our sports and arts facilities. When I was Minister for Sport, I visited magnificent sports stadia, athletics tracks and swimming pools abroad, and I can remember thinking how ideal it would be if we could have them here. The secret of those facilities was that they were provided through a national lottery.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tracey: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to speak when I have finished.

The Sports Council has sent us a list of what could be done, which includes worthy proposals not only for Olympic facilities in Manchester but for regional facilities such as velodromes, hockey stadia, swimming pools, athletics training facilities and indoor tennis training facilities. To get those facilities, we need a national lottery. They are desirable, and we shall have them if we give the Bill its Second Reading and so set the climate fair for a national lottery.

What of the attitude of our critics? I shall refer in a moment to the attitude of the pools companies, but, as we have heard about local government's attitude towards a national lottery, I wish first to tell the House that I have received a letter from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, with which I sometimes disagree but which declares itself four-square behind the idea of a national lottery to give additional funding, over and above that which it expects to come from the Treasury, for sport and the arts. So we can again call in evidence the support of local authorities.

As a former Minister for Sport, I pay tribute to the pools companies for what they have done in support of the Football Trust and the Football Grounds Improvement Trust. I do not understand why they are so opposed to a national lottery. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) referred to Italy. I do not understand his view. Surely, the greatest pillar of society in Italy is the Roman Catholic Church and it must therefore be wrong for the hon. Gentleman to place a slur on the Italians. Italy has a strong national lottery and a strong national pools set-up, which contributes greatly to its communities and national life. I see no reason why this nation of ours, which so strongly supports football, should be any different from Italy or why the football pools should win any less support here than in Italy. The national lottery will interest those many thousands of women in Britain who would never even dream of sitting down and filling in a pools coupon. They will go into a post office or newsagent and take part in the national lottery, so enhancing the funds available to it. Finally, I remind the House that, in opposing the idea of a national lottery, the pools companies saw fit to say that, if the Government decided to introduce a national lottery, they would like to run it. Does not that fact speak for itself? Surely we need no more evidence than that.

12.9 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Littlewoods provide 600 jobs in my constituency. Before I came down to London this week I spoke to some pensioners in my constituency about various problems that they were facing. They asked what I was doing as their Member of Parliament and what I intended to do this week. I told them that I hoped to speak in the debate on the National Lottery Bill. They said, "What's the National Lottery Bill?" I told them that it was a Bill to set up a lottery which would provide extra money for the arts and culture. Some of the pensioners scratched their heads and said, "Who are these people?" I said, "Well, the guy who is introducing the Bill is a big Tory barrister." They were a little deaf and got it wrong. One of them said, "I suppose they are all like that, Tommy." I said, "Well, some might agree about that."

Those pensioners then said that surely people must recognise that pensioners are important to this country. They have given up everything and they now rely on a small pension which is being eroded by inflation and price rises. They stressed that pensioners need lifelines like the telephone. They said that elderly people cannot afford to buy television licences. The pensioners are not considered when money is directed towards arts and culture. Half the pensioners to whom I spoke earlier this week cannot afford their television licences. They cannot take part in the cultural or sports worlds.

Not long ago I saw the Prime Minister and many other political figures sitting in a park beside members of the royalty. It was bucketing with rain as they watched Pavarotti. The first time that I heard of Pavarotti I thought that it was a bar of soap or an eau de cologne. I later discovered that Pavarotti was a very talented man. The pensioners to whom I have spoken cannot afford that kind of culture, but they are desperate for lifelines like a telephone. Standing orders make no difference to the problems that they face.

The National Lotteries Bill will seriously affect my constituency. I have been unemployed. I know the stinking miserable feeling in one's belly when one cannot provide the wherewithal for one's children. I know what it is like. I would fight like blazes to give every unemployed man and woman in this country the right to employment.

The Bill will mean unemployment for at least 5,500 people directly or indirectly. It is ludicrous for a former Minister responsible for sport to plug a lottery. He should have fought to ensure that sports and culture were provided by the Government. It is disgraceful that any country as rich as ours should have a lottery to provide for sport to educate our kids and make them feel healthy. That is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Wilson: The jobs of some of my constituents are involved at the place to which my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) has referred. Does my hon. Friend acccept that after that major fire which destroyed the Littlewoods factory in Glasgow, Littlewoods could have centralised the jobs in Liverpool and got rid of about 700 jobs in my hon. Friend's constituency? Instead, Littlewoods decided to maintain the level of employment not least because of its long-standing commitment to areas in which it has provided employment for many years.

Mr. Graham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to my attention. I was very impressed by the caring attitude and tremendous enthusiasm of Littlewoods and the way in which it kept the girls in employment. Conservative Members may smile, but for people who live in Strathclyde which has one of the worst unemployment levels in Europe, a job and a wage packet are so important. When the girls saw the factory burn down, the broke their hearts crying. They thought that that was it. They thought that they would be back on the dole and back to that miserable pittance which the Government provide. The girls faced that before Christmas, but Littlewoods paid their wages and provided jobs for people who desperately needed them.

That is the kind and considerate face of industry that I appreciate. I wish that we were dealing with Littlewoods and not the black Scholey in respect of the Ravenscraig workers.

Unemployment is a scourge. Some single parent women at Littlewoods in my constituency receive quite good pay. Their working conditions are also good. Any woman in

[Mr. Graham]

Scotland with a good job and quite good money would have nightmares if she thought that that job was to be taken from her. Those jobs will be lost if the Bill is successful. Thousands of people will be on the scrap heap if the Bill is passed. Thirty five thousand jobs have already been lost in my constituency. In Scotland we face the closure of Ravenscraig and Armitage Shanks. In the face of that, a rich Tory barrister who has probably been wealthy all his life and has never faced the possibility of unemployment—except perhaps at the next general election when the electorate will get rid of him—wants to introduce this Bill. I will fight for my constituents' right to work.

Mr. Bellotti: With regard to the hon. Gentleman's point about unemployment, is he aware that 50,000 people are employed in betting offices throughout the country? As there is a limited amount of money, if that money is not spent through betting shops, the jobs of those 50,000 people will be at risk. That is almost the same number of people at risk as in the football industry.

Mr. Graham: I am grateful for that point.

I said that I would fight vigorously to defend the right of my constituents to continue to work for Littlewoods. It is the Government's responsibility to provide cash for sports and culture.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the jobs in the pools industry in Strathclyde involve women who are the sole bread winners? If they lose their jobs, whole families will be destitute, not just the individuals concerned.

Mr. Graham: That is absolutely right. The 5,500 people to whom I have referred pay tax. That tax provides money for the local council. If those people are thrown on to the dole, they will stop contributing through tax and central Government will have to support them.

I have lived in Glasgow all my life. I could never afford private sporting facilities. My local council provided the wherewithal. It provided the soccer field, the swimming baths, tennis courts and bowling greens.

The Bill represents an abdication by the Government of their duty and responsibility to provide people with jobs. We should let lotteries remain in other parts of the world. We do not want to import lotteries from Spain with its bullfighting, and so on. Let us not support the alien concept of a national lottery.

12.19 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) not only on being No. 1 in the ballot for Bills —something that many of us have sought to be—but on the subject that he has chosen. My hon. and learned Friend deployed his argument with great skill and persuasion. I support the Bill. I shall certainly go into the Lobby and give my hon. and learned Friend what support and encouragement I can.

However, that is not to say that the Bill is perfect by any means. All hon. Members could improve it. However, let us consider the Bill in Committee so that some of us who have a real interest in it may have an opportunity to deploy many of the important arguments that we have received. I am delighted to see my hon. and learned Friend still in his place. He is attentive today, and I do not blame him. It is important to state that several hon. Members have a few points of real concern.

One matter that springs straight to mind is the fact that my hon. and learned Friend is in danger of establishing one of the biggest quangos of all time. Perhaps that matter can be debated in Standing Committee. When he so skilfully introduced the Bill, my hon. and learned Friend said that some of the wording of the Bill was faulty. I have never been one to support state quangos. However, we seem unwittingly to be establishing the mother and daddy of all state quangos. We should consider that matter in Committee and see how we can improve it.

Like other hon. Members, I have had many representations about the pools. It is easy to say that the pools are part of the British way of life and so on. They are. Any threat to the structure of the football pools must be taken seriously. However, any such threat is not sufficient for us not to let my hon. and learned Friend's Bill through. Let us consider it in Standing Committee and make it possible for the existing football pools structure to continue in the United Kingdom as it has done so successfully for many years. Hon. Members have received letters from Zetters and Littlewoods, fearing the worst if the Bill is successful. The pools can still enjoy their traditional place in British society, unimpaired.

One of the most impressive documents that I have received was from the Advisory Forum on Gambling. Hon. Members know all about that forum. It had severe reservations about my hon. and learned Friend's Bill. However, its reservations can be put right in Committee. Some of its real fears can be satisfied if the Bill is carefully amended.

The real point in question is the Bill's purpose. My hon. and learned Friend mentioned that the Bill is to benefit the arts, sport and heritage. Who chose those subjects? Why must they be the only subjects? There may be an argument for some support, but one can make a strong case for health, medicine, pensioners and the elderly. Why are they not mentioned in the Bill?

If my hon. and learned Friend wants to go down in history—I know that he does—all that he has to do is to include a guarantee that all old age pensioners will have free TV licences, which would cost £150 million a year. There would be a marble statue of my hon. and learned Friend in my constituency. Ordinary people are not so interested in football. They are not so interested in art galleries. They are not particularly interested in the arts. I expect that they may be interested in heritage. However, they are most interested in free television licences. If there were free TV licences, Conservative central office would also erect a statue to him.

I have received a letter from Tenovus. I have received several letters about the national lottery from such groups. Tenovus, of course, fights cancer. It is very worried about its position in the world. My hon. and learned Friend wants Tenovus to continue and to flourish. Let us consider the Bill in Committee and improve it.

I should not like to conclude without congratulating the research staff in the House of Commons Library. It may be unusual to do that, but I shall probably never get another opportunity. They do a wonderful job in producing the fantastic research documents that we take for granted and never mention. I pay tribute to Jane Fiddick, who has

produced a document on my hon. and learned Friend's Bill. It is a masterpiece which sets out all the arguments for and against.

I have great pleasure in supporting my hon. and learned Friend's Bill.

12.27 pm

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Just 24 hours after the announcement of an increase of 80,000 in the number of people on the unemployment register, and in anticipation of a rise in inflation today, millions of workers—and certainly my constituents and the people of Liverpool—will wonder why we are spending five hours on a Friday morning discussing a national lottery when the economic and social conditions in our inner-city areas demand the Government's attention.

Having heard the speeches of failed sports Ministers and failed arts Ministers, with confessions from their own lips that during their periods in office they failed to gain sufficient funding from the Government——

Mr. Burns: What about failed Labour Members of Parliament?

Mr. Fields *rose*——

Mr. Tracey: Pay the poll tax.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fields: This matter is too important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for me to rise to the bait of those who have failed this country not only in relation to the arts and sport, but economically and socially too.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) is weaving a tatty cloak to confuse people. Great play has been made of the fact that a poll has been taken and that huge numbers of people would support a national lottery. If somebody said to me, "How do you fancy winning £1 million every week?", I would, of course, say, "Yes"; but the lottery itself will still have to be paid for.

It has already been said that the lottery will not be run by the Government or the civil service. It will be a private lottery, which means that people could milk it and make profits from the greed and acquisitiveness that Thatcherism has produced in many people in the past 13 years.

At first sight, the detail of the Bill seems uncontroversial. It refers to raising large sums of money for good causes. The hon. and learned Member for Burton referred to £3 billion or £4 billion, but one of my hon. Friends has said that the hon. and learned Gentleman simply took those figures off the top of his head. In a debate on 16 February 1988 on establishing a national lottery in favour of the health service, initiated by the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), it became clear that there is no substance to the idea that between £3 billion and £5 billion could be raised. As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) said in 1988, the most that has been raised by the lottery in America is £200 million. The figure for France was £540 million; for Spain £690 million; and for Germany £910 million. Therefore, there is nothing to back up the idea of a potential revenue of £4 billion, which, I am sure, would be an attractive figure to many people. That is simply supposition and conjecture by the hon. and learned Member for Burton.

The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to providing finance for good causes and to improving the welfare state. He even went as far as to say that some of the charitable donations would aid medical research. I find it disgusting and nauseating that people such as the hon. and learned Gentleman and his Friends who, in the past 13 years, have trooped through the Lobbies consistently to attack the health service, education, housing and the poor in our society, such as pensioners and the disabled, should now raise the spectre of a lottery as a panacea for the ills of millions of people in this country.

The hon. and learned Gentleman stated in *The House Magazine* not only that the lottery would raise £3 billion a year, but that it would not affect the low-paid because they do not buy lottery tickets. However, experience in Ireland disproves that contention. Fund-raising for charities has attracted money from low-paid families, thus causing even more financial distress to those who seek the pot of gold.

Apart from my concern about the social consequences of the proposed lottery, I speak with a vested interest because I come from Liverpool and Littlewoods Pools is based in my constituency. I live a stone's throw from the new Vernons complex. We in Liverpool are proud of our area. We already have high unemployment as a direct consequence of the Government's policies and the system that they represent. The Bill would jeopardise the jobs of 6,000 mainly female workers in Liverpool, many of whom already face the prospect of being their families' sole bread winner. That is the prospect for an area that has been evaluated as a centre of poverty, not only by those of us who live in Liverpool, but by experts.

I hope and believe that the Bill will be defeated today and that hon. Members will not support it. There are other ways of achieving what have speciously been referred to as "good social works". Such works will not be achieved by the Conservative party, a member of which has introduced the Bill. When one looks at the social and economic conditions that prevail in this country today, one sees that such people are not philanthropists. People talk about obtaining new money by the lottery. Where will the new money come from? Reference has been made to the poll tax. This week 135,000 poverty-stricken people in Liverpool are going through the courts. Where will they find the money to fund the arts? They cannot afford to go into galleries or even the bus fares to travel there. Yet those are the people who are supposed to be enamoured of the Bill.

The record of the hon. and learned Member for Burton on health, education, housing and funding local authorities, pensioners and the poor does not attract me to him or anything that he stands for. I believe that the House will reject the Bill today and that people in my constituency will be happy about that.

12.34 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): May I first add my congratulations to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on winning the lottery of the private Members' ballot and introducing this Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) said, it is a Bill which has reached its time and is long overdue.

In order not to cause any confusion or fall foul of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), I should—

[Mr. Simon Burns]

although I am not sure that I must—declare an interest. After I introduced my 10-minute Bill on a national lottery in 1988 I spent a week visiting the United States sponsored by others to see how lotteries operated in certain states.

The people of Britain enjoy a justifiably high reputation for the generosity with which they donate money earned by themselves to good causes. The Charities Aid Foundation calculated in 1985 that there were 160,000 charities in England and Wales which raised over £12·5 billion for good causes. Since that date we have seen the phenomena of Live Aid, telethons and the Wishing Well appeal for Great Ormond Street hospital. That shows beyond any reasonable doubt that we are a nation of givers. In addition to those high-profile fund-raising activities, various forms of local lotteries have been permitted under existing legislation. They were consolidated in the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976. However, they have tended to be a failure.

In 1983-84 there were 4,045 local lotteries, with ticket sales of just over £40 million. By 1987-88 there were only 1,401 local lotteries, with sales of only £21 million. Those figures show a decline of 76 and 59 per cent. respectively. The cause of that decline is not the basic idea or principle behind the lotteries but that they are too small and fail to generate enough interest or excitement. Only a national lottery can achieve that. Furthermore, because there are so many lotteries throughout the country on such small scales, they tend to dilute their own effect. Similarly, the maximum prize money laid down by legislation is so relatively small that it does not attract enough people to participate.

If a lottery is to be successful, it is crucial that excitement be generated. Far too often, the time scale between purchase of the ticket and the draw in a local lottery is far too long to generate success. That is why I believe that my hon. and learned Friend is so right to seek to get away from the legislation that is failing and introduce a single national lottery that will generate interest, excitement and sales so that we can make a success of it and make available generous amounts of money for good causes such as sport, the arts, heritage and charities.

One of the main reasons for personal opposition to lotteries is that they encourage gambling. There is a great deal of contradiction and confusion in that position. I also suspect that some people in Britain always oppose lotteries and gambling for the same reason that they would like to see alcohol and tobacco and certain activities which they consider a vice banned. It is important to make a distinction for a national lottery.

All too often many people who say that a lottery would encourage gambling and, thus, is wrong will unwittingly contribute to gambling. For example, I think that I am right in saying that every major political party represented in the House generates some of its funds, either locally or nationally, through gambling. Any hon. Member who goes to church or party political fete will probably buy a raffle ticket during his or her political career—probably quite often. That is gambling. That is a form of lottery, yet the people who buy tickets and who may be opposed to gambling will not condemn such activities.

Mr. Bellotti: The distinction that I should like the hon. Member to tackle is what the proceeds of gambles are for. In the Bill that the hon. Member put before the House in 1988, he suggested that the proceeds of his proposal should go to the national health service. Does he still hold that view? Has he not come round to the view that the Government ought to provide all the funds necessary for the health service, and that we should not have a national lottery to support it?

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman is trying to tempt me down a cul-de-sac off the Bill before us. However, he is incorrect. The Government have increased national health service spending substantially in the past 12 years. Furthermore, if he read carefully the reasons behind my Bill he would realise that it was to provide additional funds. For many years the health service has benefited from additional funds raised by leagues of friends and other interested parties.

To return to the Bill, a number of people who have strong religious convictions, which I respect, condemn gambling but are happy to buy raffle tickets at a church fete and take part in gambling activities to encourage the financing of their local church, a rebuilding project, or whatever else.

Before people strongly criticise gambling they should examine their own behaviour. They should not use that as an excuse—as what they believe is a respectable front—to oppose the principle of a national lottery. If they do so, they will be failing many organisations that could genuinely benefit from the additional money generated by a national lottery.

Like many other hon. Members, I have been bombarded with data, correspondence and lobbying by the pools organisations, which have been mentioned so often in the debate. In many ways they operate as a cartel and have a monopoly on a national lottery. I fully appreciate that they are fearful of any competition and that they want to defend vigorously their self-interest by throwing up some red herrings and some genuine causes for concern about a national lottery. If such a national lottery were to be successful it might well cause some decline in their revenue, although by nowhere near the amount that they are suggesting. They are defending what is, in effect, a monopolistic national lottery.

I do not see why we should automatically accept that a national lottery will ruin the pools system. The examples of Belgium and Greece have been bandied about the House, but that argument was effectively squashed because they did not run their pools on their own football games—it is obvious that that weakens loyalty to the pools system—whereas in this country the system is based on our football leagues. So in that respect I see no reason why a lottery should be detrimental. Similarly, pools promoters who oppose a national lottery are more deserving of being described as selfish—as they have accused others of being —because they seek to protect the pools, with their link to football, at the price of depriving the rest of British sports, arts and heritage of the funding, capital and endowment funds that they so desperately need. I do not see why they should be so keen to deprive others. There is more money to be shared. The cake should be widened and shared, so that everyone can benefit.

A national lottery would be popular and fun. It would generate income to help deserving causes. I greatly hope that my hon. and learned Friend's Bill will be given a Second Reading.

12.44 pm

Ms. Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am pleased to have the chance today to contribute briefly to the debate. I have always supported the concept of a national lottery and I am even more convinced now of the need for one than I was 10 years ago.

Although I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) that the Bill is unlikely to become legislation in its present form, I am delighted that it provides an opportunity for people to hear the arguments on both sides, for us to air many of the misconceptions about a national lottery and for the Home Office officials to take lots of notes. No matter what Government are in power after the general election—I know that there will be a Labour Government—at some stage next Session Home Office officials will draft a proper Bill, so I hope that they are listening hard today.

It is particularly important that we are discussing this at the beginning of 1992. No matter what is being said, other European countries will undoubtedly find a way of getting their national lottery tickets sold here. They are already coming here and each year thousands of tickets are seized by Customs and Excise. The European gambling industry is large and I believe that it will not continue to be outside the terms of the single market. That is the context in which we need to consider the debate.

In Northern Ireland it is not so much poor people buying lottery tickets from southern Ireland as people in cars queuing up and going over the border to buy lottery tickets. Other countries' lottery tickets are already being sold in the United Kingdom. [HON. MEMBERS: "Illegally."] Yes, illegally, and that will continue until gambling comes within the terms of the single market, as I am convinced that it will.

This is an enabling Bill. It does not go into detail. There are different views about the details and how a national lottery would work, but the Bill does lay down clear areas for the proceeds—sport, the arts, the heritage and small charities. Lotteries should target particular projects. I have views on how a national lottery should work. We should not follow the example of some other countries. We should have lotteries aimed at particular targets, such as to build a velodrome. That will involve not just those who want to take part in a lottery but people with a particular interest in the project who will buy a one-off ticket because they know that their money is going to a worthwhile project. We could consider all sorts of possibilities for the detail.

National lottery proceeds are not a substitute for money that should come from the state. Lottery proceeds are extra money. All the sponsors of the Bill agree on that; there is no way that the proceeds can go to anything other than what has been mentioned here without a further debate in Parliament, a complete change and a new Bill. None of the sponsors wants that. We know clearly where the proceeds should go.

Last night at a Labour party ward meeting I spent £2 on a raffle ticket. I did not win—I never do. I do not believe that buying a lottery ticket or a raffle ticket is gambling. Nor do I believe that the average member of the British public believes that it is.

To buy a lottery ticket would be totally different from gambling on the pools or on horses or dog racing. To participate in a lottery is a harmless amusement, just like a raffle, and is far removed from the compulsive world of casinos, card houses and gaming machines. It is patronising to the poor to imply that they do not have the free will to make a choice about whether to buy a lottery ticket. I accept that some people are totally opposed to gambling, but I do not believe that a lottery would extend gambling as those people fear.

We have been inundated with literature about this issue from the pools industry. I wonder how much it has spent on that? However, it has the right to lobby for its industry. It is a question of balance. I do not believe that those who have done the pools for years will suddenly stop doing so because a national lottery has been introduced. I do the pools with Zetters, not Littlewoods—I am giving Zetters a plug—and I have done so for many years. I have never won a penny, but I shall not cancel my standing order simply because a national lottery may be introduced. I do not believe that others will stop doing the pools either. It is patronising to suggest that people are so easily persuaded to change a habit of a lifetime. People should have the choice about what they want to do.

One of the good things that has come from the debate on a national lottery is that the pools industry has started to realise that perhaps it has taken too much of the profits and that not enough has gone back into football. After all, most of those who play the pools have an interest in that sport. Perhaps the pools industry will now put more money back into football in an attempt to win the argument.

Our pools industry is unique, as it is totally different from that run in any other European country. It has a long history. I do not believe that it will be affected by the introduction of a national lottery. At the most, the effects on the pools industry will be slight.

I appreciate the concerns that have been expressed by those who represent Liverpool and Glasgow about the possible loss of jobs. However, I do not believe that those jobs will be threatened, because I do not believe that people will stop doing the pools just because a lottery is introduced. The people who will buy a one-off lottery ticket will be different from those who do the pools regularly.

I am pleased that small charities are mentioned in the Bill. I appreciate the anxieties that are felt by local football clubs and sports clubs that run small-scale lotteries. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has said, people buy a lottery ticket in those circumstances out of loyalty to their club. In essence, they are giving a donation because they do not expect to win a huge amount of money. I do not believe that that loyalty will be put at risk by the introduction of a national lottery.

The debate has been useful because it has revealed some existing prejudices. Even if the Bill does not receive its Second Reading, no one can deny that the public would like a national lottery. However, that lottery must be carefully planned and scrutinised so that it can win people's confidence.

Those who are doing the pools this weekend have nothing to fear. If a national lottery were introduced, they would still be able to do the pools. I am absolutely convinced that the pools industry and the jobs associated with it are not threatened. Today's debate marks the beginning, because this issue will not go away.

12.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): Rather than my commenting individually on the many good speeches that have been made in this lively debate, the House might find it more helpful if I set out the Government's position.

I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on his good fortune in the ballot for private Members' Bills. As several hon. Members have said, it is appropriate that his success in the parliamentary lottery for legislative time should provide the opportunity to debate the introduction of a national lottery for good causes. The odds of winning a national lottery must be better than those of winning the ballot for private Members' Bills.

My hon. and learned Friend made a characteristically vigorous and full speech. I applaud his initiative in bringing the issue before the House. The Government warmly welcome the idea of a national lottery or lotteries. We recognise, as many hon. Members have, that they could raise substantial amounts of money for good causes. On the basis of experience abroad, estimates of turnover here range from £1 billion to £4 billion or more, although such comparisons should be treated with much caution. We have seen how other countries have managed to provide resources for valuable projects that would not, and probably could not, have been funded from ordinary public expenditure. Indeed, as my hon. and learned Friend said, apart from Albania, the United Kingdom is the only European country that does not have a lottery.

The first Westminster bridge in 1750 and the setting up of the British museum in 1753 were financed by lotteries. Despite such achievements, state lotteries in this country ended in 1826. However, there is no shortage of projects today that, with funds from a national lottery, could improve the quality of life in the United Kingdom.

The success of foreign lotteries provides an additional argument for having a national lottery here. It has frequently been predicted that we shall be forced to accept national lotteries from other EC countries on or soon after 1 January 1993. Indeed, that prediction has been repeated today, but the Government believe that the threat has been highly exaggerated. The programme for completion of the single market does not contain proposals for the harmonisation of gambling legislation. The European Commission is studying gambling in the single market, but no formal proposals have been made. We believe that our present prohibition on major lotteries, which applies equally to domestic and foreign ones, is compatible with EC law. By contrast, other EC countries have national lotteries, but do not allow foreign lotteries to operate in their territory.

Mr. Tracey: Will my hon. Friend confirm that between 3 million and 6 million unofficial lotteries come into this country by letter and are not stopped by Customs?

Mr. Lloyd: No, I cannot confirm that, because those that we do not catch we do not know about, but about 3 million forms have been seized by Customs in the past year.

Our policy is that controls on gambling should remain a matter for national authorities. We believe that many other countries will take a similar view. We cannot be certain of the final outcome, but it seems extremely unlikely, to put it mildly, that there will be a common market in lotteries in the foreseeable future. It is likely to become increasingly easy for individuals to participate in foreign lotteries. For example, satellite television provides new opportunities for foreign lotteries to promote themselves. Modern technology means that participation will become easier. Such developments may take a number of years to emerge, but their impact is likely to grow with time.

There are incentives for European countries to try to promote their lotteries here. Without a national lottery here, there will be incentives for people who wish to take part in other lotteries to do so. Those incentives would be considerably less if we had our major lottery in support of good causes.

Clearly my hon. and learned Friend, who is an experienced hand where private Members' legislation is concerned and a shrewd lawyer to boot, rightly recognises that there are many ways of providing and regulating national lotteries and that there are a host of practical considerations that have to be thought through and which it is not practicable to tackle in a private Member's Bill. That is why, I am sure that his Bill is deliberately designed —indeed, he said as much—as an enabling measure which provides a broad framework and leaves the Government to fill in by means of subordinate legislation not merely the gritty detail, but most of the substance.

Leaving aside for a moment whether that is a proper and desirable way for the House to bring in a measure which will have a very wide impact on a whole range of charities and businesses, the Bill nevertheless does in fact limit the range of possible options considerably more than might appear at first sight. The most important way in which it does so is by providing for a single lottery rather than opening up the opportunity for genuine charitable concerns—singly or grouped together—to run a lottery nationally, as they now do successfully locally. That is a very substantial issue with implications for many charitable interests, particularly for those who currently benefit from their local lotteries, but who feel that they may well not be high on the priority list for help from a single national lottery.

If we opt for a single lottery, decisions have, of course, to be made about who will benefit, and machinery has to be devised to share out the proceeds. The Bill proposes that arts, sports and the heritage should receive the lion's share. Charities are to get no more than 10 per cent., perhaps less. All these causes are undoubtedly worthwhile, but there are many who would argue that the proceeds should be split differently or that other good causes should be included.

One means of resolving these difficulties would be to allow a free market in major lotteries. In this way, the public could decide which good cause or causes they wanted to support. We already have a free market in small local lotteries. No charity would be excluded from the benefits of a major lottery if it could run one properly and cared to risk the considerable investment either on its own or—much more likely—in conjunction with others. While it is attractive for those reasons, I also acknowledge there are strong arguments the other way. The greater number of lotteries, at least initially, could mean that each one would have lower prizes and attract lower turnover and so raise less money in total than a single lottery. That need not, however, be the outcome. The merits of that approach, rather than the single national lottery proposed

by the Bill, need further consideration and consultation before legislation is introduced which must inevitably close off one option.

Another way in which the Bill appears to limit options is that it seems to provide for the national lottery regulatory authority to run only one lottery at a time. Some countries, although they have a single authority, are able to run a number of different games at the same time. The question of the number and nature of the lotteries that may be run will affect the potential available for good causes. It would also have implications for other existing forms of gambling, particularly small lotteries.

The Bill also rules out a regulatory role for the Gaming Board for Great Britain which currently has responsibility for licensing small lotteries. I do not now claim that, if we had a single national lottery, there would necessarily be a substantial regulatory burden or that regulation must fall to the Gaming Board, but we certainly need to think carefully about, and reflect in primary legislation, where the responsibility for regulation should rest and how it should be conducted.

I mention these as areas in which, despite the care of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton, any enabling legislation must inevitably close off some important options. He might argue that some of these difficulties, though not, I suggest, all of them, could be overcome by amending the Bill in Committee to allow even greater flexibility. But rather than leaving even more out, I suspect that there are already a number of matters which the House might feel should be included in any well-formulated primary legislation on the issue.

For example, the Bill says nothing about the maximum proportions of total turnover which can be devoted to prizes or to expenses. This is not just a matter of consumer protection. If a national lottery is to fulfil its main charitable purpose, it is crucial to ensure that a minimum proportion goes to good causes. In relation to existing charity and local authority lotteries, no more than half the turnover may be devoted to prizes and no more than 25 per cent. may be used for expenses. Those limits are laid down in primary legislation. That seems to me to be right, both because it is a major aspect of regulation, and because otherwise we could be faced with constant pressure to keep changing the proportions. Equally, there would need to be careful study of all the evidence before deciding what the proportions should be for a national lottery.

There is also the essential bread and butter question, with implications for amending existing primary legislation, as to how a national lottery would fit into the wider framework of gambling controls. Lotteries have always been regarded as the softest form of gambling. They are the only form of gambling which may be advertised quite freely, including on television and radio. By contrast, all other forms of gambling are subject to varying degrees of control on the facilities they can offer to attract customers, and on their advertising. In particular, the broadcast advertising of all betting and gaming is prohibited.

The implications for advertising controls are, therefore, one obvious area requiring study. We need to consider whether controls on the extent and nature of the advertising of a national lottery are necessary. The controls on advertising of commercial gambling will also need to be considered. Some of these are contained in primary legislation. But there may be demands for other changes. Premises used for gambling might want to sell lottery tickets, which is at present unlawful. The pools companies would want the controls on them relaxed, perhaps by making coupons available in shops, and changes in the law to permit regular jackpots.

All those points must be examined. It may well prove that no changes can be justified. I suspect that many people would take the view that a national lottery for good causes can be distinguished easily from all other commercial gambling and there might be strong opposition to a national lottery if it were allowed to lead to a significant extension of commercial gambling. But many of the points that I have mentioned would require primary legislation. They need to be considered at the same time as the introduction of a national lottery, not as an afterthought.

Mr. Lawrence: I agree with all that my hon. Friend the Minister has said, and I am grateful for his remarks. But, as he keeps repeating that there would be a need for primary legislation, does he not agree that whatever may be added to the Bill in Committee or at other points in its passage through Parliament would become primary legislation? All the suggestions that my hon. Friend has made are no reason why the Bill should not go into Committee.

Mr. Lloyd: I have also mentioned many times the need for consultation, study and the taking of evidence. The time scale and methods of a private Member's Bill do not allow for that.

The question of gambling controls leads directly to the likely effect of a national lottery on existing gambling, particularly the football pools, as we have heard this morning. The supporters of a national lottery argue that it will tap a source of new money and that the existing gambling industry will not be affected. But the huge sums which it is claimed will be raised by a national lottery must come from somewhere, and that may well be from people who spend nothing on gambling at the moment, but who will be drawn to take part in a national lottery. Equally, it would be surprising if some people did not, in the event, divert some or all of their spending on existing gambling into a new national lottery.

It is, of course, difficult to tell in advance to what extent a national lottery would reduce expenditure on existing forms of gambling. The football pools are the nearest thing we have to a national lottery and I know that their organisers are very concerned. They even say that they could eventually be driven out of business and point to other countries where the introduction of a major lottery has killed or seriously damaged the football pools. At present, the pools companies employ about 6,500 people, mainly in areas of high unemployment. Those jobs, as well as those of about 70,000 part-time pools collectors, are thus, they insist, at risk.

The evidence of surveys about the likely effect on the pools is mixed. The survey conducted for the Rothschild commissioners suggested that about 25 per cent. of regular pools participants would switch to a national lottery. More recently, opinion surveys on behalf of supporters of a national lottery have suggested that under 10 per cent. of pools participants would spend less on the pools.

The conflicting evidence about the impact of a national lottery on the pools illustrates the need for a careful examination of the issues. We should not just brush aside their concerns, but we should not accept that a national lottery must mean major difficulty, if not the end, for the

[Mr. Lloyd]

pools. We need to study the evidence carefully and to give those directly affected the chance to put not only their views, but the evidence on which they base their views.

Mr. Ashton: The Government have said that football grounds will have to be all-seater—as a result of 95 people having been killed at Hillsborough—by 1994 for the first and second divisions. The money for that will have to come from the pools and the Government are now blocking their contribution. If the football pools money were to collapse, would the Government still insist on the all-seater legislation being implemented by 1994?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman makes the assumption that legislation will be introduced which will cause the pools to collapse. The hon. Gentleman said that the money comes from the pools now, but would not come if the pools collapsed. The effect of a national lottery on the pools must be thought through and the question would have to be addressed before legislation went through the House.

To the extent that a national lottery would have an impact on the pools or, indeed, on any other form of commercial gambling, the Government must also take account of the revenue implications. In 1990-91, just over £1 billion was raised from betting and gaming duties, of which about 30 per cent. came from pool betting duty. In many countries, national lotteries are either taxed or the proceeds directly to the Exchequer. The Rothschild royal commission suggested that a national lottery should be taxed at 10 per cent. of turnover. There is certainly a strong case for taxation of a national lottery, although that, thank goodness, is ultimately a matter on which the Chancellor, rather than I, will animadvert.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): That was a Freudian slip.

Mr. Lloyd: It was not a Freudian slip. My hesitation means that I need a drink of water.

The revenue implications of a national lottery also need to be resolved before legislation is passed.

I come now to what may be one of the most important issues that need to be taken into account—the implications for existing charitable lotteries and charitable giving generally. Many European countries have long traditions of national lotteries, but weaker patterns of charitable giving than this country has. Although direct international comparisons cannot, therefore, be made, the introduction of a national lottery might affect charitable giving by individuals, estimated to be between £3·5 billion and £5 billion in 1989-90. Many national and local charities and sporting bodies promote lotteries under the current law. Such lotteries provide sums which, although small compared with the proceeds of a national lottery, are vital to the charities concerned. The Bill proposes that charities should receive no more than 10 per cent. of the proceeds of a national lottery. That may well be insufficient to compensate charities for what they might lose in revenue diverted from their existing small lotteries. Indeed, it may be impossible to ensure that all small charities that feel that they have lost out are compensated however high the percentage adopted, especially if a section of the public come to confine their charitable giving to the purchase of national lottery tickets.

The supporters of national lotteries usually claim that experience in other countries shows that small lotteries have not suffered. Ireland has been mentioned as a country in which small lotteries have thrived following the introduction of a major lottery. In fact, Ireland seems to provide clear evidence that small lotteries have lost out. Last year, a number of leading Irish charities expressed their concern that the national lottery had cut annual sales of traditional charitable lotteries by as much as 50 per cent.

In part, that may be due to an unfair balance in the rules governing the two types of lottery—national and local—but it clearly raises the question whether a national lottery here should be accompanied by changes to the existing statutory controls governing small lotteries. For example, should the monetary limits on prizes and proceeds be increased and, if so, by how much? At present, the largest lottery has a maximum single prize of £12,000 and maximum turnover of £180,000. Many other aspects of the conduct of small lotteries, including their frequency, promotion and regulation, would also require study. In some areas, change would require primary legislation to amend the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976.

Mr. Alton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lloyd: I shall not give way because I know that other hon. Members want to speak. I have a bit more to say and I want to limit others as little as possible.

Unless those matters are tackled at the same time as legislation on a national lottery, we shall be in danger of putting some small charitable lotteries at a severe disadvantage. It would be unfair to press ahead without proper study of the consequences for them.

I have sought to illustrate that the introduction of a national lottery is a complex matter affecting many aspects of existing primary legislation on gambling. These issues have emerged from the Government's initial study of the implications of a national lottery during the previous Session and no doubt quite a number more would need to be resolved before we could come forward with a Bill which it would be right to put before the House.

As I made clear at the outset, the Government see attractions in the concept of a national lottery and we wish to examine further the issues that it raises. In doing so, it will be important to invite the views of all interested parties, particularly the charities, large and small, and the pools companies. We shall put that work in hand immediately and announce our conclusions as soon as possible. Although I said at the start of my speech that the Government welcome the concept of a national lottery, we must, I emphasise, seek evidence from all those likely to be affected before decisions are made about how best to proceed. The drafting of the Bill has sought skilfully to avoid those issues, but, as I have indicated, they must be resolved first.

However, I have sought to underline the Government's warm interest and our firm intention to take matters forward in the way that will give everyone a chance to put his views and for the important questions to be resolved. Until that work has been completed, the Government cannot give any final commitment about the outcome.

I hope that my hon. and learned Friend and the House will agree that the course that I have indicated the Government will now take is the right way of tackling this complex subject. We recognise the need to move quickly, but there must be proper consideration and consultation

first. We owe that much to those who work in the existing gambling industries. We owe it to the good causes that stand to lose, as well as to those that stand to gain from a national lottery, and we owe it to the citizens of this country, for whom a national lottery, if it comes, should not be merely an extension of gambling but, in the words of the Rothschild royal commission,

"a harmless entertainment providing a rare opportunity to improve the quality of British life".

Finally, I commend my hon. and learned Friend, not merely for his excellent speech but for providing the House with the opportunity to concentrate on the question. It will be clear from what I have said, however, that I cannot ask the House to support the Second Reading. However, it will also be clear from what I have said that, as a result of his energy and eloquence, my hon. and learned Friend has greatly added to the momentum of the cause that he is promoting.

1.19 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Like other hon. Members, I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on doing so well in the ballot and on giving us an opportunity—whether or not we agree with a national lottery—to express our views in this constructive debate. I thank the Minister for his comments, which I read as being rather cool to the whole thing. I thank him in particular for implying that there will be a need for a considerable amount of work and analysis. That makes sense, and that clarification is welcome.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton has introduced a short Bill which, as he quite rightly said, is an enabling Bill. It gives the Secretary of State the power to decide how some of the highly complex issues surrounding the introduction of a national lottery should be dealt with. In particular, the Secretary of State would be empowered to decide how a national lottery would fit in to the existing gambling structure in the United Kingdom. He would also be empowered to take all the policy decisions to make a national lottery viable.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton has introduced a "feel good" Bill. It appears to be based on the question: who would like to spend lots of money on sport, the arts, heritage and everything else? The answer to that must be that we all want to see more money spent on the arts, heritage and other things. Asking that question is easy. We must then ask how that can be achieved. Apart from a few general and obvious points, the Bill ducks the question entirely.

As I said in an intervention, no one knows what income would be generated from a national lottery. It would be misleading for the country if any of us suggested what amounts of money might be spent on good causes. We do not know how much will be spent, especially when we bear in mind the fact that the Government's policy of not stimulating demand is still extant.

I do not want to speak for long, as other hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. However, it might be useful if I were to outline at the outset the Labour party's position with regard to funding sport and the arts.

We believe that there is a need to review funding arrangements for sport and the arts. In our policy document entitled "Charter for Sport" we stated:

"We will set up a major review of sport finance and sponsorship, levy, betting and taxation to ensure that a fairer proportion of the money taken out of sport goes back into sport."

In another policy document entitled "Arts and the Media: our Cultural Future", we stated in the section on private funding:

"We will give serious consideration to the proposal to establish a national lottery for the benefit of the arts. We will set up an inquiry to examine the means by which this could be achieved with the lowest possible administrative costs, whilst safeguarding the existence of established arrangements and employment."

In practice, that means that when we form the Government in the next few months we will carry out a deep-seated review of the funding of sport and the arts and possibly other areas which will also protect the 4,630 jobs on Merseyside, the 730 jobs in Glasgow, the 640 jobs in Cardiff and the 500 jobs in London. The Labour party wants to protect the 6,500 full-time jobs in the football pools companies and the 70,000 to 100,000 part-time jobs —the collectors—associated with them. What I have referred to concerns the possible impact on jobs of the introduction of a national lottery.

Detailed answers need also to be given to questions regarding the possible loss of nearly a third of a billion pounds of revenue to the Exchequer arising from taxes on football pool stakes. If that were to happen, we would need to ask how the Treasury would be compensated. We also need answers to questions about current funding for the Football Trust, which amounts to more than £30 million per annum and which is vital to the improvement of our football stadiums, as proposed in the Taylor report following the Hillsborough disaster.

As a result of information made available to hon. Members, it is perfectly reasonable to argue that the piecemeal introduction of a national lottery could prejudice such funding. If so, where will the money come from to compensate for losses? What will be the rules for funding the Football Trust? How can we be sure that the trustees responsible for running the lottery, which essentially is a private system of funding, will be sympathetic to the Football Trust? There is nothing in the Bill which says that they should. My argument for the Football Trust applies equally to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts which receives more than £60 million per annum from the pools.

Those questions are fundamental. The reason why there are no firm answers is that the Bill is a private Member's Bill. That means that there has been no time —I agree with the Minister—for proper consultation on the matter. There is a range of unanswered questions. We do not even know whether a national lottery would be financially viable, as it can be argued that no other country offers the same variety of opportunities for gambling which would be in competition. Even more important, we have not the faintest idea of what tax regime a lottery would work under.

Successive Conservative and Labour Governments have consistently regulated gambling for two reasons—first, to limit gambling to adults and to exclude children, and, secondly, to prevent crime. The House should note that, throughout the rest of Europe, gambling is controlled by Ministers of Finance, rather than as it is in the United Kingdom, where control comes under the Home Office and Home Office Ministers. The reason for that is that we have always looked beyond the fiscal aspects of gambling and, instead, have regulated gambling in order to contain its social impact. A consequence of that consistent approach to regulation is that the United Kingdom has the

[Mr. Stuart Randall]

lowest incidence of illegal gambling in Europe, in marked contrast to Italy, where gambling is in the firm grip of the Mafia.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Tut, tut, an unjustified slur on a great country.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) is making sounds. He should talk to people at the EC Commission who feel that they cannot get reliable statistics because of that impact.

The major factor in the central control of British gambling is that we should seek only to satisfy unstimulated demand. In practice, that means that the broadcasting media may not be used for advertising and that controls are placed on the number of sales outlets. Experience shows that existing major lotteries require heavy advertising to become viable. This Bill will probably need massive advertising on television and in the press and on radio and the use of direct mailing techniques.

It should be noted that the per capita stake in the United Kingdom is likely to be higher than in most European countries apart from Spain. That is based upon the Minister's own figure of £1·12 per week, which was included in the Library briefing on the Bill. It is reasonable to conclude from the Minister's figures, in both absolute and comparative terms, that the amount of so-called new money available for a national lottery in the United Kingdom could be quite limited. Its viability will depend to a greater extent on persuading punters to place their stakes in the lottery rather than using other gambling opportunities. That could mean that the departure from the existing policy of not stimulating demand would have to be substantial.

An important question that has not been addressed is whether Parliament is now prepared to drop the system of regulation that has been so successful and whether Parliament would accept that stimulating the demand for gambling is acceptable on the ground that the money raised would be used for worthwhile causes. We do not know the answer to that question. The Labour party believes that the country should be properly consulted before any such change in policy is made.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton has tried to bypass the arguments about stimulation of demand by saying:

> "After 1992, the Government will almost certainly be unable to stop European lotteries from flooding into Britain . . . It would be absurd if British money were to be spent on good causes in Spain, Italy or Germany, but could not be spent to improve the British way of life".

The hon. and learned Gentleman is looking bewildered. I am quoting from his article *The House Magazine* on 13 January. At the moment, that argument is unsustainable. I shall not go into the reasons why I think that, because the Minister's answers have made that point perfectly clear.

Apart from the Minister's comments on the unlikelihood of there being any immediate competition from the EEC as a result of the single market, I suspect that it will not be in the interests of member states to promote competition between national lotteries because punters will always tend to place their stakes with the biggest lotteries because they offer the biggest prizes. Certainly competition could result in a fall in the income to the Exchequer and in the investment made in good causes in certain member states because one national lottery may be smaller than those of other member states. The biggest national lotteries will always be the most successful.

If there were to be competition between national lotteries across the EEC because of the single market, it is probable that a new British national lottery would not be able to compete with the established biggest lotteries in the EEC entirely because of the size of the prizes. If, for argument's sake, we accepted the hon. and learned Gentleman's assertion that European lotteries would flood into Britain in about 12 months, the business risks associated with a national lottery could be substantial.

I turn briefly to the effect that a national lottery could have on the football pools. Would the pools really be able to survive? If the current system of regulation and taxation were to be retained for the pools, the purpose of which has been to curtail expenditure by the public on gambling, and if a national lottery were free to operate in the way in which the hon. and learned Member for Burton envisages —in a free market—the pools would probably either collapse or be severely damaged. They would be competing in an unfair environment. They would be heavily taxed at 37·5 per cent., whereas a national lottery would be taxed at an appreciably lower rate. In addition, the pools face constraints on advertising which a national lottery would not. It is inconceivable that the football pools could survive such a skew in the competitive environment.

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Randall: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I do not want to give way because other hon. Members wish to speak and I should like to conclude my speech as soon as I can.

I refer now to table 1 of the booklet from the Advisory Forum on Gambling, which I am sure all hon. Members have received. It shows that gross remittances would go from about——

Mr. Lawrence: It is a pools company.

Mr. Randall: Of course it is——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman did not say that it was.

Mr. Randall: I am quoting the forum. It is for the hon. Lady to know that it has interests in football. I accept that it has. But notwithstanding that—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady says that we should question the figures——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I did not. I said—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Randall: It is implicit in what I am saying that we should always question figures because those who produce them may have an interest.

The forum estimates that, if we started the national lottery this year, the gross remittances would fall from £866 million in 1991-92 to about £260 million in 1994-95. The duty to the Exchequer would fall from about a third of a billion pounds to £97·5 million. The donations to sport and the arts would drop considerably from just below £100 million to about £13 million. So the consequences are serious.

I have a letter from Coopers and Lybrand Europe which other hon. Members may have received. I quote from a letter from Mr. Frank McFadden to Littlewoods Pools. It says:

"I have long ago formed the opinion that the introduction of a UK national lottery would effectively kill off the football pools within a period of weeks. This closely follows the pattern with regard to Littlewoods Pools in Belgium which, following the introduction of a national lottery, survived only three weeks.

As you are aware, the UK has the largest gambling and gaming market within the European Community. In addition, however, it demonstrates a high propensity to bet, which is only exceeded by Spain, Greece and Ireland. Such propensity to bet indicates that there is a limited elasticity of demand for additional gambling and gaming products in Britain and, as a result, a successful national lottery would act as a substitute for the football pools."

I shall conclude now because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak and I do not want to hog the time. As I have already said, the Labour party is committed to reviewing the system of and arrangements for funding sport, the arts and other activities. We shall do that when we form the Government in the next few weeks. We also believe that the private Member's Bill mechanism is not appropriate for introducing a national lottery. As the Bill is a private Member's Bill, it lacks depth and has involved little or no consultation. There is no way of assessing the viability of a national lottery at this stage.

We also believe that there are serious risks that the introduction of a national lottery could seriously damage or destroy our successful football pools system, which has great integrity and is held in such high esteem by the British people. That is not to mention the huge contribution that the pools make to the Treasury. Surely the time is ripe for much more thought to be given to the whole matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Standing Order on 10-minute speeches has been lifted, but if every hon. Member present is to be allowed to speak, I must ask for a voluntary restraint of five minutes.

1.37 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I will certainly abide by your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for the great city of Kingston upon Hull, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall). I agree with what he said about the effects that a national lottery would have on the pools industry. That is just one reason why I cannot support the Bill. I say that with some regret, because I have the highest personal regard for my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence).

I have other reasons for not supporting the Bill. First, I have an instinctive suspicion of any commercial enterprise by the state, whether actual or attempted, and a deep instinctive suspicion of a monopoly commercial enterprise by the state. Secondly, I question whether the state should encourage people to gamble. Encouragement there would be, because a national lottery would undoubtedly be widely advertised.

I am also worried about the effect that a national lottery would have on the greyhound racing industry. I make no apology for raising the subject of Walthamstow stadium, arguably one of the finest greyhound racing stadiums in Britain. I thoroughly recommend it to everyone in the House for a great evening out.

I am not opposed to gambling. That may be something to do with the fact that a few years ago I went to the races and was persuaded to put money on a horse called Dignity of Labour by Worthy Tryer out of Work Ethic. That horse threw its jockey at the first fence, missed the second fence altogether, caused a collision at the third, ran wide at the fourth and finally sauntered in last. So I have not had happy experiences and since then I have kept clear of betting at races.

I shall quote briefly from a letter sent to me by the Betting Office Licensees Association Limited—I suspect a different letter from the one sent to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell)—which says:

"The purpose of this letter is to inform you of BOLA's concern about the proposed introduction of a national lottery. We believe that the injection of a large-scale lottery into a complex and largely mature market which already offers horse, greyhound and football betting, plus football pools, gaming machines, casinos, bingo and local lotteries, would have a detrimental effect on the existing revenue-yielding betting and gaming activities.

In BOLA's view, most damage would be done to football pool betting, but we would also expect off-course betting turnover on horse and greyhound racing to suffer, as it did in Ireland following the introduction of a national lottery in that country. Thus we would envisage the £1 billion a year generated for the Exchequer by the taxation of betting and gaming being seriously eroded."

Supporters of the Bill state that we must establish a national lottery in Britain because the introduction of the European single market after 1992 will cause a flood of foreign lottery tickets into this country and that has already been debated.

What about the consequences of a lottery for other forms of gambling? On the assumption that a national lottery consisted of a numbers-based Lotto game—probably six from 49—and that it was promoted and protected effectively as a state monopoly, which is the almost universal pattern abroad, it is possible to state with considerable accuracy what would happen to other forms of gambling, especially the British football pools industry. The effect on the fund-raising efforts of charities, sports clubs and other voluntary organisations can also be calculated.

The setting up of a national lottery will have serious consequences for jobs and for sports and the arts.

In conclusion I shall quote from a letter which I recently received from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, which states:

"It seems a courtesy to let you know that tomorrow's list"—

of grants—

"will include a sum of £300,000 awarded to the Waltham Forest Recreation Services at Forest Road, London E17 which I believe to be in your constituency. The purpose of the grant is for structural repairs at the Waltham Forest Pool and Track Leisure Centre, including access facilities for people with disabilities. The Trustees believe you will welcome this contribution to what is happening in Walthamstow."

And so I do. Jam today is better than jam tomorrow.

1.42 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I have listened carefully to the debate since 9.30 am and with especial care to the promoter of the Bill, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), to hear where the money would come from. He did not tell us. So before he sat down, I

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

made my only intervention this morning to ask him to tell us where the £3 billion will come from. What will people cease to spend it on in order to buy lottery tickets? Even when faced with a direct question, he did not tell us, but started to talk about figures in Germany and elsewhere. He did not tell us whether £3 billion is sloshing around, unused, in British pockets. That is a crucial question.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton did not answer, because there are only two things that he can say. Either it comes from present gambling or people will cease to spend it on something else, in which case he would have to tell us what—would it be food, mortgages, rents or clothes? He prefers not to answer that question and it has not been answered by any of the supporters of the Bill. It is a crucial question. It is important from both angles. As president of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and as a sponsored Member of USDAW, I am deeply worried about the job implications.

There has been mention of hon. Members being nobbled by the football pools companies. I find that a bit offensive, although in a sense I am nobbled by the work force, because it is important for all hon. Members to be concerned about jobs. As has been established, thousands of jobs are at stake, mostly the jobs of USDAW members, in areas of high unemployment. It is not only the employer who fears for the loss of trade, but the thousands of workers.

It may come as a surprise to some of my hon. Friends when I pay a compliment to the major company involved in football pools on a particular aspect of its policy. Littlewoods has an explicit policy of maintaining employment rather than making ever-higher capital investments. It would rather spend its money on paying wages than on installing machinery to force workers out. There has been no guarantee or even a hint from one of the Bill's sponsors that a national lottery would be run on those lines. Of course it would not and it could not. Littlewoods is efficient in the organisation of its work force. It is not simply a highly capital-intensive trade. That means that it is important as an employer of labour. As has been pointed out, all its workers, too, are paying taxes from which spending on all the needs of the people can be financed. Therefore, I am concerned about jobs.

One of the most outrageous arguments this morning came from the hon. and learned Member for Burton who said that the Bill would improve equality for women. He said with a straight face that the Bill would provide access for women who find filling in the football pools too complicated. Their tiny little brains do not run to that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: My hon. and learned Friend did not.

Several Hon. Members: Yes, he did.

Mrs. Wise: *Hansard* will show that the promoter said that women find football pools coupons too complicated. I am adding the bit about their tiny little minds.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: No, I am not giving way to the hon. Lady. I have had experience of her before.

When the sponsors talk about the rights and position of women, let them remember that most of the jobs at stake will be women's jobs. Let them also remember that women in our society have less disposable income than men. Therefore, if the Bill encourages women to spend money on a lottery, it is even more likely to be at the expense of essential spending. Women have less of the £3 billion that is claimed to be sloshing around than anybody else.

If the £3 billion comes at the expense of the football pools, it will hit jobs in areas of high unemployment and women's jobs. On the other hand, if it comes from other sorts of spending, which will they be? There is already a recession in retailing because people do not have money to spend on food, clothing and household goods. If they choose to buy lottery tickets, there will be an even bigger recession in retailing and the other members of USDAW will be affected. Even more people will lose their jobs.

Lewis's, an important department store in my constituency, is likely to close on 1 February, not because it sells shoddy goods—it does not—but because people are short of money. The £3 billion needed to set up the national lottery is just not around.

People are facing the repossession of their homes and they have arrears in their mortgages and their rents. Thousands and thousands of summonses have been issued for poll tax arrears. However, the supporters of the Bill claim that they will get £3 billion of new money for the national lottery. Do they have a private arrangement with the Mint? That is the only way in which new money could be found; it would have to be freshly minted for the purpose. People will not receive huge wage increases so that they can contribute to a national lottery. There is not £3 billion available from ordinary people.

I accept that £3 billion could be raised from some sectors of society and I am in favour of them contributing —through taxation. However, they want to be able to say that funding for the sports and the arts can now be met without imposing any extra tax burden on them, the rich. They are looking for an easy way out and that is unacceptable.

The promoter spoke about the advantages of providing sports facilities as a means of preventing crime. The hon. and learned Gentleman painted a gloomy picture of young people with nothing to do. He said how important it was for society that sports halls, playing fields and other facilities should be provided for young people to keep them from delinquency. That is true. He also said that the national health service is important, but that a national lottery would be a strange way in which to finance it. If that is the case, why is it not also a strange way in which to finance all the things that would contribute to keeping down crime and keeping young people from committing acts of vandalism?

The Bill is a bad one. I do not believe that it can be remedied in Committee. I am not persuaded by the argument that it is an enabling Bill. I do not believe that the House should pass Bills that can then go off in all sorts of directions when they are amended in Committee. The promoter should get his Bill right when he introduces it. We do not want to pass Bills that are empty shells; that is bad legislative practice.

I oppose the Bill from a constitutional view. As a woman I oppose the Bill. As someone concerned about proper public provision I oppose the Bill. As someone with trade union interests I oppose the Bill. I am confident that the House will refrain from giving it a Second Reading.

1.52 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I add my congratulations to those given to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on his success in the ballot and on choosing this particular Bill, of which I am pleased to be a sponsor.

My hon. and learned Friend reminded the House that, in Europe, only Britain and Albania have, as yet, not seen the need for the resources that a national lottery would provide. It is hard to understand why when, in all our constituencies, the need for increased resources for sports, the arts and the environment must be obvious.

In my constituency a national lottery could help to provide a new running track for the athletic club and a sports pavilion for Rhyddings county high school, whose playing field is half a mile from the school. It could also provide a lift for the civic theatre, so that the disabled and older people could see the excellent amateur and professional productions that are staged there. In common with other hon. Members, I could continue to list the various needs in my constituency. Those needs must be added to the impressive list of national projects set out by the Sports Council and the Arts Council.

If the Bill were passed it could help to provide many of those facilities. Failure to pass the Bill could lead to those new facilities being established not in Hyndburn or Burton, but in Hamburg and Barcelona. Despite the efforts of Customs officials, tickets for the German, Austrian and Canadian lotteries are being bought in this country. Many of us have received mail shots which say:

"You've been declared eligible to win up to 50 million dollars tax free, lump sum cash, in the official Canadian lottery, plus special bonus prizes too. Just think what you could do with winnings like that."

That is tempting to hon. Members with marginal seats and a general election looming. A magazine that was circulating in this country in December carried a full-page advert for the Austrian national lottery. With the increasing popularity of satellite television, people in this country will have invitations to participate in European lotteries beamed into their homes.

There is no doubt that, by one means or another, foreign lottery tickets will increasingly be bought in this country. We shall be using our money to improve facilities in countries with which we compete in sport.

Any non-United Kingdom scheme that issues promotional material here is breaking the law, but the Home Office says that it cannot prosecute foreign lotteries because they have no staff here.

A national lottery will increase jobs—not simply in running the lottery but in printing tickets and in building capital projects funded from the proceeds and in servicing those facilities when they are built.

If the advice of an opinion poll taken in November is followed, tickets for the lottery will be on sale in post offices, thereby helping to preserve jobs that could otherwise be lost in sub-post offices that are facing closure. As my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) reminded us, the Post Office—24 million people use its 20,000 outlets each week—is a superb place to sell lottery tickets. It has integrity and credibility, which will be necessary if we have a national lottery.

I understand the views of the Lotteries Council. It has said that it is not against a national lottery but opposes the Bill because it does not specifically protect its members. Small lotteries have been extremely successful in providing resources that have enabled many football clubs to survive. It is not unnatural that the Lotteries Council should wish to protect its members. At our last annual general meeting, when we discussed the £10,000 lottery being run by UK Charities Ltd., members said that, far from harming them, the new lottery had generated new interest. I believe that the same would be true with a national lottery.

The objections of the Lotteries Council, like those of the pool companies, overlook the threat from European lotteries. Can anyone say with certainty that if we do not have a national lottery the status quo will continue and that foreign lottery tickets will never be available in this country? No one can give us that guarantee, so we take a risk—a risk which we should not take.

I wish the Bill success. I hope that if the calling of the election prevents it from becoming law, the Government will include a proposal for a national lottery in our manifesto.

1.57 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I want to explain why I have changed from supporting a national lottery to opposing it. It has been the duty of Labour Back Benchers to try to construct an agenda that leap-frogged Thatcherism rather than being part of a party that merely tried to adapt itself to Government successes after yet another general election failure.

In that context of thinking about the need for a national health service tax and the support that a national lottery could give the national health scheme, I supported that measure. Before the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) says that I am like everybody else who has spoken against the lotteries—a mere spokesman for the pools—let me say that I am critical of Littlewoods. Of course I am mindful of its good employment policies. Many of my constituents work at Littlewoods, but the way in which it has approached the issue in the past few years has been, to be gentle, lethargic rather than looking after the best interests of its members.

I thank the hon. and learned Member for Burton for giving us this opportunity. We are having a dress rehearsal of the real debate that will take place in the next Parliament, when hon. Members who are worried about aspects of a national lottery will have to advance better arguments than some that we have heard this morning.

We cannot rely on the shock-horror tactics which state that the whole of English national life will collapse if a national lottery is introduced. The public—the voters—will not believe us. We cannot rely on the arguments against more gambling—thank God we are a country in which most people believe that there should not be a group of people who put their sticky fingers into other people's private lives and dictate how they should behave or spend their money. That argument comes especially badly from the pools industry whose whole income comes from gambling.

Nor can we rely on the argument that it is bad to have a national lottery for sports facilities, for example, when we know that all the income of the pools industry—minus the prizes—goes into the pockets of the promoters. That argument does not stand up.

I am well within my five minutes so I shall tell the House why I have changed my mind. I can assure the House that it is not because in the past couple of years I have been on

[Mr. Frank Field]

the receiving end of a particular campaign. Indeed, if one were trying to ensure that I did not change my mind, I should have to congratulate the organisers of that campaign. I changed my mind for one reason.

I said earlier that I was not a member of the puritan lobby which is against gambling, but I must now modify that statement. I am against one form of gambling—gambling with the jobs of some of my constituents. I thought that the hon. and learned Member for Burton was in danger of talking out the Bill because he spoke for so long, but not more than two minutes of his discourse were spent on the possible job implications.

We do not know for certain what the job implications will be. It is a gamble. The House should not take such a gamble with my constituents' livelihood especially as—as many hon. Members have explained—for many of the families involved it is their only gateway to a normal existence. For that reason—and for that reason alone—I hope that the House will reject the Bill.

2.1 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Many hon. Members have made some good points today. One of the advantages of being called late in the debate is that one does not repeat some arguments which have already been made.

I see the beginnings of something called the "Bottomley" law on detailed explanations. When a Minister gives a detailed reason why something is as it is, one can be fairly sure that the Government are likely to change their mind shortly afterwards. It has happened with such issues as compensation for haemophiliacs who contracted the HIV virus and it certainly happened when one Minister at the Department of Education and Science explained why polytechnics could never be called universities. It appears to be happening in this case.

On 13 January my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary —who I thought handled the debate very well—explained that

"Government policy on all gambling, whether betting, gaming or lotteries, reflects two basic principles. The first is that controls are necessary to ensure that it is conducted honestly and fairly. The second principle is that demand for gambling should not be stimulated."—[*Official Report*, 13 January 1991; Vol. 201, c. *460*.]

It is agreed that net spending on gambling in this country is about £3,000 million to £4,000 million a year. The gross figure is larger, but much of horserace betting is recycled—people stake relatively small sums and get a fair amount of it back, although in the end they lose. Therefore, let us work on the net figure of £3,000 million to £4,000 million a year. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) said that the Bill would roughly double that amount. It is a major step for the House to take to throw away the principle that gambling should not be stimulated.

I accept what the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said about job losses, but, in time, that problem will have to be faced whatever happens. I also accept what the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) said about the need for substantial extra resources for particular causes. It is crazy that we have not found a way—whether through the tax system, through hypothecated income in another way or by allowing another form of market to work, or probably a combination of all three—to put cultural centres, sporting facilities, the preservation of our heritage and funding for charities on a higher level than at present. I am not arguing for voluntary giving—whether through gambling, through charitable giving or in any other way—because it is always a substitute for state funding.

However, I counsel people who do not seem to have done their homework to remember that the Irish figures quoted in the European survey show that half of the Government funding that went to culture, heritage, sport and other good causes was withdrawn when funding began to come from the lottery. It is important that people do not consider only the good points without considering the bad. I oppose the idea of the House passing the Bill, because some of those considerations have not been talked through. But I hope that one of its results will be that in the country as a whole we shall accept that it is right to produce funds on the scale of £750 million a year for a combination of sporting, cultural and heritage activities. The question is: what is the best way of doing that?

If we believe that the money should come from people's pockets, either through extra taxation or through extra spending of tax-provided funds—that is a reasonable assumption, and it is reasonable to ask what the best way of providing £750 million is—we could, for example, add an extra 25p to the retail price of cigarettes. That would raise £750 million, but the disadvantage would be that it would put 0·3 per cent. on to the retail prices index, whereas gambling, betting and lotteries are not included in the index.

Such hypothecation is better than the almost non-hypothecation involved in saying, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton does, that we shall raise £3 billion and then give half of it back to some winners. That does not help to do much except to make some people very rich—although I have no special objection to that. Some of the money will go in expenses and a little bit will go to sports facilities, heritage or conservation.

It is not necessarily rational, economically efficient or even dignified to say that an extra £3 billion should be spent on stimulating gambling if what we really want to do is to raise £750 million a year for causes that we accept are good and reasonable.

It would have been nice to have a debate in which we could say, "Do we need £750 million for those causes?", but instead we are faced with a National Lottery Bill.

Paragraph 13.83 of the Rothschild report, on page 231 in the chapter entitled,

"A National Lottery for Good Causes"

says:

"Finally, the whole of this chapter is predicated on the assumption that the Government will not penalise those organizations which benefit from the national lottery by withholding funds which they would otherwise have got, or reducing them if they are already being supported by the general exchequer."

I do not believe that any Government—Labour or Tory, now or in the future—when deciding how much provision to make for good causes, would ignore the other funding that those causes receive. In any particular year the Government may give permission for extra funds to be raised, but they will not go on doing that.

A table on page 232 of the Rothschild report, to which I referred earlier, shows that the vast bulk of the money raised is likely to come from people who do not support some of the causes to which the proceeds are to be dedicated. I do not believe that majority votes should

always be required for good causes. Some are minority interests, but important ones should be imposed on other people by an overwhelming minority. It is not right to say that we should stimulate gambling.

I shall make one of my final points now, so as to allow others to take part in the debate. We have seen a number of examples in which a product banned from being advertised on television is assumed to be all right in news and current affairs coverage, and such coverage is manipulated by certain organisations. One of those examples is provided by the link between motor racing and alcohol. The regulations do not allow alcohol promotion on television to be associated with motor racing. But that did not stop a lager company in effect buying the British grand prix and having it broadcast by a major television channel. So much prominence was given to the name of the lager that—perhaps "scandal" is too strong a word, but it was wrong.

Given that major gambling is prohibited as a subject for television advertising, the House would probably want to give five hours to debating the single question of whether we could cheerfully accept the idea of the draw for million-pound prizes being shown on televison as a way of stimulating demand.

I do not believe that we should say to individuals in this country, "You must not do what I do not approve of." We should say, "Do we want to change the system from one of no stimulation to over stimulation?" The idea of doubling gambling in this country as a result of five-hour debate does not seem the best way in which to get £750 million a year for cultural, sporting and heritage activities.

2.10 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): I declare an interest as an unpaid director of Sheffield Wednesday football club. That is significant because three years ago, 95 people were killed at the Hillsborough ground—not because there was anything wrong with the ground. I do not have time to go into the details. Following those tragic deaths the Government, following Lord Taylor's report, insisted that football grounds had to become all-seater and that the bigger grounds had to comply by 1994.

There was no chance that the industry could find the money without the aid of the football pools, which are paying 70 per cent. towards the cost. It is impossible to build stands, to get planning permission and to begin work in a matter of months. It must take two or three years for that to happen. There have already been strong demonstrations about the cost. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) knows, there were riots at West Ham when the supporters protested that they would have to pay £750 each, not for the price of a season ticket, but even to be able to buy a season ticket.

The Prime Minister is a football supporter. He said that the Government would pay 2·5 per cent. of the tax on the football pools to top up the money that the clubs would get from the Football Trust. When the Tories came into office, the tax on football pools was 40 per cent. They lifted it to 42·5 per cent. To be fair to the Prime Minister, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, he said that they would give back the 2·5 per cent. to football to improve the grounds.

What will happen if the pools collapse? Where will the money come from to improve the grounds? Will the clubs be left with the bill? They will never be able to pay it, and they will be halfway through building the stands and halfway through the contracts when the money will suddenly dry up, if the Bill is passed. The clubs will find themselves in that position although a Lord Justice has told them that the work must be done and although the police have said that they will not police football grounds unless they are all-seater. That will be devastating for Britain's standing in world football because we shall not be able to stage the 1996 European football championships. The industry will be plunged into a trauma and it will not know the way out.

Conservative Members may say that that will not happen overnight and that there will be a gradual run-down. I do not believe that for a minute. There are 70,000 pools collectors. People no longer send in their pools entries through the post. Instead, the entries are collected by collectors who work on commission, sometimes 25 per cent. and sometimes 15 per cent. The collectors go round every Friday night. If there is a national lottery, they will naturally say to the old ladies who do the pools, "Why don't you try a lottery ticket as well as or instead of the pools?" Many who have done the pools for many years will say, "Why not? I have used birthday dates and door numbers, but they never come up. I will do the national lottery instead." There will quickly be a massive switch and the money that the Government get from tax will dry up.

The Government will have far less money to give for the improvement of football grounds. The pools will not be able to pay the 70 per cent. as has been promised. Those will be the consequences if the Bill is passed. Between now and 1994, all the football clubs will have planned, put out tenders and taken contracts. Manchester City, for example, complained to me that it made an application for the grant last July, but that the Minister for Sport is sitting on it. I do not know why he has not released the cash, because the Government continually complain that clubs are not getting a move on. Football clubs do not know where they stand on all-seater stadiums, which the Government have demanded, on which they have had little help and which will be damaged by the Bill.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) should read what the Select Committee on Home Affairs, of which I am a member, said about the Horse Race Betting Levy Act 1981. Sharing out the cash from horse racing has been a shambles. Once again, the Home Office has had to step in to sort out who gets what in horse racing between the owners, the trainers, the bookies and everyone else because they can never agree on the share of the cake. That is exactly what will happen with the national lottery.

2.14 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): My fundamental objection to the Bill is that it defines areas of public expenditure that I believe to be very important to the richness and well-being of a society as so marginal that they can be funded outwith general taxation and the normal means of funding things that society regards as important.

I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) about the proposals advanced in the Labour party's sports document. Of course we should look at the money that

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

comes out of sport—and, no doubt, the arts—and give as much of that money as possible back to the sources from which it comes. I also agreed with much of what the Minister said, and I followed his speech with interest. But what is proposed in the Bill is one mega state lottery, with defined areas of expenditure, and that is what I cannot agree with.

Over the past few weeks, and again today, we have heard the familiar arguments. If I hear the tale about Britain and Albania once more, I shall be tempted to go to Tirana to check the facts. There is another side to the coin, even if it is true that the only countries that do not have national lotteries are Britain and Albania. In the absence of a national lottery here, other forms of fund-raising—and lotteries in particular—have developed. That problem—if problem it is—would not be confronted in countries with long-established national lotteries, but in countries such as Ireland where the lotteries are not long-established, exactly the problems that we fear are arising.

The term "small lotteries" is perhaps confusing because some of the so-called small lotteries are very large indeed. I have received two letters of which other hon. Members may also have copies. The example of Tenovus, the cancer charity, is an important one. The charity's letter refers to the fact that the charity has a £3 million income from lotteries and that £1 million of its funds depends upon that. The House must think carefully before taking a step that could contribute—and, in the experience of other countries, would contribute—to wiping out that source of revenue, which is what would happen if that relatively large lottery were subordinated to the great national mega-lottery.

The second letter was from Rangers FC Development Fund Ltd. Anyone who takes even a passing interest in Scottish football knows that Rangers football club has a splendid stadium, funded almost exclusively from two sources—first, the lottery that the club has run for many years and, secondly, the Football Trust, referred to today as a possible source of funding that would be endangered by the process. Mr. Hugh Adam, the director of Rangers, who is responsible for the development fund, writes:

"Indeed, it is now a matter of public knowledge that very few, if any, football clubs take enough money through the gate to exist from that alone. Small lotteries are probably the most important source of off-the-field revenue."

While saying that we are acting in the name of sport, we are threatening on two fronts to remove the funding sources on which football clubs and many other sports and arts organisations now depend. I do not think that we should go into that lightly.

I came away from the British Columbia lottery presentation held in the House some months ago with two clear impressions. The first was that, in order for the British Columbia lottery to be the great success that it undoubtedly is—it offers huge prizes—all other lotteries, down to a very low level, had had to disappear to make way for it. That example is relevant. Secondly, as the gentleman who came to speak to us freely admitted, no matter how carefully one defines the causes that are to benefit from a lottery, as soon as it exists representatives of all sorts of other causes immediately come knocking at the door so that, in the end, no cause get as much as it at first expected.

I want also to refer to a letter from Dr. Moran of Chase Farm hospital in Enfield, who is the chairman of the National Council on Gambling and the adviser on gambling to the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He raised a point on which I agree with the Minister. There is a difference between a large number of lotteries offering relatively modest prizes, but raising a lot of money for many different causes, and the concept of one huge lottery on which the whole fix depends and the vast prize with all the hullabaloo surrounding it.

The professional view of Dr. Moran should not be taken lightly. He wrote:

"The existing lotteries law prescribes modest levels; this avoids stimulation and allows the smaller societies to compete with larger ones, when promoting lotteries. In large scale lotteries, the gambling element predominates over that of charitable giving."

There is no po-faced moralistic view on the matter. I have nothing against gambling or lotteries. However, the House must consider today, as no doubt it will in future, whether we want to approach the matter in a way that does not wipe out other forms of income for good causes and which does not stimulate gambling, as the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) sensibly pointed out, in order to return through gambling a relatively small proportion of the money to the people who invest in it.

The scale is enormous. The Bill's sponsors switch between minimising and maximising the scale, depending upon which market they are appealing to. By creating a national lottery of £3 billion, we will be creating something new on a level that is double the existing expenditure in the United Kingdom on the pools and bingo combined. That is an enormous enterprise. I do not believe that that money can appear out of thin air. It will either destroy other lotteries or it will be new money which will be diverted from other forms of social expenditure.

2.21 pm

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): In the circumstances, I will be very brief. It is well known that I am a long-standing supporter of a national lottery, and I am delighted and proud to be a sponsor of the Bill. As a former Minister responsible for tourism, and as the present chairman of ALVA—the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions—I am well aware of the huge costs of maintaining the fabric of great museums, galleries, cathederals and historic houses.

For example, the British museum and the Tate, which are both ALVA members, require substantial funding. The British museum needs £80 million for conversion and refurbishment of the space that has been vacated by the British Library. The Tate needs £32 million to upgrade 21 galleries and to provide adequate visitor research facilities. Museums in Manchester could spend £20 million, and Merseyside could spend £27 million. Sports facilities are required throughout the country.

The Government and the Exchequer have a responsibility. Recent increases in spending on the arts are welcome. However, the Government must not believe that a lottery will allow them to dodge their obligations. The point that has been emphasised repeatedly today is the gap between what the Treasury under a Government of any political party is likely to contribute and what is actually needed. The difference is vast and that is where a national lottery has a role to play.

I had hoped that a national lottery would be announced in the last Budget. However, the pools companies proposed the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and, bluntly, the Treasury fell for that. In the Budget debate on 19 March last year, I described the foundation as mere petty cash compared with what a properly constituted national lottery could produce——

Mr. Lawrence *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 84, Noes 35.

Division No. 42] **[2.25 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cash, William
Cormack, Patrick
Devlin, Tim
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Farr, Sir John
Fatchett, Derek
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mates, Michael
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Page, Richard
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Rooker, Jeff
Rost, Peter
Sedgemore, Brian
Shelton, Sir William
Sims, Roger
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thorne, Neil
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Bowis and
Mr. John Lee.

NOES

Anderson, Donald
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bellotti, David
Cartwright, John
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dixon, Don
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fraser, John
Graham, Thomas
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McCrea, Rev William
Maclennan, Robert
Moate, Roger
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robinson, Geoffrey
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Bottomley and
Mr. David Alton.

Whereupon MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative, because it was not supported by the majority prescribed by Standing Order No. 36 (Majority for Closure).*

It being after half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 24 January.

CORPORATE SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 January.

TOURISM (OVERSEAS PROMOTION) (WALES) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 January.

COMMONWEALTH OF EUROPE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Not moved.

CHEQUES BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

ARMED FORCES (LIABILITY FOR INJURY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object:

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 January.

HOMICIDE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

M20 (Junctions 3 and 5)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

2.36 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic replied to an Adjournment debate which I initiated only 14 months ago in November 1990. I make no apology for the fact that just 14 months later I am seeking his reply to a debate on the same subject. I have to tell him that the Department of Transport's handling of the widening of the M20 between junctions 3 and 5 in my constituency has been disastrous for hundreds of my constituents. I shall seek to demonstrate that it appears that it has also been a fair-sized disaster for the public purse. I shall put several specific issues to my hon. Friend, but before doing so I suggest that there is one lesson of overwhelming importance which I hope that the Department of Transport will learn from the way in which it has handled the scheme so far.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, from the moment that the Department announces its intention to widen a road, blight is instantly created. That is particularly the case if at the time of the announcement the Department does not announce how the widening scheme will be carried out. Obviously the blighting effect is particularly acute in areas where there is a substantial amount of residential property. That is the case along almost the entire length of the M20 between junctions 3 and 5.

The announcement of the intention to widen was made in the White Paper "Roads for Prosperity", which was published in May 1989. One would have hoped that it would be followed quickly by a detailed description by the Department of Transport of how the widening would be conducted.

In practice, two and a half years elapsed—until October 1991—before details of the widening schemes were announced. As a result, the huge swathe of blight created instantly from May 1989 onwards along both sides of the motorway continued unabated for two and a half years and continues to a degree. As a consequence, hundreds of people have been unable to sell their houses. The consequences have been disastrous for those who have had to do so for personal, family, health, matrimonial break-up or job reasons.

I hope that the Department of Transport will accept that it has a fundamental responsibility not to announce its intention to widen until it can at the same time, or shortly thereafter, say how the scheme will be carried out.

The two-and-a-half-year gap has also had serious consequences for the public purse. In a reply of 3 December my hon. Friend said that the Department had acquired at that time a total of 227 houses for the cost of £21·9 million—a purchase price of about £100,000 for each house. He went on to say that another 59 houses were being acquired. The Department will end up with 286 houses, which will cost the taxpayer about £28 million.

I do not criticise the Department of Transport for discharging its legal obligations under the blight purchase provisions. Indeed, it would have been wrong for it not to have done so. However, if one looks at the alignment of the road and reads the further part of his answer of 3 December—to the effect that of 286 houses acquired by the Department not one will be required by the road scheme—one realises that it raises major issues of policy concerning public expenditure.

The Department has effectively spent, or is spending, about £28 million to acquire 286 houses, none of which is required for the widening scheme. That is a matter of great concern. Indeed, I am so concerned that I think it is appropriate for me to refer the use of public funds in those circumstances to the Comptroller and Auditor General. I spoke to his office this morning and he confirmed that that is an appropriate matter for me to refer to him, and I propose to do so.

I hope that the Department will not again announce an intention to widen without an immediate announcement—or as immediate as possible thereafter—as to how the scheme will be carried out.

I want to mention six matters to my hon. Friend. The first concerns the section 62 powers which were taken by the Government—and I welcome that—in the Planning Compensation Act 1991, giving new discretionary powers to the Secretary of State for Transport to acquire houses by agreement with their owners when they are seriously affected by a motorway or road scheme, regardless of any distance limit from the scheme.

I have been asking my hon. Friend for details of how those powers will be used, and I am grateful for the parliamentary reply that he gave me before the debate commenced, in which he has given an initial indication. Obviously, I shall want to examine that in the context of a number of cases. I hope that it will help one of my constituents who is in the extraordinary position of having received an offer from the Department of Transport whereby it will acquire her garage under the statutory blight provisions but not her house. I hope that the answer in my hon. Friend's letter will help her ludicrous and unfair situation as well as that of some other constituents who continue to feel that they are blighted, notwithstanding the announcement of the line of the widening scheme.

Secondly, there is the question of the continuance of the 200 m notification requirement on the planning authority for prospective purchasers. I can understand why that was necessary until the line of the widening scheme was announced, but I was dismayed to receive an answer from my hon. Friend on 18 December in which he said that the notification procedure would continue until the scheme was implemented. That will continue to blight properties well away from the widening scheme for some years to come. I urge him to reconsider his policy on notification in the context of the scheme.

My third point relates to noise from the motorway. In my view, this section of motorway—perhaps because I drive on it more than most—is as bad and as noisy a section of motorway as I have found anywhere in the country. It is of a ribbed, concrete surface which gives off more than the usual volume of noise. I hope that my hon. Friend will assure me that the opportunity of the widening scheme will be taken to bring about a significant noise reduction programme along this section of the M20, including a replacement of the existing ribbed concrete surface by a black top surface.

My fourth point relates to noise during the construction period. As I have said, this section runs almost entirely through a residential area. I hope that my hon. Friend will assure me that when construction commences strict

restrictions will be placed on the contractors so that construction is limited to normal working hours and there is no weekend working.

My fifth point relates to the construction timetable. Now that the line of the widening scheme has been announced, I hope that it will be carried out as quickly as possible, not least because constituents who are facing a reduction in the value of their homes will be unable to claim injurious affection compensation until one year after the widening has been brought into operation.

The timetable of the scheme seems to have slipped steadily. I have a letter of 31 May 1989 from Mr. Springett of the Department of Transport in which he said:

"The Department hopes that the widening will be completed in time for the opening of the Channel Tunnel in 1993."

Two years later I had an answer from my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic in which he said:

"Recent experience of other widening schemes suggests that construction could start by 1995 with completion two years later."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 1991; Vol. 192, c. *54*.]

In other words, between those two indications of timetable, which are two years apart, there has been no less than a four-year delay. If my hon. Friend's latest answer is the correct one, it means that no injurious affection compensation would become payable to my constituents until 1998.

That degree of delay is unacceptable to my constituents. More significant for my hon. Friend with his ministerial responsibilities, it is unacceptable in national transport terms. The section of motorway, particularly at junction 3 of the M20, is of great national significance. As my hon. Friend will be aware, all the channel tunnel road traffic from East Anglia, the midlands, the north, the west, the south-west and the south coast using the motorway system will converge on junction 3 and proceed from there to the channel tunnel.

If my hon. Friend continues to allow the widening scheme to delay to the extent that he appears willing to accept, there is a serious danger of a traffic shambles on this section of the M20 almost as soon as the channel tunnel opens. Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friend will look immediately at the timetable for the scheme and I urge him to bring forward the implementation date to the earliest possible, certainly well before 1995.

What about the 286 houses which are now in the Department of Transport's ownership? As I have said to my hon. Friend, and in correspondence with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, the management of those houses has been far from satisfactory. Many of the houses have been vacant, squatters have moved in, and properties have been subject to poor maintenance and remote management from Eastbourne. Those factors have made it that much more difficult for people in the surrounding areas to sell their houses.

What is the Department's policy towards those houses? Will they be sold or will they be rented on a permanent basis, and if so, to whom? The critical thing is that the temporary nature of the occupancy of those homes must be ended as quickly as possible. We are talking about what were once settled, stable communities and they want to revert to that pattern. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend and my hon. Friend will give the highest priority to re-establishing homes along this section of the M20 that are under permanent tenure, whether they are owned outright, rented or under shared ownership. Permanence is the key factor in bringing back stability and, I hope, a reasonable degree of tranquillity to the estates.

I am sorry to have offered my hon. Friend such a barrage of criticism of his Department. If my hon. Friend had faced, in his constituency, the dismay and distress of so many of my constituents, caused by the Department of Transport, I am confident that he would make a speech no less critical of the Department than my own.

2.51 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I acknowledge the genuine concern of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on behalf of his constituents. No group of people can ever find it easy to tolerate a major road building scheme in their area. This particular scheme has been the subject of a lot more difficulty and delay than either I or the Department would have wished.

When the scheme was included in the 1989 White Paper, "Roads for Prosperity", it was part of the Government's expanded roads programme, which covered a large number of schemes. When one is announcing additions to the roads programme, it is impossible, even with the best will in the world, to guarantee that one knows exactly the time in which all of those additions will be built.

First, one announces an addition to the roads programme and then one must obtain the advice of consultants through competitive tender. One then considers their advice as to the best way in which to implement the proposals.

When the White Paper was published, the Department hoped that the widening of junctions 5 to 8 and of junctions 3 to 5 would be able to proceed together, according to the same timetable. That is why the letter written to my right hon. Friend's constituent at the end of May 1989 cited a certain timetable.

My right hon. Friend knows better than anyone about the complexity of widening the motorway from three lanes to four in this constrained part of the M20, which runs between built-up areas. Unfortunately, when the consultants considered the proposal it became immediately apparent that it would not be possible to deal with the widening of junctions 3 to 5 on the same time scale as that for the widening between junctions 5 and 8. That is part of the background to the delay.

My right hon. Friend regrets the expenditure incurred in purchasing many houses, but he was at the forefront in campaigning for the Government to make their arrangements sufficiently flexible to allow them to purchase those houses and thereby tackle the blight that any new road scheme causes. If the blight period had been shorter, we might have had to acquire fewer houses, but I suspect that, having acquired so many houses already, we shall now have to acquire fewer under the extended powers, to which I referred my right hon. Friend in answer earlier today.

I am not saying that if we had been able to act more quickly there would not have been so much blight or over such a long period, but I hope that my right hon. Friend will understand that there was no malice aforethought. The proposal was included in the roads programme. The original strategy was to widen the M20 in time for the opening of the channel tunnel, but, unfortunately, that did not prove possible.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

My right hon. Friend will know that the missing link in the M20 has been completed. The widening between junctions 5 and 8 is under way and should be completed for the opening of the tunnel.

My right hon. Friend referred to the section 62 powers and welcomed the revised guidance. I understand that he has not had time to consider each case, but one of the most important features of the new guidance is that it enables the Department to acquire properties before construction. Previously, property could be acquired between when blight first occurred and when proposals were announced in detail, and there was a period between then and the start of works when it was not possible to acquire property. I hope that that gap has been filled by the new powers that we have taken in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. We shall use the guidelines that I have announced today to implement that.

The 200 m requirement and notification is not Government policy. The Law Society and local authorities agreed that local authorities should be required to reveal the existence of proposals to widen the M20 between junctions 3 and 5 in response to searches by prospective purchasers of properties within 200 m of the scheme, until widening is implemented. I understand my right hon. Friend's concern that that might be thought to be harsh on those seeking to sell their properties, but it is done in accordance with an agreement with the Law Society, no doubt for the protection of potential purchasers. Constituents of my right hon. Friend who found out a day after they had completed that they had moved into a property within 200 m of a road widening scheme would be none too pleased that it had not been drawn to their attention beforehand. My right hon. Friend asked me to reconsider the policy, but it is not the Department's policy. I have no control over it; it is a matter between the Law Society and local authorities.

I am well aware of the noise from the road surface between junctions 3 and 5 of the M20. Part of the surface between junctions 4 and 5 was recently topped with bitumen. At the exhibition of the widening proposals held in October, some residents said that they thought that it had reduced the noise whereas others said that it had exacerbated it. That bears out the research undertaken by my Department which shows that there is a different type of noise from concrete surfaces compared with that from bitumen surfaces. The volume of the noise is similar, but the pitch is different and that may affect different people in different ways, depending where their house or property is situated.

We are talking about an on-line widening without the need to remove all the existing carriageway. If we proceed on that basis and if the existing carriageway is strong enough to take the new road, a proper surface—a bitumen surface—would be laid. The widened road would be of bitumen rather than of concrete. If, however, it proved necessary for all of the existing carriageways to be taken up and reconstructed, in accordance with its usual policy, the Department would invite competitive bids from contractors for either a concrete or bitumen-surfaced road.

I assure my right hon. Friend that whether there is ultimately a concrete or bitumen-surfaced road, the road will be constructed to a very high standard and the most modern noise attenuation measures will be included in the scheme. I cannot give any guarantees about noise during construction, because there must be a balance between the need to build a road such as this as quickly as possible and the legitimate concern of people living close to the road that they should not be disturbed by construction noise at anti-social times. We must consider that aspect in much greater detail. I cannot give any assurances today, but the Department and the contractors are well aware of the effect of construction on residents and they will deal with it as sympathetically as possible.

On the construction timetable, I share my right hon. Friend's frustration at the potential further delay before the scheme can be brought to fruition. I shall certainly inquire whether we can improve the speed of the proposed timetable, but the biggest uncertainty is that associated with the potential need for public inquiries into objections raised to compulsory purchase orders to acquire the additional land and for the necessary orders to enable the widened road to be constructed.

As my right hon. Friend knows, there is nothing certain about the way in which an inquiry will go, about the time it will take an inspector to consider the evidence or about the conclusions that he will reach. Again, I cannot give any guarantees, but when I gave my last reply to which my right hon. Friend referred, I did so taking account of the average time it takes to design a scheme, to take the detailed proposals to the necessary inquiry and to proceed beyond that.

All this is subject to the necessary resources being available, but, as my right hon. Friend said, the improvement of the road links to the channel tunnel is a very high political priority for the Government. I assure him that the road will be a high priority scheme and will be proceeded with as quickly as possible.

As my right hon. Friend knows, I have been concerned about the quality of the management of the 286 houses, and from 1 April this year there will be a new arrangement under which any new houses acquired after that date will not automatically go the housing assocation that has managed the existing houses. That is because of concerns which we have expressed openly to the housing association about the quality of management. It has improved significantly and I would be interested to hear of the extent to which my right hon. Friend thinks that it is still lower than it should be.

The Department feels that there is a need for competition to be introduced. That will lead to even higher standards of management and I hope that it will prove beneficial for my right hon. Friend's constituents. The length of time that it will take to resell the houses that we do not need must be the subject of discussion and negotiation. My right hon. Friend will understand what the impact would be if all the houses were suddenly placed on the open market, let alone the implications for the tenants now occupying them.

The first of the tenancy agreements expires in June this year. Some of them have been on a two-year basis, and some of the more recent agreements on a one-year basis. We shall have to prepare a strategy, which we shall discuss with the local council, for the future plans for the houses that we own. We do not want to own more houses than is absolutely necessary. Those houses properly belong in the private sector and the sooner they can be returned there, in an orderly fashion, the better.

I hope that I have answered some of the questions raised by my right hon. Friend, who makes no apology for having raised the subject again after some 14 months. I hope that he understands—although he might not agree with it—my explanation that the Department is very conscious of the adverse effects that such road schemes have on people living close by, and it may have erred on the side of generosity in acquiring so many houses. That was largely because my right hon. Friend was keen to encourage the Department to acquire them. Now that we have done so, we need to get rid of the ones that we do not need as soon as possible.

We wish to bring the scheme to fruition quickly so that the uncertainty, blight, noise and the other general adverse effects can be brought to an end as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 16 December 1991

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the normal retirement age for the post of director of the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive; what is the age of the current occupant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The normal retirement age for the post of director of field operations is 60. The present postholder is being retained in the post for a year beyond his normal retirement date, to June 1992, to assist in the implementation and consolidation of the major reform of the field organisation.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish copies of *(a)* the spring 1991 review of the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the field operations division impact study 1991.

Mr. Forth: *(a)* The 1991 spring review was a series of meetings at which the Health and Safety Executive's senior management reviewed the performance of its divisions against plan in the 1990-91 financial year. A full account of HSE's performance is given in the Health and Safety Commission Executive annual report 1990-91, which was laid before the House on 12 December.

(b) the impact study is an internal review of the ways in which the HSE's field force could improve the impact of its work. The question of publication will be considered when the HSE and the Health and Safety Commission has considered its recommendations.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many premises are registered with the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive; how many were inspected thoroughly in 1990-91; what is the current backlog of inspections; and what proposals he has to clear the backlog.

Mr. Forth: On 28 September 1991 there were 653,397 fixed premises registered with the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division—FOD. Between 1 April 1990 and 31 March 1991, FOD inspectors made a total of 100,232 planned inspection visits to fixed premises.

At 31 March 1991, a total of 107,486 fixed premises in the field for inspection in the period 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991 had not received a planned inspection visit in that year. The figure includes premises which have a low inspection rating based on inspectors' judgment of risks, site standards and management control, those which have been visited for purposes other than planned inspection and those for which records are held but may no longer exist.

A reduction in the number of premises in the field for inspection and not visited continues to be an aim of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive. As part of this, FOD has carried forward and developed special inspection initiatives on a local or regional basis across a range of industries.

Between 1 July and 31 December 1991, FOD is carrying out a pilot exercise to assess the feasibility of employing visiting officers to identify establishments for inspection. Two of the objectives of the exercise are to eliminate redundant records from the factory inspectorate establishment database and to provide data on establishments that make up the backlog.

Additionally, a recent study carried out by FOD has addressed the question of improving the impact of the work of the field force, including the backlog of inspections. Recommendations from the survey are currently being considered by HSE.

Factory Inspectors

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the factory inspectors responsible for the inspecting chemical works do not have degrees in chemistry or chemical engineering.

Mr. Forth: There are currently 56 factory inspectors responsible for the inspection of chemical plants who do not have degrees in chemistry or chemical engineering. Inspection assignments for factory inspectors are not made solely on specialist technical qualifications; detailed technical support is available to field inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive's technical specialists.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the factory inspectors in the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive are trainees.

Mr. Forth: On 1 December 1991, a total of 182 factory inspectors in the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive were trainee inspectors.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factories registered with the factories inspectorate have not received a basic inspection for three, five, seven, nine and 11 years; and what were the figures two years ago.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 29 January 1991, *Official Report*, columns *782-83*. To update this information would incur disproportionate cost.

Baynards House

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost in the financial year 1990-91 and what it is so far for the financial year 1991-92 for fees paid by the Health and Safety Executive for private employment agencies for the recruitment of staff at Baynards house; and if he will end such expenditure henceforth.

Mr. Forth: No fees have been paid to private employment agencies in either financial year by the Health and Safety Executive for the recruitment of staff in Baynards house.

Construction Sites

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent initiatives have been taken by the Health and Safety Commission's construction industry advisory committee in establishing new improved standards for site health and safety.

Mr. Forth: The HSC's construction industry advisory committee has taken a number of recent initiatives to promote improved standards of health and safety in the construction industry. The main initiatives are:

undertaking a comprehensive revision of guidance on the management of health and safety in construction projects. This will support forthcoming new Construction (Design and Management) Regulations which will place clear duties on clients, their professional advisers, designers, and contractors to bring about a coherent structure for managing health and safety;

meeting professional institutions to encourage their greater involvement in health and safety matters, including improved training for the professions. A major conference is also planned for senior representatives of construction companies on the role of the professions under the proposed new legislation;

a review of the use of heavy building blocks to produce guidance and consideration of a weight limit for manual handling above which mechanical assistance would be required;

revising guidance on the safe use of site dumpers; and

publishing a long-term strategy to give its effort clear direction while remaining sufficiently flexible to respond to important immediate issues.

EC Social Action

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment has been made by his Department of British industry managers' views of the current proposals by the European Commission for action in the social area.

Mr. Forth: The United Kingdom is unique in the European Community for its wide consultation of industry on the proposals in the social area. The significant majority of responses from industry to the Department's consultation documents support the Government's view that a number of the proposed directives under the Commission's social action programme would impose damaging costs on employers, destroy flexibility and limit our international competitiveness. These views have been endorsed in many representations received from individual employers and from employer organisations.

Youth Training

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from TECs over the lack of funds to meet the responsibilities to provide youth training in line with targets set by the Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has regular contact with all training and enterprise councils on a variety of matters. The Government remain firmly committed to their youth training guarantee.

Disability Symbol

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a list of companies which have given firm commitments to the Employment Service's disability symbol for employers; and how long a company can express a firm commitment without actually using the symbol, and still remain on the list.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for the staffing of training and enterprise councils in the longer term.

Mr. Howard: On 26 July 1991 I wrote to the chairmen of all TECs proposing that discussions should begin with TECs, with the relevant trade unions and with seconded staff about arrangements to secure the objective of freeing TECs to be the direct employers of their staff on terms and conditions decided by TECs.

I am writing today to TEC chairmen setting out the broad arrangements for phasing out secondments to TECs from the civil service by October 1996. These will give TECs the freedom to offer secondees employment in their TEC. Secondees in turn will be free to accept TEC employment or return to the Department when their secondment period ends. TECs will be provided with the funding to offer former secondees pension provisions broadly comparable with the principal civil service pension scheme. Subject to normal parliamentary procedures for notifying the giving of non-statutory guarantees and indemnities, I also propose to meet the costs of redundancy entitlements for past civil service employment in the event of a redundancy arising as a direct result of Government action within the first five years of the start of former secondee's employment in a TEC.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mirror Group Newspapers (Pension Fund)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement in response to the representations made to him by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe on behalf of employees of Mirror Group Newspapers about the losses incurred by their pension fund.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have written to the right hon. Gentleman.

EC Contributions

Mr. Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column *39*, what was the level of the United Kingdom's liability for contribution to EC funds in each year since 1973 *(a)* gross and *(b)* net, in cash terms and after adjusting for inflation, before refunds or abatement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	Gross (before refunds and abatements) Current prices	Gross (before refunds and abatements) Constant[1] prices	Net (before refunds and abatements) Current prices	Net (before refunds and abatements) Constant[1] prices
1973	181	987	102	556
1974	179	850	29	138
1975	342	1,276	−56	−209
1976	463	1,500	167	541
1977	737	2,096	369	1,050
1978	1,348	3,444	822	2,100
1979	1,606	3,587	947	2,115
1980	1,767	3,303	804	1,503
1981	2,174	3,647	1,090	1,829
1982	2,863	4,464	1,625	2,534
1983	2,976	4,408	1,454	2,154
1984	3,204	4,538	1,184	1,677
1985	3,940	5,277	2,035	2,726
1986	4,493	5,815	2,273	2,942
1987	5,202	6,414	2,874	3,544
1988	5,138	5,946	2,956	3,421
1989	5,585	6,043	3,469	3,754
1990	6,355	6,355	4,172	4,172

[1] Constant prices have been constructed using the GDP deflator at market prices.

Mr. Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the contribution to EC funds in each year since 1986 made by each of the 12 members of the EC *(a)* gross and *(b)* net, in constant prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The gross contribution to the EC budget by each member state in constant prices for the years 1986-1990 is in the table. Details of member states' gross contributions for 1991 will be published in the "Statement on the 1992 Community Budget" early next year. Details of member states' net contributions are not published by the European Commission.

Mecu
Constant prices[1 2]

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Belgium	1,631	1,875	1,987	1,869	1,764
Denmark	927	946	1,024	895	775
Germany	9,598	10,115	12,237	11,488	10,358
Greece	1,139	539	589	680	564
Spain	2,980	2,072	3,584	3,370	3,671
France	7,787	8,057	9,678	8,856	8,090
Ireland	396	380	357	384	368
Italy	6,063	6,301	7,572	6,887	6,098
Luxembourg	73	82	89	75	74
Netherlands	2,366	2,518	2,926	2,785	2,615
Portugal	446	492	515	523	502
United Kingdom	6,245	7,062	6,161	7,107	6,534

[1] Constant prices for the United Kingdom have been constructed using the GDP deflator at market prices.
[2] Constant prices for other Member States have been constructed using the GDP implicit price index. *Source:* OECC.
Note: Gross contribution are given net of the United Kingdom's abatement and other Member States' contribution to it.

Unitary Tax

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is yet in a position to announce the outcome of the Government's review of unitary tax with the United States Treasury.

Mr. Maude: The review of unitary tax conducted jointly by the Inland Revenue and the United States Treasury has now been completed and the Government have endorsed the conclusions reached in the report. A copy of the review report, which has been published today, is being placed in the Library.

The report highlights the main points in a complicated issue. It identifies not only where progress has been made to date but also assesses the best practical means of taking matters forward.

In accordance with the report's conclusions, both Governments take this opportunity to restate their commitment to work together to secure the elimination of the worldwide combined reporting method of unitary taxation.

At present we believe that the best means of achieving this goal is to support companies litigating in United States courts against worldwide unitary tax. Both Governments will continue to give such support.

In the meantime the British Government intend to retain the legislation contained in section 812 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. No further guarantee is contemplated as to the effective date of the legislation were it to be triggered, beyond the guarantee, previously given, that it would not apply to dividends paid on or before 31 December 1989.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action the Central Statistical Office will be taking in its assessment of the trend in retail sales and related indicators of activity to take account of the Sunday opening of many shops this December.

Mr. Maples: No action is necessary. The usual procedures for the compilation of the monthly retail sales index will ensure that Sunday sales are properly reflected.

Taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for 1991-92 the number of *(a)* corporate taxpayers and *(b)* income taxpayers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: About 350,000 companies pay corporation tax and 25·1 million individuals pay income tax in the United Kingdom. Information for Great Britain and Northern Ireland is not separately available for 1991-92.

Allowances

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people receive *(a)* the married couple's allowance, *(b)* the additional person's allowance and *(c)* the widow's bereavement allowance.

Mr. Maude: In 1991-92 the numbers of individuals benefiting from the specified allowances are estimated to be about *(a)* 11·1 million, *(b)* 600,000 and *(c)* 140,000.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue yield from freezing the married couple's allowance, additional personal allowance and widow's bereavement allowance—but not the married couple's allowance for pensioners—*(a)* in the first year, *(b)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, *(c)* in the first year and *(d)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, with (i) the current system of tax allowances and (ii) restricting all tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance to the basic rate.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that, at 1992-93 levels of income, freezing the married couple's allowance for taxpayers aged under 65, the additional personal allowance, and the widow's bereavement allowance in 1992-93 would yield about £140 million in the first year and £180 million in a full year with the current system of tax allowances compared with the illustrative 4 per cent. indexation shown in table 4·2 of the autumn statement 1991. If all tax allowances and reliefs except the basic personal allowance were restricted to the basic rate, the yield from freezing the specified allowances would be about £130 million in the first year and £170 million in a full year. These allowances were not increased in the 1991 Budget.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the availability of special enterprise zone capital allowances—100 per cent. initial allowances or 25 per cent. writing down allowances—where a purchaser buys an unused building in an enterprise zone.

Mr. Maude: The intention underlying the enterprise zone capital allowances legislation is that the purchaser of an unused building should be entitled to initial allowances provided that the actual construction expenditure was incurred either within 10 years of designation of the zone or under a contract entered into during that period. Contrary to the Revenue's previous view and practice recent legal advice has indicated that the purchaser is not entitled to initial allowances, where an unused building is purchased after expiry of the 10-year life of the zone. The Government therefore intend to bring forward amending provisions in the 1992 Finance Bill to ensure that allowances remain available in these circumstances. The legislation would have effect from today. In the meantime, with my approval, the Inland Revenue has today issued an extra-statutory concession under which it will continue to apply its existing practice to past and current transactions. The impact of this measure on tax receipts will be nil. It simply gives effect to the tax treatment originally intended.

The Government also intend to amend the regulations defining an enterprise zone property trust to ensure that the measures I have described feed through to the investors in these trusts. Under the existing regulations investors in EZPTs only have the benefit of enterprise zone allowances where an unused building is acquired during the lifetime of the zone. The cost to the Exchequer of aligning with other purchasers the entitlement of these investors to initial allowances is estimated at £5 million in 1992-93 and £35 million in 1993-94.

The Government intend to bring forward two further amendments to the enterprise zone legislation in the 1992 Bill, also with effect from today. The existing rule that a purchaser may only receive initial allowances where a building is sold unused, adversely affects developers who face a delay in securing a purchaser and who may want to let the building in the interim. This rule may act as a disincentive to the occupation of buildings and to business activity in enterprise zones. To mitigate that effect we intend to bring forward legislation providing that initial allowances will be available to a purchaser buying the building within two years of its first being used. The proposed provision would apply to buildings first brought into use after today. The basis for making any quantitative estimate of the effects of this extension on the yield of corporation tax in 1992-93 and 1993-94 would depend on many factors and be highly speculative. Any estimate of the total revenue effects and the impact on receipts as between individual financial years would therefore be very uncertain.

Finally, the Government propose to curtail the existing open-ended nature of relief for expenditure incurred under a contract entered into during the life of the zone. In future, it is proposed that such expenditure would only be eligible for initial allowances if it is incurred within 10 years of expiry of the zone.

These changes do not alter the Government's general policy towards enterprise zones announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment in his written answer of 17 December 1987, that there would not be a general extension of the enterprise zone experiment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Liquidations

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms in the building trade and the furniture trade have gone into liquidation in each year since 1979 inclusive; and, in each year, how many of those firms in each category were based in Tottenham or Edmonton prior to going into liquidation.

Mr. Redwood: The information on company liquidations resulting from insolvency in timber and furniture manufacturing and in construction for England and Wales is as follows. Information is not collected by location; nor is furniture collected separately from timber. No sectoral breakdown is available for voluntary liquidations.

Year	*Timber and furniture manufacturing*	*Construction*
1979	116	789
1980	211	949
1981	203	990
1982	350	1,422
1983	294	1,776
1984	382	1,831
1985	495	1,975

Year	Timber and furniture manufacturing	Construction
1986	427	1,914
1987	378	1,490
1988	242	1,471
1989	302	1,638
1990	391	2,445

Car Imports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the decision of the European Commission to clarify the role and activities of car intermediaries; and how his Department plans to monitor the activities of intermediaries to ensure that the Commission's regulations are enforced.

Mr. Redwood: The Government take the view that intermediaries should be free to operate within the EC car market. Intermediaries have a role to play in helping car buyers to obtain cars at the lowest price within the Community. Enforcement of European Commission regulations is a matter for the Commission. The EC Commission found that Peugeot had breached competition rules by upholding supply from Ecosystem. This case is now a subject of an appeal to the European Court of Justice.

Christmas Paper (Recycling)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will issue guidance on the recycling of Christmas packaging paper before Christmas.

Mr. Leigh: I have no plans to issue guidance specifically related to the recycling of Christmas packaging paper. My Department continues to encourage recycling of materials for which there is a market. No material should be collected unless an outlet has been identified.

Leg Irons

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information his Department has about the manufacture of leg irons in Britain, and the export from Britain of these products.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* The Department has no information on the manufacture of leg irons. I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave on this subject on 22 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *608*.

ECGD Insurance Services Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, columns *260-61*, what policy considerations will govern the allocation of export credit cover for high-risk projects in vested countries to *(a)* the continuing Export Credits Guarantee Department or *(b)* NCM Credit Insurance with assistance from the Export Credits Guarantee Department under the national interest reinsurance facility; what the anticipated budget for each category of cover is for *(a)* the remaining months of this year and *(b)* the next two financial years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* Export credit cover for project business in the vested markets will be given only by the continuing ECGD.

NCM will provide cover in the vested markets for non-project business only. It will do this without any assistance from ECGD under the national interest reinsurance facility.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mentally Disordered Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he received on his recent visit to Wandsworth prison on the level of post-release supervision of discharged mentally disordered prisoners.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has made no recent visits to Wandsworth prison.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners at present serving sentences in Her Majesty's prisons suffer from some kind of mental disorder; what percentage of these are receiving psychiatric treatment during their sentence; and what percentage receive specialist care upon release.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information is not available in the form requested. However, Prison Service medical officers carry out medical monitoring at regular intervals within their establishments. The most up-to-date information held centrally is for September. At that time, approximately 3·5 per cent. of prisoners were receiving some form of mental health care.

Where appropriate, arrangements are made for specialist care to continue after release. Short of an order under the Mental Health Act 1983, there are no powers to make medical treatment, or attendance for treatment, compulsory.

Evening Betting

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to permit the opening of off-course bookmakers shops during the evening hours.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We issued a consultation document in October inviting the views of all interested parties on whether licensed betting offices should be open in the evenings and, if so, at what times. The Government will give careful consideration to the views received in response to that document before deciding whether to allow evening opening.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he gives to magistrates adjudicating cases of shoplifting carried out in stores during Sunday trading.

Mr. John Patten: It would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to give guidance to magistrates about the way in which they exercise their judicial discretion in cases before them.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to bring

forward the necessary statutory instrument to include the offence of illegal Sunday trading within the list of offences for which a confiscation order may be made under the terms of section 71 and schedule 4 to the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Mrs. Rumbold: No.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current certified accommodation for Wandsworth prison while the two wings are closed for refurbishment.

Mrs. Rumbold: The current certified normal accommodation for Wandsworth prison is 965. This compares with a certified normal accommodation of 1,275 prior to the closure of D and K wings for refurbishment.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the reduction on a like-for-like basis, of prisoner overcrowding at Wandsworth prison based on the figures for 1980 to 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The overcrowding at Wandsworth Prison over this period is shown in the table. The average percentage occupancy is based on the relationship between the certified normal accommodation figure—that is, the capacity of the prison without overcrowding—at the end of the year and the average population throughout the year.

Year	*Average percentage occupancy*
1980	114
1981	115
1982	109
1983	109
1984-85	115
1985-86	120
1986-87	121
1987-88	118
1988-89	128
1989-90	119
1990-91	109

Bail Hostels

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the variations between bail hostels as to regimes, curfews and emphasis on enforcement of rules, including the distinction between open and closed hostels.

Mr. John Patten: Bail hostels are not divided into "open" or "closed". All bail hostels have 24-hour staff cover and operate a night-time curfew which may in individual cases be amended by bail conditions attached by the court. Hostel rules set out what conduct is acceptable and residents are required to comply with these rules as well as the conditions attached to their bail. Residents who fail to observe the curfew or comply with the rules are liable to be brought back to the courts to determine their disposal.

The regimes of individual hostels and their policy on enforcement of curfews and hostel rules are matters for local hostel management and such information is not held centrally.

National standards for the management of approved hostels will be introduced next year to ensure that good and consistent practice is applied in all hostels throughout England and Wales.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of locating bail hostels on the crime rate in the local area;

(2) what publicly available research evidence has been produced either by, or at the instigation of, his Department on the social and economic effects of bail hostels upon the communities where they are located.

Mr. John Patten: None.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the extent to which bail hostel functions may be contracted out to private organisations in the future.

Mr. John Patten: A number of private sector organisations are already involved in the provision of new bail hostels in co-operation with probation and voluntary sector managers. For example, Greater Manchester probation service contracted with a private sector developer to deliver the new bail hostel in Oldham and Cheshire probation service are working with a housing association in the development of hostels at Sandbach and Ellesmere Port. The extent to which other bail hostel functions may be contracted out to private and voluntary sector organisations in the future is being considered following responses to the consultation paper "Partnership in Dealing with Offenders in the Community" which was issued in 1990. We hope to make an announcement early in 1992.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued to the police in co-operating with management of bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: No specific guidelines have been issued centrally, but local managers liaise with station sergeants, community constables and other police officers on such matters as breach proceedings and security systems.

Channel Tunnel (Policing)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *572-74*, how many additional police posts were approved by the Kent police authority for funding for 1992-93; how many of those which he approved were for *(a)* channel tunnel duties and *(b)* motorway duties; and how many of these posts will be re-imbursed by Eurotunnel from January 1993.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has been asked to approve a total of 82 posts for Kent police for 1992-93. He has approved 42 posts to be funded in the normal way and 40 reimbursed posts. The 40 reimbursed posts are for the policing of the channel tunnel duties; 11 of the remaining 42 will be devoted to motorway duties. The chief constable will be able to deploy the remainder to general policing duties in Kent.

Prison Service (Review)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has yet received the report of Sir Raymond Lygo's review of the management of the prison service.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I received Sir Raymond Lygo's report on 12 December and am today placing copies of it, together with Sir Raymond's covering letter, in the Library. It provides a wide-ranging set of recommendations and I am extremely grateful to Sir Raymond for the speed and thoroughness with which he has completed his task. I am also grateful to Lord Rayner for the assistance which he has given.

The report acknowledges the particularly intractable problems with which the prison service has to deal, many of which are outside its control. Sir Raymond concludes, however, that it would be too easy to attribute all the problems of the service to external factors and that there are a number of fundamental managerial issues which need to be tackled. The most important of these is the relationship between the prison service and Ministers. Sir Raymond advocates a greater independence for the prison service from day-to-day ministerial oversight. This would be achieved by turning the prison service into an agency, appointing a part-time non-executive chairman of the Prisons Board, giving the board formal collective responsibility for the management of the service and establishing a supervisory board to advise me on major policy and resource issues. The post of director general would be filled by open competition.

Sir Raymond also makes a number of other important recommendations on management and personnel issues. He proposes that the prison service should recruit people from outside into some of its senior management posts; that there should be more contracting out of support services such as catering, the provision of clothing, building maintenance and possibly workshop management; that prison governors should wear uniforms; that if industrial relations in the service do not improve legislation should be introduced to restrict industrial action; and that far more work should be devolved from headquarters to local level.

A number of Sir Raymond's recommendations are in line with developments already taking place within the prison service, but, taken together, they amount to a radical programme of change both within the service and for its relationship to ministers. I am therefore inviting comments on Sir Raymond's report before reaching decisions in the spring. Copies of the report are being made available to interested organisations, including the trade unions, with an invitation to submit comments by Friday 28 February to Her Majesty's Prison Service, Room 601, Abell House, John Islip Street, London SW1P 4LH.

Category A Prisoners

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has now considered the report of the security audit of arrangements for holding and managing category A prisoners and the inquiry into the workings of DOC1 division in prison service headquarters, conducted by Mr. Ronald Hadfield and Mr. Gordon Lakes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Mr. Hadfield and Mr. Lakes submitted their report on 1 November 1991. It covers a wide field, ranging from detailed matters of physical security to wide-ranging proposals for collecting and disseminating intelligence. I am most grateful for the thorough way in which they have completed their work.

The report is both helpful and reassuring. Mr. Hadfield and Mr. Lakes indicate that they have found no evidence of general complacency about security standards and that governors are alert to security needs. Where they identified improvements in procedural and physical security which needed to be made, they communicated these to individual governors in the course of their inquiry. Many of their broader recommendations have already been implemented. Some, with considerable resource implications, will need to be prioritised; some involving building work will need to be phased into existing prison building and refurbishment programmes; and others will need to be the subject of consultation with prison governors and others in the prison service and, in some cases, outside.

There is only one recommendation which I have not accepted in its present form. With the aim of ensuring that attention is focused on prisoners posing the highest risk, Mr. Hadfield and Mr. Lakes proposed that standard risk category A prisoners in dispersal prisons should be re-categorised "category B (dispersal)". While I fully support this aim, I am concerned that re-categorisation in the form recommended could give rise to operational uncertainty or confusion whenever these prisoners need to be transferred or detained outside these very secure establishments. I therefore intend to consult the governors of dispersal prisons and others to see whether the underlying aims of the recommendation can be met in another way.

As far as DOC1 division is concerned, Mr. Hadfield and Mr. Lakes found staff there to be hard working and well motivated. They have, however, made recommendations relating to the strategic management of the division and proposals for a more systematic approach to the collation and dissemination of information and intelligence. A feasibility study into this latter proposal is already under way. All other recommendations have been accepted.

Mr. Hadfield and Mr. Lakes have prepared a version of their report which they have advised need not be withheld on grounds of security. I have accepted that view, and have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Prison Staff (Name Badges)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the target of December 1991 for the wearing of name badges by prison staff has been achieved.

Mrs. Rumbold: Work is progressing on the commitment given in the white paper "Custody Care and Justice", to the wearing of name badges by all staff on duty in prisons. Necessary consultation with the trade unions on the detailed arrangements, and the procurement mechanisms necessary for the quantities that will be required, result in the need for a slower introduction than originally targeted.

Chelmsford Prison

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to end slopping out in Chelmsford prison; when the practice is expected to end; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Preparatory work on providing in-cell sanitation at HM prison, Chelmsford, is now in progress. The first cells with in-cell sanitation will be available early in 1992 and the programme will be completed by 1994.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners there were in Chelmsford prison on 1 December 1990 and 1 December 1991; what is the maximum number of prisoners meant to be in Chelmsford prison; and if he will make a statement on what actions are being taken to reduce overcrowding in Chelmsford prison;

(2) if he will make a statement on the number of prisoners being held in police cells at Chelmsford police station; and what actions are being taken to alleviate the situation.

Mrs. Rumbold: The readily available information for the period in question is as follows:

	Number
Monday 3 December 1990	376
Monday 2 December 1991	389

The certified normal accommodation—that is the uncrowded capacity of the establishment—is 232 and its operational capacity is 392.

The prison service has now arranged for young men awaiting trial to be moved from Chelmsford prison and held in Rochester prison. This had removed the need for Chelmsford prisoners to be held in police cells. On 11 December, the latest date for which figures are available, there were five prisoners in Chelmsford police station who should have been held in Bedford prison.

My right hon. Friend and I regard reducing the number of prisoners in police cells as a high priority for the prison service. Every effort is being made to make the most efficient possible use of existing prison accommodation. New prison accommodation which will be provided in eight prisons which are due to open in 1992 should make a significant impact on this problem.

Television Franchises

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure those television companies which have lost their franchises continue to broadcast a full range of locally orientated programmes for the duration of their licence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The ITV companies operate under contract to the Independent Television Commission until the end of 1992. It is for the ITC to consider whether the amount of local interest programming in each area is adequate.

Immigration

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar can expect answers to immigration case letters to his Department of *(a)* 11 March 1990, relating to Musse Kinsi Abdi (Ref.: 095413); *(b)* 20 November 1990 and reminders relating to Yussuf Amina Hussein (Ref.: A 444158); *(c)* 12 December 1990 and reminders relating to Ahmed Hassan Jama (Ref.: H 353673); *(d)* 21 January 1991 and reminders relating to Arraleh Abdillarhi Dualeh (Ref.: A 132858); *(e)* 20 December 1990 and reminders relating to Mohamoud Mohamed Adan (Ref.: M 495545); *(f)* 23 January 1991 and reminders, relating to Mohamoud Saleh Mohamed (No reference number); *(g)* 21 February 1991 and reminders, relating to Farah Kin Abdi (Ref.: 095413); *(h)* 20 May 1991, relating to Mohamed Ilhan Farah (Ref.: N3/1581/261/11:/89); (i) 11 September 1991, relating to Mattan Ahmed Jama (Ref.: A 419816/A 437821); and *(j)* 3 October 1991, relating to Arrale Abdool (Ref.: A 132858/7).

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The hon. Member wrote to me on 15 November about each of these cases. I will be replying to that letter very shortly.

Television Licences

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether owners of a monochrome television receiver and a video recorder are required to pay the licence fee applicable for a colour receiver; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: While the Home Secretary still has responsibility for broadcasting policy matters, it now falls to the BBC to interpret the regulations and to determine the licensing requirements in individual cases.

However, I can confirm that a colour television licence is required for the installation or use of a video cassette recorder in conjunction with a monochrome television set.

Emergency Planning Review

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if proposals for local authorities to carry out the duties of the Royal Observer Corps outlined in his answer to the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 10 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 393-96, will include extending the VHF radio network to local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Local authorities have had a statutory planning responsibility for civil defence arrangements, including communications arrangements, since 1983.

The Home Office is considering the re-allocation to local authorities of the radio equipment previously used by the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation and the Royal Observer Corps in order to improve the facilities already provided by the emergency communications network.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans exist at present for the monitoring of nuclear burst information and radiation levels; what provisions govern the issue of dose rate meters; how these functions will continue after the abolition of the Royal Observer Corps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend announced on 10 July that the arrangements for monitoring nuclear bursts and radioactive fallout in wartime must be restructured. The Royal Observer Corps has therefore stood down from its operational monitoring role at the end of September 1991.

A radiation monitoring capacity has been planned and developed by local authorities since 1983. A total of 57,000

portable dose rate meters were issued to local authorities and the police and fire service in the mid-1980s and 22,000 meters have also been issued to other Government Departments. A further 9,000 are held in store to supplement existing issues stocks as necessary.

We intend to issue further guidance, in the new year, to local authorities on the new monitoring arrangements which were outlined in my right hon. Friend's July statement.

ENERGY

Miners Pension Fund

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps the Government are taking to ensure that the British Coal Mineworkers Pension Fund is fully protected both now and in the future, following the proposed privatisation of the industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government have confirmed that the pension interests of both current and past employees of British Coal will be properly safeguarded, as has been the case with previous privatisations.

Dounreay

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the present status of nuclear materials control and accountability at the Atomic Energy Authority's nuclear power development establishment at Dounreay.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Nuclear material control and accountability at Dounreay, as at other United Kingdom nuclear establishments, are carried out in accordance with carefully specified procedures and are subject to Euratom inspection. Those procedures identified a discrepancy and an investigation of the circumstances is now under way. It would be premature to anticipate the results of that investigation, which will be reported to my Department.

Methane Generation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has to encourage the generation and recovery of methane from waste not destined for combustion for electricity generation by means comparable to present regime for the encouragement of electricity generation by waste-based methane combustion provided under the renewables subsection of the non-fossil fuel levy.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department's R and D programme on landfill gas provides information for both electricity generation and heat producing applications and projects of the latter kind have been supported under the programme. Future policy on renewable energy is being considered by the renewable energy advisory group under my chairmanship.

Non-fossil Fuels

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to update or alter the Electricity (Non-Fossil Fuel Sources) (England and Wales) Order 1990 SI 1990, No. 263.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no intention of updating or altering the Electricity (Non-Fossil Fuel Sources) (England and Wales) Order 1990 SI 1990, No. 263.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what his proposals are for his Department's research and development budget for renewable energy beyond the current year.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department's renewable energy research, development and demonstration programme will continue to follow the progressive development strategy published in Energy Paper 55, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House. The programme budget has risen from £20·8 million in 1990-91 to £24 million for the current year.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has for the encouragement of DEFBOT —design, finance, build, operate and transfer—financing for those constructors interested in developing renewable sources of energy under the non-fossil fuel order, but not interested in long-term commitments to management of non-fossil fuel plant.

Mr. Moynihan: Developers are proposing a variety of mechanisms for the construction, financing and operation of renewable energy projects which are included in orders under the non-fossil fuel obligation. Comprehensive packages including design, construction and financing may well be the best arrangements in many circumstances and are therefore welcome. We will be monitoring arrangements developers make for projects and will be able to see to what extent this route is followed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to announce the completion of his negotiations with the European Commission regarding the extension beyond 1998 of the Renewable Subsection of the Electricity (Non-Fossil Fuel Sources) England and Wales Order 1991 and levy procedure; what consultations he has held on this with the Director-General of OFFER and the chairmen of the 12 regional electricity companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Discussions with the Commission of the European Community about the extension beyond 1998 of the non-fossil fuel obligation for renewable sources of energy have begun. The results of those discussions will be announced in due course.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to increase the funding of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom's contribution to the International Atomic Energy Agency for 1992 has already been fixed and will be paid in due course. Contributions in 1993 and 1994 will be determined by discussion with other member states and in the agency's board of governors in which the United Kingdom will play an active part.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Judges

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the names and ages of all the judges of *(a)* the Supreme Court and *(b)* the crown-county courts now aged 69 years or over.

The Attorney-General: On 1 December 1991, in addition to the Lord Chancellor and the four heads of divisions, there were 27 Lords Justices, 84 High Court judges, 457 circuit judges and 231 district judges. Those aged 69 or over represented about 19 per cent. of Lords Justices, 10 per cent. of High Court judges, 9 per cent. of circuit judges and 3 per cent. of district judges.

The names of those judges, with their ages, at 1 December 1991, is as follows:

	Age
Heads of Division	
Lord Lane	73
Lord Donaldson of Lymington	71
Lords Justices	
Lord Justice Watkins	73
Lord Justice Fox	70
Lord Justice Purchas	72
Lord Justice Gibson	69
Lord Justice Stocker	73
High Court Judges	
Mr. Justice Hollings	73
Mr. Justice Boreham	73
Mr. Justice Tudor Evans	73
Mr. Justice Hodgson	74
Mr. Justice Wood	69
Mr. Justice Eastham	71
Mr. Justice Sheen	73
Mr. Justice Mervyn Davies	73
Circuit Judges	
Judge Paterson	73
Judge David QC	69
Judge Francis	70
Judge da Cunha	69
Judge Barr	71
Judge Figgis	73
Judge Lovegrove QC	71
Judge Macnair	72
Judge Powell	71
Judge Monier-Williams	71
Judge Rutter	72
Judge Rubin	71
Judge Lymbery QC	71
Judge Willcock QC	70
Judge Wakley	74
Judge Hickman	69
Judge Starforth Hill QC	70
Judge Bolland	71
Judge Martin QC	72
Judge Booth QC	69
Judge Beezley	70
Judge Hayman	73
Judge Woolley	69
Judge Leo Clark QC	70
Judge Morris-Jones QC	69
Judge Garfitt	70
Judge Sir Sanderson Temple QC	70
Judge Galpin	70
Judge Band QC	72
Judge Blythe	74
Judge Cosgrave	71
Judge Dobry QC	73
Judge Shindler QC	69
Judge Cooke	74
Judge Aron Owen	72
Judge Hunter	70
Judge Clark	69
Judge Medd QC	72
Judge Roberts	70
Judge Birks	71
Judge McCarraher	69
Judge John Davies QC	70
Judge Fox-Andrews QC	69
District Judges	
District Judge Hibbert	69
District Judge Freeman	71
District Judge Park	69
District Judge Barker	71
District Judge Vaughan	69
District Judge Radford	69
District Judge Bilmes	71

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the names, with dates of appointment, together with last possible date of retirement, of all unretired judges of the Supreme Court and crown/county courts who have already acquired sufficient years of service on the bench to qualify for the maximum appropriate judicial pension.

The Attorney-General: Judges of the Supreme Court must retire on their 75th birthday. Normally, circuit judges and district judges must retire at the end of the completed year of service in which they attain the age of 72, but may be extended in office by the Lord Chancellor, where he considers it desirable in the public interest, up to the age of 75. The last possible date of retirement for each judge is therefore 75.

Set out in the table, with their date of appointment and 75th birthday, are the judges of the Supreme Court who on 1 December 1991 had served for at least 15 years in that capacity, the condition necessary to qualify for an immediate pension on retirement of half annual salary:

	Date of appointment to Supreme Court	*Date of appointment to current post*	*75th Birthday*
Heads of Divisions			
Lord Lane	30 September 1966	15 April 1980	17 July 1993
Lord Donaldson of Lymington	30 September 1966	30 September 1982	6 October 1995
Sir Stephen Brown	30 September 1975	11 January 1988	3 October 1999
Lords Justices			
Lord Justice Watkins	19 April 1971	15 April 1980	11 November 1993
Lord Justice Fox	30 September 1975	9 February 1981	8 October 1996
Lord Justice Purchas	22 April 1974	30 September 1982	19 June 1994
Lord Justice Stocker	4 June 1973	3 February 1986	7 October 1993

	Date of appointment to Supreme Court	Date of appointment to current post	75th Birthday
High Court Judges			
Mr. Justice Hollings	19 April 1971	—	12 June 1993
Mr. Justic Boreham	10 January 1972	—	19 October 1993
Mr. Justice Tudor Evans	21 June 1974	—	20 June 1995

Set out in the table, with their date of appointment and 75th birthday, are the circuit judges who on 1 December 1991 had served at least 15 years in that capacity and had attained the age of 65, the conditions necessary to qualify for an immediate pension on retirement of half annual salary:

	Appointment	75th Birthday
Judge Paterson	30 September 1968	10 July 1993
Judge Robert David, QC	1 May 1969	30 April 1997
Judge Francis	7 July 1969	19 March 1996
Judge Heald	6 February 1970	19 August 1998
Judge da Cunha	1 June 1970	6 September 1997
Judge Barr	20 October 1970	20 November 1995
Judge Figgis	19 March 1971	12 September 1993
Judge Lovegrove, QC	23 April 1971	22 December 1994
Judge Verney	2 June 1971	19 July 1999
Judge Gower, QC	1 October 1971	6 November 2000
Judge Head	8 November 1971	4 December 1998
Judge Anwyl-Davies, QC	1 January 1972	11 July 1998
Judge Irvine	1 January 1972	10 July 2000
Judge Macnair	1 January 1972	27 February 1994
Judge Powell	1 January 1972	29 July 1995
Judge Monier-Williams	1 January 1972	29 April 1995
Judge Lloyd	1 January 1972	3 January 1999
Judge Rutter	1 January 1972	18 September 1994
Judge Allarice	1 January 1972	18 December 1999
Judge Hammerton	15 May 1972	18 June 2001
Judge Rubin	11 September 1972	8 March 1995
Judge Lymbery, QC	29 September 1972	14 November 1995
Judge Willcock, QC	29 September 1972	22 February 1996
Judge Harrison-Hall	29 September 1972	20 December 2000
Judge Morgan Hughes	10 November 1972	20 January 2001
Judge Norwood	12 January 1973	24 March 2001
Judge Cotton	12 January 1973	6 March 2001
Judge Wakley	2 March 1973	7 July 1992
Judge Baker	30 March 1973	5 November 2000
Judge Phelan	1 July 1974	25 July 1998
Judge Hickman	1 July 1974	2 October 1997
Judge Starforth Hill, QC	5 July 1974	30 September 1996
Judge Bolland	2 September 1974	30 March 1995
Judge Wickham	3 September 1975	22 September 2001
Judge Arthur	17 October 1975	29 April 1998
Judge Martin, QC	12 December 1975	26 November 1994
Judge Robert	12 December 1975	19 November 1998
Judge Stroyan, QC	12 December 1975	27 November 1999
Judge Booth, QC	13 January 1976	20 August 1997
Judge Beezley	30 April 1976	30 January 1996
Judge Wooley	30 April 1976	28 November 1997
Judge Hayman	30 April 1976	24 August 1993
Judge Lea Clark, QC	1 July 1976	15 December 1995
Judge Nina Lowry	2 July 1976	6 September 2000
Judge Anthony Cox	2 July 1976	21 April 1999

Set out in the table, with their date of appointment and 75th birthday, are the district judges who on 1 December 1991 had served in that capacity for at least 20 years and had attained the age of 65, the conditions necessary to qualify for an immediate pension on retirement of half annual salary:

	Date of Appointment	75th Birthday
District Judge Hibbert	19 November 1962	24 March 1997
District Judge Dunford	3 December 1962	22 September 2001
District Judge Elliott	2 December 1963	8 February 1999
District Judge Lam	2 December 1963	3 March 2000
District Judge Parmiter	15 June 1970	21 November 2001
District Judge Horsey	1 January 1971	20 July 2001
District Judge Jeffreys	1 January 1971	19 September 2001
District Judge Freeman	1 September 1971	3 September 1995

Separate arrangements may apply in certain circumstances to judges who have served previously in other judicial capacities.

Ambrosia Creamery (Accident)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Attorney-General if he will request the Health and Safety Executive to provide him with information about the activities of the executive in connection with the accident to Holger Subir Majhi at Ambrosia creamery, Lifton, Devon, on 28 November 1990 with a view to requesting the Director of Public Prosecutions to initiate a prosecution under his powers under section 38 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

The Attorney-General: I have received information from the Health and Safety Executive concerning the accident to Mr. Majhi on 28 November 1990 from which I have concluded that there is no basis for referring the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Magistrates (Poll Tax Briefing)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 10 December, *Official Report*, column *361*, what was the date of the Coventry justices' seminar; how many magistrates attended; how many magistrates who did not attend have subsequently sat on poll tax cases; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the note referred to.

The Attorney-General: The Coventry justices' seminar was held on 19 June 1991; 123 magistrates attended. The number of magistrates who did not attend but subsequently sat on community charge cases could not be obtained without disproportionate expense. Notes passed between a justices' clerk and his justices are confidential and I do not have a copy.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Achievements

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the achievements of Her Majesty's Government over the past year.

The Prime Minister: Over the past year the Government have continued to pursue policies designed to remove barriers to choice and provide opportunities for all the

people of this country, to lay a sound basis for future prosperity, to play a full part in Europe and to contribute to international peace and stability.

Our firm financial policies, reaffirmed by our commitment to the exchange rate mechanism, have reduced inflation sharply and permitted interest rates to be substantially reduced. The conditions necessary for resumed growth have now been established.

We have brought forward a Bill to provide for a new council tax, to replace the community charge in financing local government spending. The Budget helped businesses, large and small. We have taken initiatives to encourage innovation in industry and improve export performance. We have initiated joint action with industry to help identify and pursue export opportunities. Its first use in Kuwait in March 1991 has already led to orders worth £480 million for the United Kingdom. We have opened up telephone services to allow consumers to benefit from more competition.

We have continued to promote wider share ownership. National Power, PowerGen and the non-nuclear electricity companies in England, Wales and Scotland, have been privatised, and a second tranche of shares in British Telecom sold to the public. One in four members of the adult population now owns shares.

We have provided more effective training opportunities and are now offering a wider range of help than ever before to assist unemployed people in obtaining new jobs.

We attach the highest priority to ensuring that everyone, whoever and wherever they are, will have access to high quality public services. The citizens charter White Paper announced a progamme of radical initiatives to improve efficiency and standards in the public services and the privatised utilities. Measures to implement the charter feature strongly in our legislative programme for 1991-92, and we have published a number of charters relating to individual public services.

In education we have taken action to raise standards and improve parental choice. The new School Teachers' Review Body for England and Wales provides the means of improving teachers' status. The development of the national curriculum will encourage concentration on basic skills. Our legislation to provide parents with more information about the performance of schools and to improve school inspection will give parents the basis on which to exercise the choices they are now able to make.

We have also introduced legislation to widen access to an expanded higher education system, to abolish the distinction between universities and other higher education institutions, and to raise the status of vocational education and of further education colleges. Spending on science by the Department of Education and Science will top £1 billion for the first time next year and will rise in real terms for the remainder of the planning period.

The Government's health policies have led to an increase in the number of patients treated, a reduction in waiting times and lists, better quality of care and greater awareness of health promotion. The consultative document "The Health of the Nation", setting out a comprehensive strategy for better health, has been warmly welcomed. Record levels of resources have been made available: spending on the NHS in 1992-93 will be nearly £36 billion, a 55 per cent. increase in real terms since 1978-79.

The NHS reforms are already yielding tangible benefits for patients. Fifty seven NHS trusts have already been established and 99 more approved for start-up in 1992. The growing enthusiasm for trust status within the NHS means that many more will follow. GP fundholding is also proving a success. The patients charter has set out patients' rights for the first time and the standards which will be set nationally and locally by the health service, including the first waiting time guarantees.

We have maintained our determined efforts in the fight against crime. We have established a royal commission on criminal justice to examine the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in securing the convictions of those guilty of criminal offences and the acquittal of the innocent.

In September we published "This Common Inheritance —The First Year Report" reporting progress on the whole range of environmental policies and concerns, and listing 400 separate measures taken during the year.

We have continued to raise standards of food safety, ensure consumers are better informed, make environmental considerations central to agricultural policy, with significant extension of environmentally sensitive areas, as well as raising standards of animal welfare in Britain and taking the lead in setting higher standards throughout Europe.

We have continued to invest record sums in the improvement of the United Kingdom's transport infrastructure, and to encourage greater private sector involvement in the provision of transport facilities.

We have introduced legislation to enable the structure of English local government to be reviewed so as better to reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

We have continued to work for the regeneration of our cities. The city challenge initiative encourages local authorities to work with their private, voluntary sector and local community partners, to regenerate key areas of their cities.

In the housing field, the new emphasis on quality of performance will further improve the renovation and management of council housing in England and Wales. We have introduced pilot rent-to-mortgage schemes, to extend tenants' opportunities to buy their homes, and brought in new arrangements to ensure that tenants are actively consulted in local authorities housing plans. A special programme of hostels and permanent housing is reducing the numbers of people sleeping rough in central London.

We have improved the position of children. We have increased child benefit, and pledged to increase it in line with inflation in the future. The Children Act, which came into effect this year, is a far reaching reform of children's rights. The new Child Support Agency, for which legislation was passed earlier this year, will improve the assessment, collection and enforcement of child maintenance. We are continuing to enhance the opportunities for disabled people to play an independent part in society. In 1991 we enacted legislation providing for two new social security benefits for disabled people.

Nineteen-ninety-one has seen momentous events internationally. The United Kingdom's contribution to the liberation of Kuwait enhanced our standing in the world, strengthened the power of the United Nations and proved again the outstanding abilities of our armed forces. We responded rapidly to the Iraqi Government's persecution of their own people, proposing the safe-haven initiative to provide an effective response to the plight of ordinary Iraqis. Building on the experience of this we

launched the United Kingdom's disaster relief initiative in August to provide the capacity for an immediate informed response to disasters round the world.

The United Kingdom contributed significantly to the successful outcome of the Maastricht European Council. We have fully protected the United Kingdom's right to take its own decision at the appropriate time on a move to the final stage of economic and monetary union. On political union, we have agreed a series of pragmatic reforms, many as a result of our proposals, which will make the Community more efficient, accountable and effective internationally. The new treaty on European union will also strengthen inter-governmental co-operation outside the framework of the Community in important areas like the fight against crime.

We have continued to make steady progress towards completing the single market by the end of 1992 and to the conclusion of the GATT Uruguay round. The Government welcomed the determination confirmed at the Maastricht European Council to keep the Community open to our European neighbours who are eager for closer links and eventual membership. It was agreed that in 1992 negotiations would take place on applications from countries of the European Free Trade Area to join the Community, and, in due course, consideration would be given to the further possibility of expansion towards eastern Europe.

I chaired the successful G7 economic summit in July and the historic meeting between summit leaders and President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union. The Government vigorously denounced the attempted coup in the Soviet Union and supported President Yeltsin's courageous stand against it. I have co-ordinated the G7 programme of aid for the republics of the Soviet Union.

The Government played an important part in concluding the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe. We have continued to make a substantial contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, participating fully in adapting the alliance, and developing a stronger European defence identity in the Western European Union. We have taken steps to restructure the armed forces to reflect the changed international situation.

We have made a determined effort to promote democracy and good government in the developing countries, as a means to improving the prospects for development and the reduction of poverty. My announcement at the Commonwealth conference in Harare in October that the United Kingdom would implement the Trinidad terms debt reduction initiative for the poorest and most indebted countries was widely and warmly welcomed. If all official creditors followed this lead, the total debt of the countries concerned would be reduced by some $17 billion. At our instigation, the European Community and the Commonwealth have taken a more positive attitude to the welcome developments in South Africa, and sporting links have now been re-established with that country.

These policies will ensure that the United Kingdom is well placed and fully prepared to meet the challenges of the 1990s.

World Memorial Day

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what contribution Her Majesty's Government intends to make to World Memorial Day on 1 January 1992.

The Prime Minister: The Government note the inauguration of World Memorial Day on 1 January 1992 by the Memorial Fund for Disaster Relief. Her Majesty's Government will continue to do all they can to promote a safer and better world which is the stated object of the fund.

Packaging

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to require Her Majesty's Stationery Office to use biodegradeable rice paper chips in place of styrofoam chips in packaging of parcels.

The Prime Minister: This question falls within the scope of the policy announced in Cm 1263; arrangements have therefore been made for the controller and chief executive of HMSO to respond direct. Copies of the letter will be placed in the House Library and with the Public Information Office.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Michael Welsh: To ask the Prime Minister what evaluation has been made of which countries have the know-how for safely dismantling nuclear weapons.

The Prime Minister: The five declared nuclear weapon states have to dismantle and reassemble their own nuclear weapons in order to maintain their stockpiles. The break-up of the Soviet Union may pose a range of problems, including the safe disposal of nuclear warheads. We are addressing these problems, in consultation with our allies and Soviet and Republic authorities.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Norris: To ask the Prime Minister if he has yet received the supplementary report from the Doctors and Dentists Review Body on pay for out-of-hours work for junior doctors.

The Prime Minister: This report has been published today and copies are in the Vote Office. I am grateful to the review body for the work they have put into preparing it.

The report recommends new rates of pay for out of hours working by hospital doctors and dentists in training, following the agreement reached earlier this year which introduced new working arrangements and set limits on contracted hours of duty for such staff.

The recommended rates of pay are:—

100 per cent. of the basic rate for full shift working
70 per cent. of the basic rate for partial shift working
50 per cent. of the basic rate for on call rota working

The recommendations, which arise from a major restructuring of working arrangements, are estimated to increase the paybill for hospital doctors and dentists in training by 5·8 per cent., given certain assumptions about the proportion of staff who will be contracted under each working pattern.

The Government have decided to accept these recommendations and we shall seek to implement them as soon as possible in order to help to deliver our objective of reducing the hours of work of hospital doctors and dentists in training. The costs of the award will be met by health authorities and boards from the resources which we have made available to them this year and which we shall be making available to them in future years.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Scientific Facilities (Germany)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the German Federal Minister of Science regarding the exchange use of large scientific facilities; and what was his response.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend has not received any formal representations on this subject from the German Federal Minister of Science.

"Your Child and the National Curriculum"

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many requests for the booklet "Your Child and the National Curriculum" have been received from schools in Cleveland; how many will be distributed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend published "Your Child and the National Curriculum"—as promised in the citizens charter—on Monday 9 December. Sample copies have been sent to all schools in England and they have been invited to order as many additional copies as they need to distribute to parents. One school in Cleveland has already put in its order. We expect many more to follow suit over the next week and in the new year.

Special Needs

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will require establishments of further education to conduct a multi-professional assessment of the needs of students with special educational needs as a basis for their education provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Colleges of further education already carry out assessments of their students' needs, seeking specialist support as necessary. These assessment processes are not prescribed.

Trafford Park Schools

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what approaches he has received regarding the establishment of independent schools in the Trafford Park area of Manchester; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: A group of people interested in establishing an independent primary school in the Trafford Park area of Manchester met members of Her Majesty's inspectorate in March this year. In November, a deputation representing the optimum schooling project, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery), came to see me about applying for voluntary aided status for any such school.

No application has yet been made for registration as an independent school, neither have any proposals been made to establish a voluntary aided school.

Free School Meals

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out, by local education authority, the number of pupils taking free school meals for 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Fallon: This information is available in table A15 of "Statistics of Education: Schools" 1989 and 1990 respectively, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps are being taken to make an assessment of the future capital requirements of further education colleges for new building and repairs.

Mr. Fallon: The Department keeps under regular review the capital requirements of further education colleges for new building and repairs, in the light of information from LEAs and advice from HMI. Following the establishment of the new Further Education Funding Council, subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill, we shall look to the council for advice on colleges' future capital requirements.

GCSE

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he intends to hold further discussions with interested parties about the implementation of new GCSE syllabus following his recent announcement on coursework; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Officials of the Department and those of the School Examinations and Assessment Council and the examining groups are in close and constant contact about the implementation of my right hon. and learned Friend's recent decisions on GCSE coursework.

Science and Technology

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has made any assessment of resources needed to implement fully at primary level the national curriculum in science and in technology; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: In determining education's share of the proposed local authority grant settlement an assessment was made of the broad range of pressures facing the education service, including the implementation of the national curriculum in primary schools. The proposed settlement allows for LEAs in England to spend £18,730 million on education in 1992-93. This represents an increase of 7·1 per cent. over last year's settlement, which was itself a 16 per cent. increase over the previous year. Within the grants for education support and training programme of support for the national curriculum in 1992-93 totalling some £176 million, £5·5 million will be earmarked specifically for training courses for primary science teachers, and £15 million will be made available for equipment.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all grant-maintained schools showing whether they were county, voluntary aided or voluntary controlled, indicating denomination where appropriate, before becoming grant maintained.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

School Name	*Ex-status*	*Denomination*
Adams' Grammar School	VA	—
Arnewood School	C	—
Audenshaw School	C	—
Avon Valley School	C	—
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	C	—
Bankfield High School	C	—
Baverstock Grant-Maintained School	C	—
Beaconsfield High School	C	—
Beechen Cliff School	C	—
Bingley Grammar School	VA	—
Bishopshalt School	C	—
Bourne Primary School	C	—
Bournemouth School	C	—
Bridgewater Hall School	C	—
Brindley Hall School	C	—
Bullers Wood School for Girls	C	—
Burgate School	C	—
Caistor Grammar School	VC	—
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School	VA	RC
Carre's Grammar School	VC	—
Castle Hall Grant-Maintained School	C	—
Chalvedon School	C	—
Claremont High School	C	—
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	VC	—
Collingwood School	C	—
Colyton Grammar School	C	—
Coopers School	C	—
Crossley Heath School	VC	—
Dartford Grammar School	VC	—
Ecclesbourne School	C	—
Francis Bacon School	C	—
Graveney School	C	—
Great Barr School	C	—
Guildford County School	C	—
Handsworth Grammar School	VA	—
Hardley School	C	—
Haydon School	C	—
Heckmondwike Grammar School	C	—
Hendon School	C	—
Highams Park School	C	—
Homewood School	C	—
King Edward VI School	VC	—
Kingsley Park Middle School	C	—
Kingswood School	C	—
Kirkbie Kendal School	VA	—
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	C	—
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	C	—
Langley Park Boys School	C	—
London Oratory School	VA	RC
London Nautical School	C	—
Long Field High School	C	—
Manor High School	C	—
Marling School	VC	—
Moseley Park GM School	C	—
Moulton Primary School	C	—
Netherthorpe School	VC	—
Newton Bluecoat C of E GM Primary School	VA	CE
Nonsuch High School for Girls	C	—
North Halifax High School	C	—
Old Swinford Hospital	VA	—
Oldfield School	C	—
Parmiters School	VA	—
Pate's Grammar School	VA	CE
Queen Elizabeth's GM School for Boys	C	—
Queen Elizabeth's GM Grammar School	C	—
Queensbury School	C	—
Queensmead School	C	—
Raines Foundation School	VA	CE
Reading School	C	—
Ribston Hall High School	C	—
Rickmansworth School	C	—
Sexey's School	VC	—
Skegness Grammar School	C	—
Small Heath School	C	—
Southfield School for Girls	C	—
Southlands Comprehensive School	C	—
Southlands School	C	—
St George's School	C	—
St John the Baptist School	VA	RC
St Helen's Primary School	C	—
St Augustine RC School	VA	RC
St George's CE School	VA	CE
St Francis Xavier's College	VA	RC
St Bartholomew's School	VC	—
St James' CE School	SA	CE
Stratford School	C	—
Stroud High School	VC	—
Thamesview School	C	—
The Kings School Grantham	VC	—
The Cornwallis School	C	—
The Maplesden Noakes School	C	—
The GS For Girls Wilmington	C	—
Vyners School	C	—
Watford Girls' Grammar School	VC	—
Watford Grammar School	VC	—
Westcliff High School for Boys	C	—
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys	C	—
Wilsons School	VA	CE
Wold Newton Primary School	C	
Wolverhampton Girls High School	C	—
Woodroffe School	C	—
Wymondham College	C	—

Key:

SA: Special Agreement.
C: County.
VC: Voluntary Controlled.
RC: Roman Catholic.
VA: Voluntary Aided.
CE: Church of England.

European Football Championship

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Football Association bid for the 1996 European championship to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Atkins: On 25 November, I confirmed that I was happy for an exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall relating to the Football Association's bid to host the 1996 European championship. I understand that the exhibition is to be held on 9 March.

Degrees

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the outcome of his consultations about degree awarding powers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department is today writing to all higher education institutions in the following terms:

"DEGREE AWARDING POWERS, FUTURE VALIDATION ARRANGEMENTS AND POLYTECHNIC DESIGNATIONS

1. The Department's paper "Degree Awarding Powers and University Titles" consulted on the Government's proposals concerning:

(a) criteria for the extension of degree awarding powers beyond the present polytechnics;

(b) arrangements for the Secretary of State to secure advice on whether institutions meet those criteria; and

(c) criteria for extending the university title beyond the present polytechnics.

2. This letter sets out the Government's conclusions on the first two issues in the light of comments received on the consultation paper. It also sets out the Government's views on the related issues of future validation arrangements for institutions which do not receive degree awarding powers, and on whether there should be further polytechnic designations. The Secretary of State will announce his decision on criteria for university titles shortly (although this letter confirms one of the criteria in paragraph 17 below). These conclusions are subject to the passage of the FHE Bill currently before Parliament.

Criteria for Degree Awarding Powers

3. The Government's proposal was that the criteria for taught course degrees should be those recommended by the CNAA and the Academic Audit Unit of the CVCP, and which are essentially those used by the CNAA now for the purpose of considering whether to grant institutions accredited status. The principal criterion would be that any institution seeking degree awarding power for taught courses would need to be a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to quality assurance supported by effective assurance and enhancement systems. Characteristics of institutions which met this general principle were that they would have:

(a) a commitment to quality assurance and a demonstrably successful system for defining objectives and safeguarding standards. The system would be sufficiently rigorous to respond to changing circumstances including changes in senior staff;

(b) systems for the identification and transmission of good practice. Staff would be exposed to developments and innovations in the work of others inside and outside the institutions;

(c) appropriate external academic and professional points of reference so that standards were judged against those of the wider academic world. This was especially important in smaller and monotechnic institutions where limited breadth or volume of work would otherwise be a significant disadvantage;

(d) suitable administrative systems supporting an institution's academic work.

4. This proposal has been unanimously welcomed. In the light of that, the Secretary of State has decided that it should be confirmed.

5. The consultation paper proposed additional criteria which would need to be met for an institution to be empowered to award its own research degrees. These were that any such institution would need to demonstrate that the arrangements for the supervision of research students and the management of their programmes, and the extent to which students were exposed to a research environment, would need to be broadly comparable with the position in universities which already have such a power.

6. In the light of a generally favourable response, the Secretary of State has decided to confirm this proposal as well. He does, however, attach considerable importance to the criteria being judged robustly. It should not be assumed that having research capability within an institution is a sufficient condition.

7. It was drawn to the Department's attention in some responses that Clause 72 of the Further and Higher Education Bill as published restricted the power of the Secretary of State to confer degree awarding powers on institutions which are to be funded by the new Higher Education Funding Councils. A Government amendment to the Bill has been tabled which extends the Secretary of State's powers so that it covers all institutions providing higher education.

Arrangements for Considering whether Institutions meet the Criteria

8. The consultation paper proposed that during the period up to the formal dissolution of the CNAA, the Government would look to the Council to advise on whether institutions validated by it meet the degree awarding criteria, and would in parallel appoint Ad Hoc Committees to look similarly at institutions which are validated by universities. This approach was widely welcomed in the responses and is now confirmed by the Secretary of State.

9. CNAA is already working on an accreditation programme. An announcement about the arrangements for the DES Ad Hoc Committees will be made early in the new year.

10. As to securing advice for the Secretary of State in the longer term after the dissolution of the CNAA, some respondents supported the proposal that the Ad Hoc Committee approach should be retained if it works well. However, others saw this as a job for the Quality Audit Unit, while some other respondents considered that the Higher Education Funding Councils should have the main responsibility. This is not a matter which requires an immediate decision and the Secretary of State will reflect further on the options with a view to reaching a decision in the spring.

The Dissolution of the CNAA and New Validation Arrangements

11. The DES intends, in line with the CNAA's Strategic Plan of October 1991, that the CNAA will continue to operate until 30 September 1992. After that date it will concentrate primarily on winding up its affairs in preparation for dissolution, which is likely to be at the end of March 1993. This means that the CNAA will not be able to register any students for taught courses or programmes of research after 1 September 1992, although it will confer awards to all successful students whose courses of study or programmes of research are completed in the 1991/92 academic year. Alternative arrangements for the making of awards and the validation of courses will therefore need to be put in place in time for the 1992-93 academic year.

12. The Secretary of State has considered carefully the representations made that the CNAA should continue in existence until all then students presently registered with it have completed their courses of study. To achieve that, the CNAA would have to continue for at least three more years. Given that its other functions will have transferred elsewhere, the Secretary of State does not consider this to be a practical proposition. The Secretary of State does not believe it would be practical to transfer the CNAA Charter to another institution.

13. Ministers accept that it will be essential for alternative arrangements to be made for those students to be able to

continue on the course of study on which they enrolled, in the institution at which they enrolled and with the expectation of receiving a degree or other award at the end of that course of similar standing to the CNAA degree or award for which they initially registered. The Secretary of State expects that to be achieved through institutions not empowered to grant thier own awards entering into a validation agreement with institutions which are so empowered, and awarding their qualifications. It is for institutions which are not presently assured of receiving degree awarding powers to ensure that a suitable agreement is in place by next September.

14. There are many current examples of university validation, and there are now more potential validating institutions. The CDP and the CVCP have indicated their readiness to help in identifying suitable validating institutions in particular cases. In addition, the Open University is intending to offer a validation service for those colleges without degree awarding powers which for various reasons, do not wish to become associated with a local institution. I understand that the Open University expects this to operate broadly on CNAA lines. The Secretary of State recognises that there may be other degree awarding institutions which will also wish to offer a similar service. For its part, the CNAA has given an undertaking to assist all of the associated institutions needing to transfer validation from CNAA to another degree awarding body, whatever relationship they eventually choose.

15. Against this background, the Secretary of State is satisfied that the necessary arrangements are capable of being made within the planned timetable.

Polytechnic Designation

16. At present, an institution which meets certain student numbers criteria, and has received CNAA taught course accreditation, may apply for polytechnic designation. The Secretary of State is advised by the PCFC whether an institution meets the criteria, and if so advised would normally expect to approve the application. The White Paper announced that all polytechnics would be allowed to adopt the university title.

17. The consultation paper included proposed criteria for extending the university title beyond the present polytechnics. These included the requirement that such institutions should have the full range of degree awarding powers. Powers to award taught course degrees will not be sufficient. In the light of the Government's plans for a new framework, Ministers do no expect to approve further applications for polytechnic status."

Science Budget

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the distribution of the science budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have considered the Advisory Board for the Research Councils' recommendations on the distribution of the science budget, and have decided to accept the board's advice that the £1,050 million for 1992-93 should, subject to approval by Parliament of the Estimates in due course, be allocated as follows:

Table 1

	£ million
Allocations for 1992-93	
Agricultural and Food Research Council	107·3
Economic and Social Research Council	45·1
Medical Research Council	227·6
Natural Environment Research Council	129·7
Science and Engineering Research Council	520·8
The Royal Society	17·3
The Fellowship of Engineering	1·6
ABRC (Secretariat and Science Policy Studies)	0·5
Centre for the Exploitation of Science and Technology	0·1
	[1]1,050·0

[1] Including £48 million (1992-93), £125 million (1993-94) and £154 million (1994-95) consequent on the new arrangements for funding of scientific work in higher education institutions announced on 8 November 1990, *Official Report*, columns *27-28*.

I have also accepted the board's recommendation that for planning purposes the following indicative allocations should be adopted for the years 1993-94 and 1994-95:

Table 2

		£ million
	1993-94	*1994-95*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	110·1	119·9
Economic and Social Research Council	53·9	58·3
Medical Research Council	256·8	275·2
Natural Environment Research Council	141·0	148·6
Science and Engineering Research Council	587·0	621·7
The Royal Society	18·0	18·7
The Fellowship of Engineering	1·7	1·8
ABRC (Secretariat and Science Policy Studies)	0·5	0·6
Centre for the Exploitation of Science and Technology	0·1	0·1
Unallocated	12·0	25·4
	[1]1,181·1	[1]1,270·3

[1] Including £48 million (1992-93), £125 million (1993-94) and £154 million (1994-95) consequent on the new arrangements for funding of scientific work in higher education institutions announced on 8 November 1990, *Official Report*, columns *27-28*.

The indicative planning figures contain an unallocated £12 million in 1993-94 and £25·4 million in 1994-95 on which I expect to receive further advice from the ABRC in due course.

The science budget for 1992-93, excluding the dual support transfer, is 25 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979-80. By 1994-95 it will be over 30 per cent. higher. This represents a significant increase in provision for science, and I hope that the scientific community at large will see it as further evidence of the importance which the Government attach to civil science in the research Councils.

I am particularly pleased that the rising profile of the science budget over the next three years will give the research councils a sound basis for their forward planning and enable them to launch a number of exciting new research initiatives. These include the MRC's neurosciences approach to human health, the AFRC's intracellular signalling in plants and animals, and the NERC's land-ocean interactions study. This increase will also enable SERC to give a substantial boost—an extra £40 million by 1994-95—to its programme of research grants to higher education establishments.

I am publishing the board's advice today. Copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Voluntary-aided Schools

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on capital allocations for 1992-93 for voluntary-aided schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Local Education Authorities have today been informed of their allocations for capital spending by the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools in their areas for 1992-93. Overall grant for voluntary aided schools announced in the autumn

statement rises from £131·5 million to £151·6 million, an increase of over 15 per cent. A total of £55 million has been set aside for grant aid for expenditure on external repairs, up nearly 16 per cent. on the amount set aside in 1991-92. Grant for capital spending rises from £84 million to £96·6 million, an increase of 15 per cent.

I have authorised work to start on 61 major building projects over £250,000, compared with 47 such projects in 1991-92, and 37 in 1990-91. A further 47 such projects have been put on the design list to enable detailed costed plans to be drawn up, compared with 29 such projects in 1991-92.

Eight of the projects authorised for a start are to improve technology facilities, and form part of my recently announced technology schools initiative.

I am allocating over £19 million in grant which will support £23 million of minor works improvement projects, costing less than £250,000, by formula to each LEA based on the number of pupils in voluntary aided schools in the authority. This is double the amount I was able to allocate for equivalent projects for 1991-92, and is being distributed by formula to all LEAs for the first time. I have also allocated additional funds for 35 specific minor projects to provide new school places or to achieve the removal of surplus places.

During the course of the year work has also been approved to start on a further 27 projects which have been the subject of statutory proposals approved since my statement last December.

The amount available for allocating to new improvement/replacement projects at voluntary aided schools in 1992-93 is up no less than 114 per cent. on the equivalent figure last year, at £36 million.

The effect of this substantial increase in capital grant available for projects at voluntary aided schools, taken together with the increases of the last five years, which have seen capital grant allocations rise from £32 million in 1987-88 to £96 million for 1992-93—an increase of 300 per cent.—will have enabled work to go ahead at several hundred voluntary aided schools, including many which have been bidding for allocations for many years. The distribution of funds for projects under £250,000 means that all LEAs will be able to embark on a continuing programme of improvements at their voluntary-aided schools—the first time they will have been in a position to do this.

These increases demonstrate the government's continuing determination to improve school buildings and underlines our commitment to the continuing partnership between Church and state in the delivery of education.

The allocations to LEAs, together with a list of the projects authorised to start or on which design work can begin, and a list of projects approved as a result of statutory proposals since last year's announcement together with those projects which form part of the technology schools initiative, follows.

Voluntary aided and special agreement schools—1992-93 allocations

Note:

1. Project Category codes as follows:
   S – Starts list; D – Design list; MJ – Major work; MN – Minor work; BN – (New school places); SP – Surplus place removal; IR – Improvement or replacement; [1] – Approved statutory proposals; [2] – Ex 1991-92 design list
2. Figures in brackets following named project[illegible] amount allocated for expenditure in 1992-93 expressed in £ thousands.

Local education authority	*Total allocation 1992-93*	*Allocation components*			*Agreed projects ex 1991-92 or earlier design list or approved statutory proposals*	*Project category*	*New named projects major starts and design lists and minor projects*	*Project category*
		Commitments	*Minor works improvement*	*Major and minor projects*	*(allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)*		*(allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)*	
	£ thousands	£ thousands	£ thousands	£ thousands				
City of London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Camden	1,390	335	230	825	Maria Fidelis Sec, Somerstown RC S (163)	MN, IR[2]	Jewish Free School Sec (662)	S, MJ, IR
Greenwich	144	—	144	—	—	—	—	—
Hackney	309	2	152	155	—	—	Hackney Free and Parochial CE S (105)	D, MJ, IR
							Skinners Company Upper Girls (50)	S, MJ, IR
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,822	1,670	141	11	—	—	Lady Margaret CE S (11)	D, MJ, IR
Islington	145	6	139	—	—	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	3,243	1,638	125	1,480	St. Thomas More RC S (1,480)	S, MJ, IR[1,2]	—	—
Lambeth	217	4	167	46	—	—	St. Luke's CE P (exc nursery) (46)	D, MJ, IR
Lewisham	813	25	187	601	Christ The King VI FM Centre (580)	S, MJ, SP[1]	All Saints CE P (21)	D, MJ, IR
Southwark	996	35	236	725	St. Peter's CE P (640)	S, MJ, IR[2]	St. John's and St. Clement's CE P (85)	D, MJ, IR
Tower Hamlets	2,647	2,462	185	—	—	—	—	—
Wandsworth	178	—	139	39	—	—	St. Joseph's RC P (39)	D, MJ, IR
Westminster	849	43	210	596	St. Marylebone CE S (543)	S, MJ, IR[2]	St. George's RC S (53)	D, MJ, IR
Barking	482	427	55	—	—	—	—	—
Barnet	700	32	305	363	—	—	Hasmonean High J S (300)	S, MJ, IR
							Christ Church CE S (63)	D, MJ, BN
Bexley	1,880	1,778	102	—	—	—	—	—
Brent	219	18	171	30	—	—	St. Gregory's RC High (30)	S, MJ, IR

Local education authority	Total allocation 1992-93	Allocation components: Commitments	Minor works improvement	Major and minor projects	Agreed projects ex 1991-92 or earlier design list or approved statutory proposals (allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)	Project category	New named projects major starts and design lists and minor projects (allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)	Project category
	£ thousands	£ thousands	£ thousands	£ thousands				
Bromley	84	1	83	—	—	—	—	—
Croydon	1,090	561	179	350	—	—	Archbishop Tenison CE-S (350)	S, MJ, IR
Ealing	174	—	131	43	—	—	St. Saviour's CE P (43)	D, MJ, IR
Enfield	1,260	949	197	114	—	—	St. George's RC JMI (11) Bp Stopford CE S (53) Winchmore Hill, St. Paul's Primary (50)	S, MJ, IR D, MJ, IR MN, BN
Haringey	247	82	138	27	—	—	SS David and Katherine CE S Phase 1 (27)	S, MJ, IR
Harrow	121	—	94	27	—	—	Wealdstone Salvatorian RC Coll (27)	D, MJ, IR
Havering	196	50	146	—	—	—	—	—
Hillingdon	230	—	118	112	—	—	Bishop Ramsey CE S (112)	S, MJ, IR
Hounslow	968	9	141	818	St. Mark's RC Sec (818)	S, MJ, IR[1]	—	—
Kingston upon Thames	146	—	96	50	—	—	St. Lukes CE P (50)	D, MJ, IR
Merton	131	13	118	—	—	—	—	—
Newham	484	390	94	—	—	—	—	—
Redbridge	150	16	106	28	—	—	Trinity High RC (28)	D, MJ, IR
Richmond upon Thames	84	—	84	—	—	—	—	—
Sutton	1,770	1,686	84	—	—	—	—	—
Waltham Forest	57	—	57	—	—	—	—	—
Birmingham	1,799	859	620	320	St. Ambrose Barlow RC P (300)	S MJ IR[1]	St. John Wall RC Comp (20)	S MJ IR
Coventry	2,910	2,725	185	—	—	—	—	—
Dudley	903	689	96	118	Jesson's CE P (26) Castle High (Phase III) (57)	D MJ IR[1] D MJ SP[1]	Bishop Milner RC S (35)	D MJ IR
Sandwell	62	—	62	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull	405	41	114	250	Berkswell CE Combined (250)	S MJ IR[1]	—	—
Walsall	137	—	137	—	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	336	—	97	239	Holy Trinity RC P (200)	S MJ IR[1]	St. Peter's Collegiate CE S (39)	D MJ IR
Knowsley	330	25	205	100	Huyton CE Inf (70)	MN IR[1]	Whiston, St. Leo's Primary (30)	MN SP
Liverpool	5,396	4,080	650	666	St. Lawrence CE P (Phase 2) (250) St. Finbar's RC P (250) St. Gregory's RC P (103) Cardinal Heenan RC S (195)	S MJ IR[1] S MJ SP[2] S MJ SP[2] S MJ SP[1,2]	St. Francis de Sales RC P (12) St. Nicholas Primary (56)	D MJ IR MN SP
St. Helens	1,194	980	214	—	—	—	—	—
Sefton	2,135	1,398	326	411	St. Luke's CE P, Halsall (400)	S MJ IR[1]	English Martyrs RC P (11)	D MJ IR
Wirral	331	100	181	50	—	—	St. Anne's RC P, Rockferry (50)	S MJ SP
Bolton	1,561	1,328	233	—	—	—	—	—
Bury	434	155	154	125	Our Lady of Grace RC P (125)	S MJ IR[2]	—	—
Manchester	1,836	1,363	439	34	—	—	Xaverian VI Form College (34)	D MJ IR
Oldham	671	106	212	353	Crompton House CE S (300)	S MJ IR[2]	Blue Coat CE S (53)	D MJ IR
Rochdale	395	239	156	—	—	—	—	—
Salford	547	337	181	29	—	—	Broughton Jewish Primary (29)	D MJ IR
Stockport	136	9	127	—	—	—	—	—
Tameside	205	47	120	38	—	—	St. Thomas More RC S (38)	D MJ IR
Trafford	1,709	1,571	113	25	St. Anne's RC P (25)	MN IR[1]	—	—
Wigan	1,498	749	459	290	Sacred Heart RC P (250)	S MJ SP[2]	Bryn, Downhall Green Primary (40)	MN SP
Barnsley	180	23	57	100	—	—	St. Michael's RC S (100)	S, MJ, IR
Doncaster	95	—	95	—	—	—	—	—
Rotherham	105	32	73	—	—	—	—	—
Sheffield	1,169	30	103	1,036	All Saints RC S (1,036)	S, MJ, IR[2]		

Local education authority	Total allocation 1992-93	Allocation components: Commitments	Minor works improvement	Major and minor projects	Agreed projects ex 1991-92 or earlier design list or approved statutory proposals (allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)	Project category	New named projects major starts and design lists and minor projects (allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)	Project category
	£ thousands	£ thousands	£ thousands	£ thousands				
Bradford	541	298	243	—	—	—	—	—
Calderdale	125	12	113	—	—	—	—	—
Kirklees	917	8	130	779	St. John Fisher RC High (760)	S, MJ, BN[3]	Batley Parish CE P (19)	D, MJ, BN
Leeds	5,830	5,466	364	—	—	—	—	—
Wakefield	351	145	121	85	Sandal Magna Endowed CE (27) St. [illegible]'s CE P (53)	MN, IR[1] MN, IR[1]	St. Austin's J & I (5)	MN, BN
Gateshead	271	136	98	37	—	—	St. Edmund Campion RC S (37)	D, MJ, IR
Newcastle upon Tyne	512	338	146	28	—	—	Sacred Heart RC P (28)	D, MJ, IR
North Tyneside	411	—	71	340	—	—	St. Thomas More RC S (170) Walkend CE P (170)	S, MJ, IR S, MJ, SP
South Tyneside	77	—	77	—	—	—	—	—
Sunderland	1,129	986	143	—	—	—	—	—
Avon	292	28	251	13	—	—	Portbury CE P (13)	S, MJ, IR
Bedfordshire	438	208	188	42	—	—	Cardinal Newman RC High (42)	D, MJ, IR
Berkshire	585	265	243	77	—	—	Windsor, Trinity St. Stephen First (77)	MN SP
Buckinghamshire	1,057	374	153	530	Waddesdon CE S (530)	S, MJ, IR[1]	—	—
Cambridgeshire	835	483	152	200	Bury CE P (200)	S, MJ, IR[1]	—	—
Cheshire	2,902	2,180	558	164	St. Mary's RC P Middlewich (105)	S, MJ, IR[1]	Bunbury, Aldersey Primary (47) St. Nicholas RC S, Hartford (12)	MN, BN D, MJ, BN
Cleveland	1,281	704	345	232	—	—	Sacred Heart RC P (208) English Martyrs RC S (24)	S, MJ, IR S, MJ, IR
Cornwall	262	139	123	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	1,938	1,403	332	203	—	—	Keswick Sec (143) St. Bernard's RC S, Barrow (60)	D MJ IR D, MJ, SP
Derbishire	710	459	251	—	—	—	—	—
Devon	1,702	1,176	288	238	—	—	St. Boniface RC P (238)	S, MJ, IR
Dorset	3,114	2,156	292	666	Dorchester Upper (300) St. Mark's CE P (208) St. John's CE P (76) St. Walburgas RC P (15)	S, MJ, SP[1] S, MJ, BN[1] S, MJ, BN[1] MN BN[1]	St. Edward's RC S (42) St. Osmund's CE M (25)	D, MJ, IR S, MJ, IR
Durham	1,313	1,070	243	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	873	141	219	513	—	—	Bp. Bell CE S, Eastbourne (53) Cardinal Newham RC Sec (460)	D, MJ, BN S, MJ, BN
Essex	709	41	486	182	Bradwell on Sea Endowed CE P (150)	S, MJ, IR[1]	Loughton, Duvenant Foundation (32)	MN, BN
Gloucestershire	1,897	1,227	203	467	St. Peter's RC High (300)	S, MJ, BN[1]	Hardwicke Parochial (150) Mitcheldean Endowed (17)	MN, BN MN, SP
Hampshire	664	250	334	80	—	—	Milford-on-Sea CE P (80)	MN, BN
Hereford and Worcester	1,119	551	336	232	—	—	St. George's CE P (176) Bp. of Hereford Bluecoat CE S (15) Ross on Wye, Lea Primary (20) Evesham, St. Mary's (21)	S, MJ, IR D, MJ, IR MN, BN MN, BN
Hertfordshire	932	175	584	173	—	—	John F. Kennedy RC S (53) St. George's Sec (120)	D, MJ, IR MN, BN
Humberside	399	1	158	240	—	—	St. Bede's RC Sec (240)	S, MJ, IR
Isle of Wight	141	95	46	—	—	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	3,048	2,154	559	335	Bennett Memorial CE S (254)	S, MJ, IR[1]	St. George's CE M, Sheerness (81)	D, MJ, IR
Lancashire	6,437	4,642	1,548	247	—	—	St. Joseph's RC P, Barnoldswick (13) St. Mary's RC High (88) Sacred Heart RC P (12) Lytham St. Anne's, Lytham St. Peter's (30) Over Wyre, St. Aidan's High (14) Preston, Fulwood St. Clare's (30) Blackburn, Holy Souls (30) Tarleton, Hesketh with Becconsall (30)	S, MJ, IR D, MJ, SP D, MJ, SP MN, BN MN, BN MN, BN MN, BN MN, BN

Local education authority	Total allocation 1992-93 £ thousands	Allocation components: Commitments £ thousands	Minor works improvement £ thousands	Major and minor projects £ thousands	Agreed projects ex 1991-92 or earlier design list or approved statutory proposals (allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)	Project category	New named projects major starts and design lists and minor projects (allocations shown in brackets £ thousands)	Project category
Leicestershire	1,091	24	217	850	—	—	Sacred Heart RC P (26)	D, MJ, IR
							English Martyrs RC S (824)	S MJ, IR
Lincolnshire	695	—	169	526	—	—	Butterwick, Pinchbeck Endowed (80)	MN, BN
							Cowbit Endowed Primary (69)	MN, BN
							Leadenham Primary (28)	MN, BN
							Lincoln, Bp. King Primary (108)	MN, BN
							Partney Primary (32)	MN, BN
							Spalding Parish Church Primary (60)	MN, BN
							Spalding Grammar (149)	S MJ, IR
Norfolk	376	—	147	229	Archbishop Sancroft CE High (129)	S, MJ, IR[1]	Notre Dame RC High (47)	D, MJ, IR
							King's Lynn, Whitefriars Primary (35)	MN, BN
							Cromer, The Belfry Primary (18)	MN, BN
North Yorkshire	884	369	257	258	St. Wilfred's RC P (258)	S, MJ, IR	—	—
Northamptonshire	599	—	187	412	St. David's RC Middle (359)	S, MJ, IR[1]	Bp. Stopford CE S, Kettering (53)	D, MJ, IR
Northumberland	659	198	135	326	St. Mary's RC P, Hexham (326)	S, MJ, BN[1]	—	—
Nottinghamshire	418	106	312	—	—	—	—	—
Oxfordshire	2,353	1,980	196	177	Our Lady of Lourdes RC P (157)	S, MJ, IR[1]	St. Edburg's CE P, Bicester (20)	D, MJ, SP
Salop	126	12	114	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	2,597	2,173	128	296	St. Augustine of Canterbury CE/RC S (150)	S, MJ, BN[1]	—	—
					Trull CE Primary, Taunton (146)	MN, BN[1]	—	—
Staffordshire	2,107	1,456	385	266	St. George's RC P, Stoke (100)	S, MJ, IR[1]	St. Peter's CE P, Stoke (120)	S, MJ, IR
							St. Peter's CE High Stoke (46)	D, MJ, IR
Suffolk	340	183	129	28	—	—	S, Lowestoft, St. Mary's Primary (28)	MN, BN
Surrey	946	362	504	80	St. Nicholas CE P (36)	S, MJ, IR[1]	St. Peter's RC Comp, Guildford (44)	D, MJ, IR
Warwickshire	920	672	238	10	—	—	St. Francis RC P, Bedworth (10)	S, MJ, IR
West Sussex	649	335	314	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	769	596	200	—	—	—	—	—
TOTALS	108,073	64,895	22,993	20,185				

3VA school statutory proposals approved since December 1990—funds allocated as committed expenditure

LEA and School

Bedfordshire—St. John Rigby RC
Bexley—St. Stephen's RC
Birmingham—Erdington CE
Bolton—St. Peter's CE, Smithhills Dean
Cheshire—Newman RC, Warrington
St. Gregory's, Warrington
Devon—St. John's RC, Tiverton
Rockenford CE
Dorset—Verwood Emmanuel CE
Enfield—New Jewish Primary School
Lambeth—Archbishop Sumner
Lancashire—Burnley Wellfield CE/Meth
St. John/St. Michael CE
St. Alban's RC, Blackburn
Bishop Martin, Skelmersdale
English Martyrs, Preston
St. Oswald, Accrington
St. James, Chorley
Thornton Cleveleys, St. Teresa's (previously part of St. Bernadette's)
Lewisham—St. Ursula's
Liverpool—St. John's RC
St. Gerard's RC
Manchester—St. Andrew's CE
Shropshire—St. Matthew's CE
Tameside—St. Mary's CE
Tower Hamlets—Blessed John Roche
Bishop Challoner

Technology initiative VA projects named to start in 1992-93

Barnsley—St. Michael's Secondary
Birmingham—St. John Wall Comp, Hansworth
Brent—St. Gregory's High, Kenton
Cleveland—English Martyrs, Hartlepool
Croydon—Archbishop Tenison's
Hackney—Skinner's Company Upper Girls
Haringey—St. David and St. Katherine
Humberside—St. Bede's, Scunthorpe

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Croatia and Slovenia

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of people who are refugees from the war in Croatia and how they are being cared for; and whether the United Kingdom will be providing any financial or other assistance to them.

Mrs. Chalker: The latest estimates suggest that 40,000 Yugoslavs are currently in Hungary.

UNHCR has a budget of US$2·9 million to provide assistance for 15,000 refugees for the period October to December 1991. The League of Red Cross Societies is also contributing and has just launched a new appeal to cover the needs of some 20,000 people over a further three-month period. Some 40 per cent. of the UNHCR budget is spent on food allowances, the remainder on

domestic items, heating allowances, sanitation and registration equipment. The 1992 UNHCR budget is currently being finalised.

I also refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 3 December at columns *96-97*, to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) on 21 November at column *292* and to the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on 9 December at column *277*.

UNCTAD Report

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he received a copy of the United Nations conference on trade and development report 1991; and what contribution was made to the report by his Department's Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: Copies of the 1991 report on the United Nations conference on trade and development were received by the Government in September. While the report is produced by the UNCTAD secretariat on its own responsibility, it also reflects discussion in UNCTAD's trade and development board. Officials from the Overseas Development Administration regularly attend sessions of the board and contribute to the discussion on a whole range of issues, including debt and sustainable development, as well as the crucial question of good government.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the position of Gibraltar in the proposed European Community convention on external frontiers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my noble Friend Lord Cavendish in another place on 21 November, Vol. 532, c. 1017.

Hong Kong

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Hong Kong Legislative Council on the proposed court of appeal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 4 December, the Legislative Council passed a motion calling for greater flexibility about the number of overseas judges who might sit on the court of final appeal. My noble Friend the Minister of State discussed this matter with OMELCO members during his recent visit to Hong Kong. Our policy remains as stated in the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 4 December, Vol. 200, c. *155*.

European Parliament

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current policy towards the remit and powers of the European Parliament.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The treaty on European union agreed at Maastricht includes a package of measures to extend the European Parliament's non-legislative powers, particularly to enable it to monitor the Commission more effectively. We also accepted a new procedure giving the EP a right to block legislation in a number of specified areas. A declaration attached to the treaty calls for closer contacts between the European Parliament and national Parliaments.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the recent report, "Options and Opportunities: The N.P.T. Extension Conference of 1995" by G. Bunn, C. N. Van Doren and D. Fisher.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This report has already been received in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resources were committed by Her Majesty's Government to supporting the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe apparatus and secretariat in 1991; and what resources are earmarked for the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe support in 1992.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom contribution to the costs of CSCE institutions and meetings is set at 9·1 per cent. of the total. In 1991 the United Kingdom contributed £46,416 each to the costs of the CSCE secretariat and conflict prevention centre and £28,654 to the cost of the office of free elections.

We have estimated that the United Kingdom's share of the costs of the above institutions in 1992 will be approximately £200,000.

TRANSPORT

Highways

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total expenditure of all English local highway authorities for each year between 1980-81 and 1991-92 on *(a)* new construction and improvement, *(b)* structural maintenance and *(c)* current maintenence.

Mr. Chope: For the years 1983-84 to 1989-90 the information is published in tables in part 1 of successive editions of "Transport Statistics Great Britain", copies of which are held in the library. Information for 1980-81 to 1982-83 is not readily available in the form requested. Information for 1990-91 and 1991-92 is not yet available.

Vehicle Immobilisation

Mr. Dickens: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to meet the motor industry to discuss the immobilisation of vehicles to prevent theft of vehicles and joy riding.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has met representatives of the motor industry a number of times, most recently on 11 December, to discuss a wide range of matters relating to car crime including the immobilisation of vehicles to prevent theft.

Severn Tunnel

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what surveys have been carried out in the air purity and quality in the Severn tunnel; what system of continuous monitoring is in operation; what surveys have been carried out into the chemicals present in the deposits in the Severn tunnel; what chemicals were found and in what quantity; whether any of the chemicals and diesel fumes found to be present have been identified as a cause of cancer in humans; what was the last date on which environmental health officers carried out tests on the air and chemical content of the tunnel; what is the frequency of such environmental health tests; and if he will place in the Library copies of such reports on deposits, chemicals and air.

Mr. Freeman: The tunnel is equipped with a force ventilation system which gives a 5 to 12 mph wind speed throughout. The last extensive survey of air quality in the tunnel was carried out by British Rail Research, Scientific Services, in 1969. The survey report concluded that under normal running conditions no hazard existed if the fan stopped for short periods. Even under worse conditions, in which locomotives stopped in the tunnel, but with the forced ventilation running, conditions were not considered hazardous.

The Health and Safety Executive undertook a survey in 1979 which found that the level of fumes in the tunnel did not constitute a hazard. Further surveys by BR between 1978 and 1980 reached a similar conclusion. There is no continuous monitoring, but British Rail tells me that a monitoring exercise, which has been planned for some time, is due to start next month.

No hazardous chemical deposits have been found. I understand that the tunnel is drier now than at any previous time due to remedial works.

Health and safety matters which arise within the Severn tunnel are the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate which carries out periodic inspections. Environmental health officers have no jurisdiction in the tunnel.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains carrying various fuel oils and chemicals pass through the Severn tunnel in the opposite or same direction during the time period that passenger services are operating each week and each day; and when it is proposed to change service times and timetables so that freight does not dovetail with passenger services in the tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: These are operational matters for British Rail. BR's operating procedures do not allow more than one train at a time travelling in the same direction to use the Severn tunnel. No train carrying dangerous goods is permitted to be in the tunnel at the same time as a passenger train. HSE's railway inspectorate sees no need to restrict further the passage of trains conveying non-dangerous goods.

Trains

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to require British Rail passenger trains to provide positive pressure breathing air in passenger carriages when passing through or stuck in tunnels.

Mr. Freeman: No. HSE's railway inspectorate advises that the natural movement of air within railway tunnels is sufficient to ensure the health and safety of passengers and staff.

River Thames

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been conducted into the use of the River Thames as a mass transit system.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department does not know of any recent studies that have been conducted into the use of the River Thames as a mass transit system, other than some confidential market research carried out by the private sector.

Airports (Luggage)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will investigate the number of occasions on which passengers' unaccompanied luggage has been loaded on to aircraft at Scottish airports in the last 12 months; what steps he intends to take to stop this practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Airlines are required to identify instances where passengers fail to join their flight, and to ensure that any bags checked in by those passengers are not carried without first being subjected to security controls. No useful purpose would be served by establishing the number of occasions on which such bags have been carried from Scottish airports in the last 12 months, nor in placing a total prohibition of the carriage of such bags.

Recent press articles relate not to the above procedure but to a more sophisticated one involving identifying bags which are travelling unaccompanied because, for example, they have been misrouted. The technology necessary to achieve this satisfactorily in the complex environment of a major airport is only now becoming available. A number of promising systems are under development, but they have not yet reached the stage where it would be reasonable for us to set a firm date by which they must be in use.

Workers' Transport

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will invite the European Commission to proceed with the proposed directive 4315/91 under article 75; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have expressed our concern to the Commission about the proposed treaty base. We will continue to press for the directive to be taken under article 75.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the details and address of the section and directorate within the European Commission concerned with the exclusion of non-workers from the proposed directive (4315/91) on transport of workers with reduced mobility.

Mr. Freeman: The proposal originated in directorate C of directorate-general V, employment, industrial relations and social affairs, Rue de la Loi 200, 1049 Brussels.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if taxi cabs are to be covered by the proposed directive 4315/91.

Mr. Freeman: It is not clear from the text whether taxis are to be covered. We will pursue this point in discussions on the text.

Licensed Vehicles

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department holds on the number of licensed motor vehicles in the north-west region.

Mr. Chope: The records kept at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency show that the total number of vehicles licensed in the north-west region as at 31 December 1990 was 2,563,825.

Civilian Aircrew

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring forward proposals to provide for legal sanctions to be invoked against a civilian pilot incapacitated by alcohol from flying safely and to define on whose responsibility such a person may be denied the right to take over the controls of an aircraft.

Mr. McLoughlin: Article 52(2) of the Air Navigation Order 1989 already provides that

"a person shall not, when acting as a member of the crew of any aircraft . . . be under the influence of drink or a drug to such an extent as to impair his capacity so to act."

The penalty for contravening that provision can be a fine, or imprisonment for up to two years, or both.

Article 95(1) of the order empowers the Civil Aviation Authority or an authorised person to direct the operator or commander of an aircraft not to make a flight, and to detain the aircraft, if it appears that the flight would be in contravention of the order and be a cause of danger. An "authorised person" is defined as a constable or a person authorised by the Civil Aviation Authority. In addition, article 54 of the order requires that "all lawful commands" given by an aircraft's commander for safety reasons should be obeyed; this may be of relevance to my hon. Friend's question if the aircraft has two pilots on board.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering legal provisions for compulsory testing of flight crew for alcohol in certain circumstances—such as after an accident—with associated penalties; he is advised that primary legislation would be needed.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information is collected by the Civil Aviation Authority on the number of civil aviation pilots and aircrew flying with British airlines who were disciplined for drunken behaviour in 1985 and in 1990.

Mr. McLoughlin: Disciplinary action against pilots or aircrew is a matter for the airline concerned. All flight crew licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority must hold a valid medical certificate; I am advised by the authority that in 1990 two professional pilots were refused a certificate for alcohol-related reasons and five had their certificates suspended. Figures for 1985 are not available.

Motor Cyclists (Helmets)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has undertaken of the effectiveness of compulsory helmet wearing for motor cyclists.

Mr. Chope: A study carried out when compulsory helmet wearing was introduced in 1973 indicated that it would result in a substantial reduction in casualties. The number of motor cyclists killed in 1990 was lower than in 1973, but it is not possible to isolate the contribution made by helmet wearing. Comprehensive studies carried out in the United States have indicated that the fatality rate for motor cyclists is twice as high in those States which do not require helmets to be worn—or require wearing only by young riders—as in those states where helmets were required to be worn by all riders.

Ilkley Bypass

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what environmental matters he has taken into consideration in considering the alignment of the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass.

Mr. Chope: Appropriate environmental matters are being taken into account in considering the alignment of the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass. Specialist environmental consultants have been employed to work with the designers of the scheme and those national and local bodies having an environmental interest have been consulted.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what account he has taken of the effect on the proposed Nidderdale area of outstanding natural beauty when considering the alignment of the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass.

Mr. Chope: When developing options for the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass, the Department of Transport was aware of the proposal to create a Nidderdale area of outstanding natural beauty. The Department was formally consulted by the Countryside Commission about this proposal.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the alignment of the preferred route of the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass.

Mr. Chope: Responses to the public consultation including technical and environmental aspects are still being considered. I shall not be able to announce a preferred route until this work has been completed.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with representatives of *(a)* the city of Bradford metropolitan district council, *(b)* Harrogate district council, and *(c)* North Yorkshire county council over the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass.

Mr. Chope: These local authorities were all formally consulted about the options for an Ilkley bypass as part of the public consultation.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the impending decision on the alignment of the proposed A65 Ilkley bypass.

Mr. Chope: The Department of Transport received more than 4,000 responses to the public consultation on Ilkley bypass. These included representations from national and local bodies.

Railway Signals (Warning Device)

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require British Rail to install an electronic warning device in railway signals that would sound an alarm horn in the train driver's cab if the engine were to pass a signal set at red.

Mr. Freeman: Most of the BR network is already fitted with an automatic warning system—AWS—which sounds a warning horn every time the train approaches a signal showing a restrictive aspect—double yellow, yellow or red. When the train approaches such a signal, the driver has to acknowledge the AWS by pressing a button which silences the warning horn and causes an indicator disc to display black and yellow segments as a reminder to the driver. If he does not acknowledge the warning within three seconds, the brakes of the train will be applied automatically. The AWS does not distinguish between the different restrictive aspects.

BR is also evaluating two automatic train protection —ATP—systems which will automatically slow a train which passes a double yellow or yellow, to a speed which will enable it to stop at the next red signal. ATP will also automatically impose any speed restriction required, including temporary ones required for track maintenance.

SS Richard Montgomery

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 13 November, *Official Report*, column 521, if he is yet in a position to make a statement on the findings of the most recent survey of the wreck of the vessel Richard Montgomery.

Mr. McLoughlin: I will be making a full report on the SS Richard Montgomery early in the new year.

Highway Assessment Programme

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with representatives from highway authorities concerning the feasibility of installing the multicriteria analysis of scheme options in transport systems into the highway assessment programme.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* None.

M4

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport from what time the Severn bridge and the M4 were closed on Sunday 8 December; what stretch of the M4 was involved in total; at what time each was re-opened; and what was the cause of the closure.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* I shall write to the hon. Member.

HEALTH

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

Mr. Dorrell: The chief executive of NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency (NHS Estates) was appointed on 1 April 1991 for a fixed term of five years.

His salary is £55,000 plus an annual non-pensionable performance-related bonus of up to £7,000.

The chief executive of the Medicines Control Agency was appointed as from 10 April 1989 for a fixed term of five years. His appointment for the remainder of his contract was confirmed when the MCA became a "next steps" agency on 11 July 1991.

His salary is £65,993 plus an annual non-pensionable performance-related bonus of up to £13,150.

Pregnancies

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into the living standards and health of pregnant girls under 18 years of age and into the outcomes of such pregnancies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department commissioned a wider study from the Institute for Social Studies in Medical Care. The findings were published by HMSO in 1986 in "Teenage Mothers and their Partners", a copy of which is available in the Library, and in a series of articles in professional journals.

The Department has provided core funding to the national perinatal epidemiology unit since 1978. The unit continuously monitors and analyses data which are routinely collected by the Government Statistical Service and the national health service, to assess how the outcome of pregnancy and social, economic and medical factors thought to be associated with it vary both over time and from place to place within England and Wales. Analysis of the outcome of pregnancies in girls under 18 years of age is encompassed within this work.

Patients' Money (Guidance)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to revise the guidance on the use of patients' money contained in HM(71)90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Officials are currently considering, in consultation with the Public Trust Office and other interests whether any further advice needs to be issued.

Outside Tenders

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions exist on the freedom of a regional health authority, where a district health authority accepts an outside tender for architectural, ancillary or computer and training services at lower cost than the same services provided by the regional health authority, to penalise the district health authority financially by withholding other moneys or by continuing to charge for the overheads associated with the services concerned.

Mr. Dorrell: There are a wide variety of circumstances in which a regional health authority could reasonably withhold money from a district health authority or charge for overhead costs properly incurred for the benefit of districts within the region. A regional health authority would not, however, wish to penalise a district health authority for contracting out a service at lower cost. On the contrary, in line with the Government's policy as set out in "Competing for Quality", a regional health authority would wish to facilitate such developments.

Waiting Lists, Yorkshire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by specialty the waiting times for referrals by general practitioners to consultants in the Yorkshire regional health authority before a patient is seen.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bryan Askew, the chairman of the Yorkshire regional health authority, for details.

NHS Operations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority, and specialty, national health service operations that can be performed within six weeks waiting time.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The time patients wait depends on the severity and urgency of their condition and not on the intended treatment or operation. About half all patients admitted to hospital from the waiting lists are admitted in five weeks or less.

Tattoos (Removal)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate has been made of expenditure involved in the removal of tattoos within the NHS for the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

(2) what percentage of the in-patient waiting lists for 1990-91 were cases relating to the removal of tattoos; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what estimate he has made of the total number for the current year on NHS in-patient and out-patient waiting lists who require removal of tattoos; what percentage of total waiting lists these represent; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what information he has showing by region the numbers of patients waiting for tattoo removal in the NHS and the percentage of the whole waiting list represented by this group in each case in *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* the current year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Waiting list information is available centrally by specialty only and not by the intended method of treatment or operation. Out-patient waiting list information is not collected centrally. No estimate has been made of expenditure involving the removal of tattoos.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department proposes to put out to consultation its guidance to local authorities on charging for personal social services; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Officials are already consulting the local authority associations on a new financial assessment for people in residential care, to take effect from April 1993. Preliminary work to produce guidance about charges for day and domiciliary services has also commenced, and will involve the local authority associations. For both there will be further consultation in 1992.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding local authorities have received from his Department to implement the Children Act 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 5 December at column *199*.

After-care Support

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding local authorities receive for after-care support programmes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) on 9 December at columns *331-32*.

Private Health Care

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedure patients should use for activating the commitment in paragraph 9.6 of the White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: District health authorities and GP fundholders are responsible for securing health services that reflect the needs and preferences of their residents and patients. They have the freedom to purchase services from provider units within their own or another health authority, from NHS trusts or from the independent sector. The choice of service provider will depend on a local assessment of people's needs, the relative quality and cost-effectiveness of the services on offer, and the views of local people. District health authorities will be able to establish people's preferences in a number of ways, including discussions with local GPs, community health councils and other local organisations, and local surveys. Patients will be able to make their preferences known direct to GP fundholders.

Medical Records (Access)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the guidance issued by his Department on a patient's right of access to medical records; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The NHS Management Executive issued guidance to the NHS in August, entitled "Access to Health Records Act 1990—A Guide for the NHS", under cover of HSG(91)6. A copy of the guidance is available in the Library.

National Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the estimated percentage change in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, for hospital and community health services expenditure in 1991-92;

(2) what was the estimated percentage change in expenditure in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, on family practitioner services current in 1991-92;

(3) what was the percentage change in estimated current expenditure in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, on local authority personal social services in 1991-92;

(4) what was the estimated percentage change in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, in total NHS expenditure in 1991-92;

(5) what was the percentage change in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, for health and community health services current expenditure in 1990-91;

(6) what was the percentage change in expenditure in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, on family practitioner services current in 1990-91;

(7) what was the estimated percentage change in current expenditure in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, on local authority personal social services in 1990-91;

(8) what was the percentage change in real terms, adjusted for pay and price increases in the NHS, in total NHS expenditure in 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* Column A of the table shows the estimated percentage change in hospital and community health services current, family health services current, total national health service and total personal social services expenditure adjusted for changes in input unit costs. Figures on this basis for 1991-92 are not yet available.

Changes in input volumes are however an inadequate guide to the level of services the NHS can be expected to achieve, since they do not reflect the continuing success of NHS management in increasing the efficiency with which it uses resources.

Columns B and C therefore give the percentage change in expenditure for each of the programmes for 1990-91 and 1991-92 (estimated) in real terms that is after adjustment by the gross domestic product deflator.

	A *Percentage change in expenditure in 1990-91 after having been adjusted for changes in input unit costs*	*B* *Percentage change in expenditure after having been adjusted by the GDP deflator in* *1990-91*	*C* *1991-92 estimate*
Gross HCHS Current	5·0	4·0	6·2
Gross FHS Current	−0·6	4·2	3·0
Gross NHS Current	2·5	3·3	5·2
Net PSS Current	3·3	3·6	2·6

Note:
Calculated against the existing indicies of HCHS and FHS in service inflation. These are however currently under review.

Dental Health

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will specify the various considerations which led the Health education authority booklet, "Enjoy Healthy Eating", to advise caution in the consumption of dried fruit in order to avoid the harmful effects on teeth, and to encourage the consumption of fruit with no reference to its effect on teeth;

(2) what was the basis of tests carried out to determine the cariogenicity of the various foods, drinks and snacks referred to on pages 19 to 21 of the Health Education Authority's booklet.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* The advice provided in the Health Education Authority booklet is based on the expert advice of the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy. The COMA report "Dietary Sugars and Human Disease" (1989) stated that the experience of caries was positively related to the amount of non-milk extrinsic sugars in the diet and the frequency of their consumption.

In order to reduce the risk of dental caries COMA recommended that consumption of NME sugars by the population should be decreased. The food items for which the HEA advised caution in consumption, including dried fruits, contain NME sugars. Epidemiological evidence suggests that fresh fruit, as eaten by humans, appears to be of low cariogenicity.

The recommendations made by COMA have taken account of available scientific evidence as explained in the dietary sugar report. The report is available in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Kiosk

39. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans there are to extend the range of items on sale in the House of Commons kiosk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The range of souvenirs stocked in both kiosks is kept under continual review. The kiosk in Bellamy's holds a limited range of foodstuffs, pharmaceutical products and other useful items. There is little scope to extend that range, although there may be changes in individual items held in response to demand.

Select Committee Reports

40. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to secure the early debate of Select Committee reports.

Mr. MacGregor: I have at present no proposals for any changes in the existing arrangements. Subject to pressures of business in the House I hope to find time for debate on some Select Committee reports during this Parliament.

Working Hours

41. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the progress being made on reforming the working hours of the House of Commons.

Mr. MacGregor: A recent example of reforming the working hours of the House has been that, since they were

set up in January, the European Standing Committees have made a significant contribution to reducing the burden of late-night debates on the Floor.

My hon. Friend will be aware that a number of right hon. and hon. Members have either submitted written memoranda or given oral evidence to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House.

Special Standing Committees

Mr. Beith: To ask the Lord President of the Council when a Special Standing Committee set up under Standing Order No. 91 last considered a Bill; and whether he will make a statement on this procedure.

Mr. MacGregor: The last Bill to be considered by a Special Standing Committee was the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Bill *[Lords]* in the 1983-84 Session. The Government will continue to consider the possible use of this procedure in appropriate cases where this is compatible with the overall management of their legislative programme.

Visitors (Security)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Lord President of the Council if security arrangements for visitors to the Palace of Westminster are maintained at the same level during the parliamentary recesses.

Mr. MacGregor: It has been the long-standing practice of Leaders of the House not to comment on matters of security within the Palace of Westminster. I can, however, inform my hon. Friend that the security arrangements for access are the same whether the House is in recess or not.

DEFENCE

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related element, in each case where appointments from the private sector have been made at grade 7 or above in respect of each of the executive agencies in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Excluding chief executive posts, appointments from the private sector at grade 7 or above have only been made in two of the eight agencies in my Department to date. The table shows the standard civil service rate for the grades specified including discretionary pay for performance.

Agency	*Grade*	*Numbers employed from private sector*	*1991-92 maximum salary including performance element (£)*
Meteorological Office[1]	5	2 1st post 2nd post	39,402-52,122 39,402-46,724
	7	1	27,819-33,175
Defence Research Agency	7	1	27,819-33,175

[1] The difference between the two grade 5 maxima relates to the number of range points and the performance element applicable in each case.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last annual report was published and when the next one is due for each of the executive agencies in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Meteorological Office and the Hydrographic Office were the first two agencies to be established in April 1990. Their reports for 1990-91 were published in July 1991. Their next annual reports, together with the first annual report for the other six agencies in my Department, are due to be published in July 1991.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many staff were in post on the date that each of the executive agencies in his Department were established as executive agencies; and how many staff are in post now in each case;

(2) if he will list those new facilities for staff, including nurseries and health care schemes, which have been introduced since the establishment of each of the executive agencies in his Department;

(3) how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of the executive agencies in his Department; and whether the cost was borne by the parent Department or the new agency.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a matter for the chief executives of the executive agencies and defence support agencies. I have asked them to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive, including performance-related elements and the length of time of the chief executive's contract for each of the executive agencies in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Three chief executive appointments in MOD have been made following open competition. The details of these are shown in table 1. Chief executive positions in the five other MOD "next steps" agencies were filled by the existing head of the organisation. The details are shown in table 2.

Table 1
Chief executive appointed following open competition

Agency	*Period of contract*	*Salary £*
Defence research agency	3 years	140,000
Meteorological office	5 years	[1]65,000
Service children's schools (north west Europe	3 years	[2]55,417

[1] New chief executive appointed with effect from 2 January 1992. Within standard civil service range for grade 2, plus discretionary performance bonus of 15 per cent. of salary.

[2] Standard civil service rate for grade 4 which includes discretionary payments for performance. This post also attracts London weighting and foreign cost of living allowances.

Table 2
Chief executive posts filled by existing head of organisation without competition

Agency	*Grade or service rank*	*Salary £*
Hydrographic office	Rear Admiral	52,855
Military survey DSA	Major General	52,855
Maintenance group RAF support command	Air Vice Marshal	52,855
Chemical and biological defence establishment	Grade 3 civil servant	[1]57,000
Directorate General defence accounts	Grade 4 civil servant	[2]47,921

[1] Standing civil service rate for grade 3 which includes discretionary payments for performance.
[2] Standard civil service rate for grade 4 which includes performance related elements.

Trident

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 15 November, *Official Report*, column 703, what is his estimate of the cost of cancelling *(a)* the entire Trident submarine programme, *(b)* the building projects at Coulport and Faslane, under the liquidated damages clauses in the contracts, if such cancellations took place (1) on January 1992, (2) on 1 April 1992, (3) on 1 July 1992, (4) on 1 October 1992, or (5) on 1 January 1993.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: As I advised the hon. Member on 15 November at column *703*, cancellation costs would be based on an assessment of contractors' properly incurred liabilities at the time of cancellation. Such liabilities would need to be negotiated at that time with the companies concerned. It would not be sensible, therefore, to speculate on what these might be, especially as it is not this Government's policy to cancel the Trident programme.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to the United Kingdom of radioactive decontamination and rehabilitation of the sites where the United Kingdom has tested nuclear weapons, or conducted weapons-related tests, at *(a)* Christmas island, *(b)* Monte Bello island, *(c)* Maralinga, *(d)* Emu field, *(e)* Potton island and *(f)* Nevada nuclear test site; and what is his estimate of the further costs that will be needed to complete the environmental restoration of these sites.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The cost to the United Kingdom of decontamination and site restoration of the former United Kingdom atmospheric nuclear weapon test sites following completion of the programme in the 1960s could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

No further costs are anticipated in respect of either Christmas island or the Monte Bello islands.

The Australian Government are currently seeking a contribution from the United Kingdom for additional work at Maralinga and Emu field, but the United Kingdom view is that the 1968 and 1979 agreements absolve the United Kingdom from any liability to contribute.

There have been no firings involving radioactive materials at Potton island.

No costs have been incurred for rehabilitation of the Nevada test site and the future management of the site is a matter wholly for the United States.

NAAFI

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to implement the recommendations contained in the National Audit Office study of Management Services (Organisation) Division dealing with the financial relationship between his Ministry and NAAFI.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There has been no National Audit Office study into the financial relationship between my Department and NAAFI. An MOD efficiency scrutiny has been carried out, however, and some of its recommendations have been implemented. Others will be considered further when the effect that the restructuring of the armed forces will have on the NAAFI have been analysed.

Regimental Memorabilia

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to satisfy himself that the President of the Service Institute and President of the Regiment Institute shops are abiding by their charter to sell only regimental memorabilia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: President of the Service Institute and President of the Regiment Institute shops do not operate under a charter, but are permitted to sell goods including, but not solely, memorabilia, providing they are not in competition with the NAAFI.

Battalions

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the average costs of maintaining *(a)* a British foot guards battalion and *(b)* a battalion of the equivalent of the Royal Air Force Regiment in (i) London, (ii) the United Kingdom and (iii) Germany.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) on 15 November, column *703*.

Records are not maintained in a way which enables the other information requested to be provided.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Child Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year costs of raising child benefit to £9·55 (i) for 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in linked means-tested and national insurance benefits, for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The rates of child benefit from April 1991 were £8·25 for the eldest eligible child and £7·25 for each other child and were increased to £9·25 and £7·50 respectively from October 1991. The estimated gross cost of increasing child benefit from those rates to £9·55 for each child throughout 1991-92 would be about £36 million. If the October 1991 rates had applied throughout 1991-92, the cost would reduce to around £29 million. The gross full year costs in 1992-93 of paying £9·55 for all children, instead of the rates of £9·65 and £7·80 which will be in payment from April 1992, would be about £21 million.

National Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate for 1991-92 the numbers paying national insurance contributions in Northern Ireland, distinguishing *(a)* between the different classes of contribution and *(b)* between employees and employers.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the

Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Daniel Doherty

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the evidence that Daniel Doherty, who was shot dead by the security services at Gransha hospital in Londonderry on 6 December 1984 was, at that time, engaged in a terrorist operation.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* It is not the practice to publish details of police investigations. The death of Daniel Doherty was fully investigated by the RUC, and the report passed to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who directed "no prosecution" of the soldiers involved.

However, I believe that it is widely accepted that Daniel Doherty was engaged in terrorist activities when he was killed.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his reply of 11 November to the hon. Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Thompson) about resources for housing in 1992-93, *Official Report*, columns *397-98*, if he will now announce the Housing Corporation's approved development programme, local authorities' housing investment programme allocations, the distribution of resources for estate action and housing action trusts and the housing revenue account subsidy determinations.

Mr. Heseltine: I am today making a number of dispositions for the use of housing resources in 1992-93.

First, gross expenditure by the Housing Corporation will be £1,770 million, rising to £2,004 million in 1993-94 and £2,052 million in 1994-95. A total of 50,900 new homes will be approved next year, 25 per cent. more than this year, three times higher than in 1990-91. I now expect that completions next year will be 60 per cent. higher—at 43,000—than this year; this is an increase of 24 per cent. on previously published projections.

The corporation expects a very much higher output than previously projected, partly because of falling construction costs and property prices, but also because of increases in the more cost-effective elements of the programme. Next year's rented programme is expected to attract double the amount of private finance secured in 1991-92.

At least 27,000 of the newly approved units will be targeted to benefit the homeless. These remain our most urgent priority.

Next year, the corporation will be introducing a major new programme of "do-it-yourself" shared ownership of which 80 per cent. will be targeted on existing local authority and housing association tenants. Its move into home ownership will release rented accommodation for immediate use in housing the homeless.

As previously made clear, from 1992-93 resources for the corporation's new rented and housing for sale programmes will be allocated among the corporation's regions using the housing needs indicator, without "damping" to reflect past shares. This will direct resources where they are most needed. Even with the removal of damping, all regions will gain compared with 1991-92, most substantially. Details of the programme are being published in the corporation's *News Supplement Series*, copies of which are being placed in the Library.

Today I am informing local housing authorities of their housing investment programme allocations for 1992-93, some £1·7 billion in total. A total of £1,300 million of these resources are general-purpose allocations, or "annual capital guidelines". In October I confirmed to local authorities that 40 per cent. of these would be distributed on the basis of a statistical assessment of local housing needs, but this year, for the first time, authorities have competed for shares of 60 per cent. of the resources, with the Department assessing their performance and the quality of their proposals. My regional offices have scrutinised authorities' strategy statements and bids, against known criteria, meetings were held with authorities, and Ministers have reached decisions in the light of controllers' advice.

We were particularly impressed by the resourcefulness and quality of some 50 authorities which were well ahead of the field in pursuing effective policies. However, 25—about 79 per cent.—were disappointingly poor and fell far short of the standards their tenants and other people locally have the right to expect. I am placing a list in the Library of the names of the authorities in each region who comprise these groups.

In reaching our final decisions we also took into account other relevant factors such as specific problems or needs and allowed for commitments, and for peaks and troughs in expenditure. For up to 31 authorities these discretionary awards were topped up to honour assurances we had given a year ago as to the minimum allocations they should expect. Some of the more disappointing authorities have been saved, by this topping up, from the full rigours of the new performance assessment. Nonetheless, for about 90 per cent. of authorities the proposed allocations were greater than the minimum level we were committed to. For 90 per cent. therefore, the size of the allocation was directly affected by the performance assessment and the exercise of discretion.

The Department's regional controllers will today be telling councils the broad assessments made and will offer follow-up meetings to discuss, where appropriate, the aspects of performance where improvements could be made.

A further £400 million has been allocated to private sector renewal, in the form of "specified capital grants", to assist councils in their grant aid to private owners and in their expenditure on renewal areas, etc. Forty per cent. was allocated by statistical assessment of renewal needs; 60 per cent. was distributed mainly on the basis of authorities' spending patterns.

I am depositing tables in the Library showing the 1992-93 allocation to each authority of the annual capital guideline and of specified capital grant. Together these comprise the housing investment programme allocations.

I am also reviewing the scope for my Department's regional offices, which already advise me on these HIP allocations, to play a greater role in allocating other DOE resources to local authorities, on a more corporate basis.

Substantially increased resources are given for estate action. A total of £364 million is available, an increase of

over one third—£96 million—on the £268 million made available this year. This demonstrates our commitment to the most rundown estates and confirms the strategy announced last July by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning.

Almost £160 million is available for distribution to new schemes, of which £115 million will be set aside to start or speed up large-scale regeneration schemes next year. The remainder will support traditional small and medium-sized estate action schemes.

I am, therefore, today inviting over 25 authorities to proceed with 32 large regeneration schemes and 80 authorities to work up a further 100 small and medium-sized schemes for approval. These schemes will involve over £900 million of public and private investment over the next few years. The names of successful authorities and schemes are set out in tables placed in the Library.

Before I give final approval to any scheme I shall expect the local authority to demonstrate that its proposals accord with published guidelines, particularly with regard to housing management and the diversification of tenure and that they have been developed in consultation with tenants, the local community and the private sector.

I have also provided for a major expansion of the programme of housing action trusts. A total of £215 million has been set aside for spending on HATs over the next three years, sufficient for the established HATs in North Hull and Waltham Forest, and for further HATs in four new areas.

Preliminary discussions have taken place with authorities interested in pursuing the HAT option in Liverpool, Brent, Birmingham and Tower Hamlets. I am now satisfied that these should go to the next stage.

As in Hull and Waltham Forest, the projects should be a co-operation between tenants, the local authority and central Government. Some of the feasibility studies are well advanced. Subject to the outcome of these, and after full consultation with tenants, there will be formal ballots of tenants in these areas. If tenants vote in favour, the House will be asked to approve orders establishing the trusts.

As to the current expenditure, I have today issued the housing revenue account subsidy determinations for 1992-93. I am placing copies of the determinations in the Library.

On subsidy allowances for management and maintenance, I confirm the proposals to increase allowances by 6·5 per cent. overall and to distribute the increase by a new system of targeted allowances reflecting the problems faced by different authorities. As a result about £93 million more will be directed to authorities with the greatest need. This is in addition to a general 3·5 per cent. increase in allowances which all authorities will receive.

For rent guidelines, I am confirming the proposal for an average rent increase of 9·5 per cent. This will result in an average increase of guidelines of £2·44 a week over the guideline rents which apply this year with a range of between £1·20 and £4·50 in individual councils. Responsibility for setting actual rents however remains with individual local authorities. Housing benefit will normally meet the whole of any rent increase for the two thirds of tenants receiving it.

These various allocations continue the redirection of resources towards the housing association movement and further develop our measures to help the most neglected council estates. They give a fresh impetus to local authorities to work closely with the private sector, to involve their tenants, and to strive continually for the highest standards of management.

Montreal Protocol

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding the current United Kingdom position in the Montreal protocol negotiations.

Mr. Baldry: The negotiations towards the 1992 revision of the Montreal protocol will begin in April 1992. The United Kingdom has first to reach agreement with other European member states. In view of the latest scientific findings on ozone depletion, the United Kingdom has proposed that the European Community position for the international negotiations should be: production and consumption of all CFCs and carbon tetrachloride to be phased out by 1 January 1996, with an interim cut of 85 per cent. by 1 January 1994; 1, 1, 1 trichloroethane to go by 1 January 1996, with a 50 per cent. cut by 1 January 1994; halons by 1 January 1995, with an interim cut of 50 per cent. by 1 January 1994. These phase-out dates, which would have a provision for essential uses, are the fastest which could be implemented internationally.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the indicators for standard spending assessments and the grant for each indicator for *(a)* the city of Durham and *(b)* Hove council for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: A description of the indictors used in the calculation of standard spending assessments for all authorities for 1991-92 is contained in "The Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England)". A breakdown of SSAs by indicator for all authorities including Hove and the City of Durham is given in the "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook 1991-92". Copies of both these documents are in the House of Commons Library.

Global Warming

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions of competing theories of global warming have taken in the European Council of Ministers.

Mr. Baldry: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is the principal international forum for discussion of the science of climate change. The conclusions of the EC joint Energy/Environment Council meeting in October 1990 referring to the forthcoming second world climate conference recorded the Council's wish that

"the concern of the IPCC about the increase of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, 'resulting on average in additional global warming', be recognised."

The IPCC will be producing a supplementary report for the international negotiating committee for a framework convention on climate change in February 1992.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the most recent scientific advice on climate change due to emission of carbon dioxide; what data he has received via satellites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The scientific assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published last year, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House, remains the most complete and authoritative statement of scientific advice available. The IPCC is currently preparing a supplementary report to be presented to the international negotiating committee on a climate convention in February next year. This will take into account information produced since the first scientific assessment including data from instruments on Earth observation satellites.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information and data his Department receives from satellites regarding the greenhouse effect.

Mr. Baldry: Information from satellite data studies was included in the scientific assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published last year, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. New findings from satellite programmes will be included in the supplementary report that the IPCC will submit to the international negotiating committee on a climate convention next February. The Department commissioned a study on data requirements for climate change research which gives details of existing and proposed satellite missions, the instruments carried and the scientific questions to which they would contribute. I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to give directions under section 50 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to require waste disposal authorities to draw up waste disposal plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government have stated in their consultation paper on the Environment Agency issued on 3 October—copies of which have been placed in the Library—that they do not consider there would be a role for area-based waste disposal plans when the agency is set up. The Government are reviewing the need for waste regulation authorities to draw up waste disposal plans in the interim period before the agency is set up.

Local Income Tax

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the level of income tax supplement which would be required to be levied by each local authority in Northamptonshire to raise the local revenue required for 1991-92 local authority budgets under a system of local income tax, taking into account variations in the tax base between local authority areas.

Mr. Key: The level of bills in a particular local authority area with a local income tax, would depend on the precise way in which such a system were introduced.

Waste Management

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect the formation of an environment agency will have on the timetable for the introduction of waste management licences; when he expects an environment agency to be operational; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's proposals for the new Environment Agency are set out in the consultation paper issued on 3 October, copies of which have been placed in the Library. We hope to introduce a Bill early in a new Parliament and our aim is that the agency should be operational as soon as possible following Royal Assent. The Government recognise that the timing of the waste licensing provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, due to come into force on 1 April 1993, may need to be reviewed in the light of the emerging timetable for the new agency.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies have been requested from the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee since the terms of reference governing the remit of the committee were changed in July this year; and if he has yet received any of the studies requested.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment and Countryside to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on 19 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *102*.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman or officials of the National Rivers Authority to discuss the proposals for an environment agency.

Mr. Baldry: We are in regular touch with the National Rivers Authority on a range of issues. The NRA has recently put forward its views on the Government's proposals for the Environment Agency. We shall consider these carefully alongside all other responses to our consultation paper, which was issued in October.

Housing Associations

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many housing associations have expressed an interest in acting as agents for mortgage lenders under his Department's joint initiative on repossessed properties of 5 November;

(2) how many repossessed homes have been brought into use for letting to homeless families through housing association management agreements under his Department's joint initiative with mortgage lenders of 5 November.

Mr. Yeo: It is too early for any such properties to have been transferred, but an encouraging 77 housing asssociations have expressed interest in the initiative.

UN Environment Conference

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what women's non-governmental organisations are to be included in the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations conference on environment and development in 1992.

Mr. Baldry: The Prime Minister has indicated that he hopes to attend the United Nations conference on environment and development. No decision has been taken on the composition of the rest of the British delegation.

Housing, Waveney

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement indicating the Government schemes and other measures available to Waveney district council to increase and improve the housing stock in Waveney.

Mr. Yeo: Government schemes and other measures available to Waveney district council to increase and improve housing stock in its district include the use of basic credit approval, specified capital grant and capital receipts as specified together with housing revenue to maintain and improve the council housing stock, assist housing associations and provide grants to improve private homes. There is also scope to obtain supplementary credit approval under the initiatives for rural housing and flats over shops. The council may promote a scheme to provide council tenants with "portable discounts" to help buy their own homes and they can operate both shared ownership and "do-it-yourself" shared ownership schemes. By providing council-owned land free, or at reduced price, to housing associations, the council can encourage the inflow of Housing Corporation funds for the provision of more social housing, which can also be promoted by negotiation with private developers seeking to build in the district.

Small Cetaceans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent or allocated to research projects undertaken by his Department on the status and conservation of small cetaceans for 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Baldry: The Department has allocated funds as follows:

Year	*£*
1990-91	111,869
1991-92	43,840
1992-93	61,896

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the research projects undertaken by his Department on the status and conservation of small cetaceans and specify in each case the amount allocated, the duration of the project, and the body or institution conducting that work.

Mr. Baldry: Last year this Department, as part of its programme of North sea research, initiated three extra-mural projects in this area: a one-year study on contaminants in small cetaceans in England and Wales, to be carried out by the sea mammal research unit of the Natural Environment Research Council at a total cost of £58,626; a small cetaceans sighting and monitoring scheme, undertaken by the United Kingdom Mammal Society Cetacean Group for two years at a total cost of £24,000; and the three-year appointment of a veterinary pathologist at the Institute of Zoology to co-ordinate the investigation of marine mammal strandings in England and Wales, at a total cost of £86,000. A number of other bodies are involved in these contracts or are contributing practical assistance, including the Natural History museum and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

In addition, we expect in the near future to complete arrangements for the appointment of a parallel co-ordinator, to investigate strandings in Scotland.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what work has been undertaken by his Department to investigate the level of contaminants in small cetacean carcases retrieved in the United Kingdom; what budget has been allocated to this work for each of the years 1990, 1991 and 1992; and which body or institution is conducting the work.

Mr. Baldry: The sea mammal research unit of the Natural Environment Research Council was commissioned last year by this Department to carry out a programme of contaminant analysis on cetaceans found stranded around our shores in 1990 and 1991. A total of £58,680 was allocated to this work in the 1990-91 financial year.

World Climate Conference

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department plans to be represented at the third world climate conference, organised by the Global Commons Institute in London on 13 to 16 April 1992.

Mr. Baldry: The second world climate conference in November 1990 was organised by UNEP, WMO, UNESCO, FAO and several other United Nations and intergovernmental organisations. We are aware of the event proposed for April 1992 by this non-governmental group, but have not received an invitation to attend.

Young People (Care)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funding his Department provides to local authorities specifically to house young people stepping out from care.

Mr. Yeo: The bulk of capital resources for local authority housing is distributed through a single housing investment programme allocation. The allocation of resources to particular areas of activity is mainly a matter for authorities themselves, although their duties under the homelessness legislation cover vulnerable young people. The Housing Corporation allocates resources to housing associations, who are now the main providers of new social housing. In 1990-91 the corporation spent £4·7 million on new housing schemes for young people at risk, including those leaving care. For 1991-92 the corporation has allocated £13·6 million, a 190 per cent. increase.

Poll Tax Enforcement

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *316*, if he will arrange to place in the Library the minutes of the meetings of the local taxation working party at which the use of bailiffs in poll tax enforcement was discussed.

Mr. Key: No.

Estate Action

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the names of the successful estates in West Yorkshire who qualify for improvements under the 1992-93 estate action programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The following local authorities in West Yorkshire have today been invited to work up bids for estate action resources as part of the 1992-93 programme:

Local Authority and Estate
Bradford—Holmewood.
Kirklees—Brackenhall/Riddings.
Leeds—Ebor Gardens, Halton Moor.
Calderdale—Ashenhurst, Elland.
Wakefield—Simpson Lane, Kershaw Avenue.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he has made to publicise and distribute in England and Wales the guidance note recently published on the planning considerations deemed to govern applications for renewable energy generating stations.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 13 December, *Official Report*, column *554*.

Community Charge

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about claimants on income support who are in arrears of community charge payments being dealt with by bailiffs rather than by direct deductions from their income support; if he will issue new guidance urgently to local authorities to advise them to use direct deductions from benefit wherever possible rather than to send in the bailiffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I have had numerous representations on the enforcement of the community charge payment. It is for local authorities to decide which is the most appropriate method of enforcement to pursue within the powers available to them.

Planning Inquiries (Costs)

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now implement the provisions of section 30 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Mr. Yeo: Section 30 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 enables appeals costs to be awarded, in an inquiry or hearing, where the unreasonable behaviour of one of the principal parties causes the cancellation of the inquiry or hearing, so that other parties incur wasted expenditure in making their preparations to be represented in the proceedings. These provisions are to be brought into force from 2 January 1992.

To complement these provisions we shall also bring into force provisions, which are already in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, enabling appeals costs to be awarded in appeal "hearing" cases, as well as inquiries.

The practical effect of these changes, and the various planning proceedings to which they apply, are fully explained in a new circular issued today by my Department and the Welsh Office. The draft guidance in this circular was recently the subject of public consultation involving a wide range of interested bodies.

We think these new cost arrangements should bring an increased sense of discipline to planning appeal proceedings. In the past, it has sometimes been too easy for a developer to maintain a planning appeal right up to the last moment, before an inquiry was due to begin, only to withdraw it without any liability to meet the wasted expense inevitably incurred by the planning authority and other interested appeal parties. These new provisions will help to deter any developers who may continue to think they can get away with such unreasonable behaviour.

Unauthorised Development

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now issue revised policy guidance to local planning authorities about effective enforcement action against unauthorised development, in accordance with the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Sir George Young: We have carefully considered the comments of all the organisations who were consulted about the draft planning policy guidance note I announced on 24 July, *Official Report*, column *667*. PPG 18, entitled "Enforcing Planning Control", is being issued today. The new guidance emphasises that the Government do not condone any wilful breach of planning control; and they encourage vigorous enforcement action where unauthorised development is plainly unacceptable and immediate remedial action is required. The guidance also suggests what factors planning authorities should normally take into account when they are considering whether enforcement action is expedient for small businesses or self-employed people.

The main enforcement provisions in part I of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 are being brought into force on 2 January 1992. A Department of the Environment and Welsh Office circular, which is also being published today, gives procedural guidance to planning authorities about the new provisions.

During parliamentary debates on the Planning and Compensation Bill earlier this year serious concern was expressed about the weakness of the present enforcement provisions. The strengthened and improved regime, now being brought into force, should enable every planning authority to take quick and effective enforcement action whenever it is justified.

Hedgerows

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial assistance is available to help landowners retain hedgerows in situ.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* In England assistance is available towards the cost of hedgerow management under grant schemes for wider purposes administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Countryside Commission and English Nature.

In July I announced our intention to provide new incentives to promote improved care of hedgerows in ways which are environmentally beneficial. At present we are

discussing the terms of the proposed scheme with the Countryside Commission and others, and will make a further statement in the new year.

Local Authority Powers

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to extend the powers of local authorities, under section 16 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 1976, to obtain information other than issues connected with land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* The Government have no plans to extend the powers available to local authorities under section 16.

Sports Clubs (Rates)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *17*, if he will publish a table showing for 1990-91 *(a)* the total number of applications for relief from non-profit making sports clubs (survey entry B(b)1), *(b)* the total number of sports clubs receiving relief after submitting an application (survey entry B(b)2), *(c)* the total number of sports clubs receiving relief without submitting an application (survey entry B(b)3) and *(d)* the total number of sports clubs denied relief after submitting an application.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* The departmental survey to which my previous answer referred collected information about non-profit making recreational clubs; not only sports clubs. The table shows information for 1990-91, based on the returns received from 81 per cent. of local authorities.

	Number
(a) Number of applications received	10,000
(b) Number of clubs receiving relief after applying	9,000
(c) Number of clubs receiving relief without applying	1,300
(d) Number of clubs not receiving relief after applying	1,000

These figures may not sum with those shown in my previous answer because of rounding.

Public Conveniences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) *Official Report*, 11 November column *395*, he will *(a)* update his statement on the number of pennies received under the send-a-penny campaign to improve public conveniences and *(b)* state how he intends to spend the moneys received to date.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* No more pennies have been received. These are extra receipts payable to the Consolidated Fund.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the provisional level of total spend per adult at standard spending assessment in 1991-92 for *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster and *(c)* each of the 10 district authorities of Greater Manchester;

(2) what has been the total spend per adult at standard spending assessment in 1990-91 for *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster and *(c)* each district authority in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* A standard spending assessment represents the Government's view of the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure which would enable a prudent authority to provide a standard level of service, taking into account its physical, social and demographic characteristics.

The SSAs for 1990-91 and 1991-92 expressed in £s per adult for all inner London boroughs and districts in Greater Manchester are given in the table.

	1991-92 SSA (£/adult)	*1990-91 SSA (£/adult)*
Camden	1,403	1,166
Greenwich	1,191	986
Hackney	1,920	1,569
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,335	1,118
Islington	1,551	1,267
Kensington and Chelsea	1,178	1,192
Lambeth	1,718	1,392
Lewisham	1,295	1,019
Southwark	1,455	1,171
Tower Hamlets	1,872	1,591
Wandsworth	1,262	982
Westminster	1,548	1,276
Bolton	970	816
Bury	823	681
Manchester	1,448	1,170
Oldham	1,055	879
Rochdale	1,024	809
Salford	1,019	855
Stockport	816	678
Tameside	913	730
Trafford	916	754
Wigan	857	716

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, 8 November, column *308*, he will set out the reasons for the increased level of expenditure on advertising by his Department in 1989-90.

Mr. Heseltine: The increase in my Department's expenditure on advertising in 1989-90 arose mainly from campaigns to provide information to the public about the flotation of the 10 water companies in England and Wales, new legislation on local government finance and housing and to encourage the use of lead-free petrol.

WALES

EC Projects

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount of money in pounds sterling allocated to projects in Wales by the European Community in 1990 and to date in 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: Allocations of European regional development fund and European social fund money to projects in Wales in 1990 and 1991 are as follows:

	ERDF	ESF
1990	27·5	10·8
[1]1991	64·3	13·3

[1] To date.

Farming Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the average per farm management and investment income, net farm income inclusive and exclusive of breeding livestock appreciation, and percentage changes by farm type and size for 1990 and 1991 in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Management and investment income and net farm income per farm for 1990-91 are due to be published after Christmas. The latest available information relates to 1987-88 and 1988-89 and is as follows:

Type of farming	Size of business (BSU)	Management and investment income (£'000) 1987-88	1988-89	Per cent. change	Net farm income (including BLSA) (£'000) 1987-88	1988-89	Per cent. change	Net farm income (excluding BLSA) (£'000) 1987-88	1988-89	Per cent. change
Dairy:										
Specialist	All sizes	9·5	13·5	43·0	17·0	25·0	46·7	17·0	21·0	25·7
Mainly	All sizes	10·5	13·0	25·8	18·5	24·5	31·8	17·5	20·5	17·3
All dairy:										
	Small	2·0	2·4	13·1	10·0	12·5	28·8	9·5	10·0	5·7
	Medium	9·5	14·0	45·0	17·5	25·5	45·1	17·0	22·0	27·6
	Large	35·5	48·0	34·9	43·5	64·5	48·4	42·0	54·5	30·1
	All sizes	10·0	13·5	37·9	17·5	25·0	42·4	17·0	21·0	23·4
Hill and upland:										
SDA										
Sheep	All sizes	4·5	9·0	99·5	12·5	18·0	46·2	10·5	15·0	42·4
Cattle and sheep	All sizes	6·0	9·5	55·2	15·0	20·0	34·2	12·5	16·5	29·2
DA										
Cattle and sheep	All sizes	·1	4·0	5,274·0	7·0	12·5	69·0	6·5	10·5	61·0
LFA livestock										
	Small	−2·0	·1		5·0	4·5	−3·8	4·0	6·5	66·0
	Medium	8·5	12·5	46·8	17·0	23·0	36·2	15·0	19·0	28·5
	Large	31·0	48·5	56·8	42·0	60·5	43·4	37·0	54·0	45·2
	All sizes	4·0	8·0	105·6	11·5	17·0	45·7	10·0	14·0	40·8
All dairy and livestock										
	Small	−1·5	·5		5·5	9·0	45·7	5·0	7·0	45·7
	Medium	9·0	12·5	42·8	17·0	23·5	38·0	15·5	19·5	26·1
	Large	33·5	48·5	45·0	43·0	46·0	8·1	39·5	54·5	37·2
	All sizes	5·0	9·0	72·8	13·0	19·0	45·2	12·0	16·0	33·4

Notes:
Income figures are shown to the first decimal place and rounded to the nearest five.
Percentage changes are however worked on unrounded figures.

Emissions

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will publish information on the per capita emissions of *(a)* agricultural CH_4, *(b)* non-agricultural CH_4, *(c)* CO_2 from land use change and *(d)* CO_2 from industrial usage;

(2) if he will publish information on the gross emissions in Wales of *(a)* agricultural CH_4, *(b)* non-agricultural CH_4, *(c)* CO_2 from land use change and *(d)* CO_2 from industrial usage.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures specifically relating to Wales of CH_4 (methane) and CO_2 emission levels are not available. However, United Kingdom figures can be found in the Department of Environment publication "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics" No. 13 1990.

The latest published data on United Kingdom emissions of both gases relate to 1989. Based on an estimated current United Kingdom population of 55 million, the following estimates can be calculated:

United Kingdom emissions (Gross)

	(Thousand tonnes)	Per capita kg
Agricultural methane	1·16	21·1
Non-agricultural methane	2·29	41·6
	(Million tonnes)	tonnes
CO_2 from industrial usage	101	1·840
CO_2 from agricultural usage[1]	1	0·018

[1] No specific figure is available for land use change.

Valleys Programme

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the expenditure to date under the valleys programme, by category of expenditure and by year, in constant prices, for the Cynon Valley borough council area, the Taff Ely council area and the Rhymney Valley council area.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is not available except at disproportionate cost.

South Glamorgan TEC

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council concerning the expenditure undertaken to adopt, launch, promote and subsequently abandon its logo and title of ETCETERA; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council concerning the location of its new headquarters office.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Wentloog Lagoon

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will place a copy in the Library of the letter written to the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales on Friday, 6 December, concerning the construction of the Wentloog lagoon for wading birds.

Mr. David Hunt: Correspondence between the Countryside Council and my Department on the Wentloog lagoon has been at officer level.

Cardiff Bay Development

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will agree a code of conduct with the chairman of Cardiff Bay development corporation limiting the use of advertising incorporating the proposed barrage during the passage of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

Mr. David Hunt: The Cardiff Bay development corporation observes the spirit of the conventions governing propriety and value for money which apply to all Government Departments.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning progress on the training centre of excellence.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy for the report from Mr. Roy Stoner, on the possible groundwater rise side-effects of the proposed Cardiff Bay barrage to be completed and published before the commencement of the select committee proceedings on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

Mr. David Hunt: Mr. Stoner's advice to me following the consultation on the Hydrotechnica report will form part of the advice submitted to me before I make my decision. I shall be publishing my decision, together with the factors I have taken into account, as soon after the end of the consultation period as is consistent with proper consideration for all of the issues raised.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will instruct Mr. Roy Stoner to include in his report on the side-effects of the groundwater rise expected to be caused by the proposed Cardiff bay barrage, the expected effects of the barrage on sports grounds, gardens and allotments.

Mr. David Hunt: Mr. Stoner's terms of reference include advising me on representations made during the three months' consultation period. Since these include the issue of protection for open ground such as sports grounds, gardens and allotments, I would expect him to include this issue in his advice.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his written answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, columns 53-54, if he will give for 1990-91 a breakdown of the total number of non-profit-making sports clubs awarded discretionary rate relief *(a)* after submitting an application, *(b)* without submitting an application and *(c)* which applied for discretionary rate relief and were denied such relief.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Discretionary rate relief was awarded by Welsh local authorities in 1990-91 to non-profit making clubs, including sporting organisations, as follows:

Number of clubs awarded discretionary rate relief

Category	*Number*
(a) After submitting an application	620
(b) Without submitting an application	53
(c) Applied but not awarded relief	83

Sewage Treatment Works, Llanfaes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those organisations, individuals, companies and parties that contacted him requesting that he call in a planning application for a sewage treatment works at Llanfaes, Ynys Mon; and how he communicated his decision to those listed, giving dates in all cases.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is as follows:

Person/organisation requesting call-in and date of letter	*Contact date*	*Date of letter informing decision not to call-in application*
Mr. Joe Wilson MEP	21 October 1991	8 November 1991
Ms. G. Robson	n/a	11 November 1991
Mr. Stuart Andrew, Chairman of Ynys Mon Young Conservatives and Secretary of Wales Young Conservatives	14 October 1991	13 November 1991
The Bishops of Wrexham, Bangor, and St. Asaph (joint letter)	5 and 17 October 1991	13 November 1991
Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones MP	24 October 1991	14 November 1991

	Contact date	Date of letter informing decision not to call-in application
Mr. Gwynn Price Rowlands—PPC, Ynys Mon		
Dr. Robin Jones—PPC, Ynys Mon		
Mr. Joe Wilson MEP	24 October 1991	19 November 1991
Mr. S. Earnshaw, Vice Chairman, Beaumaris East Ward Action Group (joint letter)		
Mrs. Kathryn Pritchard Gibson	7 November 1991	26 November 1991
Mr. Dafydd Wigley MP	11 November 1991	27 November 1991
The Baroness Nicol JP	14 November 1991	29 November 1991

Teacher Training

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students were recruited to courses of initial teacher training in Wales in 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A survey undertaken by the Department shows that 2,195 students entered courses of initial teacher training in Wales in October 1991, an increase of nearly 28 per cent. over 1990. Intakes to primary training courses were almost 26 per cent. higher than last year and for secondary courses the increase was over 32 per cent. The figures for secondary teacher training are particularly encouraging as many of these student teachers are pursuing courses in the shortage areas, including Welsh.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales have been summonsed because of poll tax arrears in Wales to the latest available date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* The total number of summonses issued by Welsh courts for the period 1 April 1990 to 30 September 1991 was 442,988.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the costs of legal proceedings involving poll tax to the present.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* For the period 1 April 1990 to 30 September 1991, the estimated cost of legal proceedings to enforce the community charge through the magistrates courts in Wales was £315,000.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consult the Coalition for Badgers before finalising his criteria for the issue of licences under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991.

Mr. Maclean: Yes.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those persons and organisations he has consulted in considering the criteria under which section 4 licences may be issued under the Badgers Act 1991; and if he will publish a summary of the views each interest presented to him.

Mr. Maclean: The consultation exercise on licensing under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 has not yet taken place; the consultation document is to be issued shortly. It is the standard procedure in such consultations to make available to the public all responses received unless specifically requested not to do so by the respondent.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that any licences issued under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 take into acount the rules of the National Working Terrier Federation on interference with badger setts.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 12 December, *Official Report*, column *550*.

Fish Quotas

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to announce sectoral fish quotas allocations earlier in the calendar year in 1992 than in previous years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Yes.

Fruit and Vegetables

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the gross production figures for the major fruit and vegetables in the United Kingdom in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Gummer: The latest estimates of the gross production ('000 tonnes) of the major fruit and vegetables in the 1990-91 and 1991-92 crop years is as follows:

	1990-91	*1991-92 (forecast)*
Cabbages	665·8	672·6
Carrots	550·1	600·7
Cauliflowers	308·5	365·4
Lettuces	252·1	269·4
Peas	318·2	314·0
Tomatoes	138·8	141·8
Apples	310·5	333·6
Pears	36·7	39·1
Raspberries	19·2	17·9
Strawberries	52·3	52·9

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the figures for the amount of each different type of fruit and vegetable which was withdrawn from the market in the United Kingdom, indicating in each case how much was *(a)* delivered to institutions such as schools and prisons, *(b)* delivered to

charitable organisations, *(c)* ploughed into the ground, *(d)* used as animal feed, *(e)* processed into fruit juice or alcohol and *(f)* put to other uses, specifying the use, in (i) 1990 and (ii) 1991; and how much was spent on these withdrawals in the United Kingdom and EC.

Mr. Gummer: These arrangements are an operational matter for the chief executive of the Intervention Board executive agency, who will write to the hon. Member.

EC Agriculture Expenditure

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken by the Agriculture Council and the EC Commission on the containment of agricultural spending within the budget of 1991.

Mr. Curry: The Council at this year's price fixing agreed a number of measures to reduce the level of EC expenditure on agricultural support. These included price cuts, a 2 per cent. cut in milk quotas and changes to the beef and butter intervention arrangements. The Commission took action under its management powers in a number of sectors. Expenditure on agricultural support in 1991 is now expected to be some £350 million below the level provided for in the EC budget.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what adjustments have been made to the budget of agricultural spending by the EC in 1991 to take account of inflation; and if he will further state the basis on which the rate of inflation is calculated and the responsibility for making such assessments.

Mr. Curry: No changes were made to the provision for expenditure on the common agricultural policy in the 1991 EC budget.

Community expenditure on agricultural market support is legally constrained by the agricultural guideline which is adjusted each year to take account of 74 per cent. of the rate of growth of Community GNP and of inflation. The level of EC GNP, the general GNP deflator and the level of the guideline are calculated each year by the Commission on the basis of information supplied by the member states.

Set-aside Scheme

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which crops were proposed for each acre of agreed set-aside land for each year since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Detailed information on base year crops, cropping patterns in the year prior to the entry of land into set-aside and the green cover crops sown on fallowed set-aside land is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers in England and Wales have applied for the set-aside scheme for 1991-92; how many hectares of land are involved; what was the total expenditure for set-aside schemes for each year since 1988; how many farmers benefited; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is shown in the table:

Applications for the 4th year (1991-92) of the set-aside scheme

	Number of applications[2] received	Hectares set-aside
England	673	24,396·98
Wales	6	177·02

Applications for the temporary one-year set-aside scheme (1991-92)

	Number of applications[2] received	Hectares set-aside[1]
England	742	12,651·75
Wales	7	94·81

[1] Approved to date.
[2] The figures shown in the table relate to applications received, they are provisional and liable to adjustment in the light of eligibility and withdrawals.

Set-aside: Total expenditure by scheme year

	1988-89 £ million	1989-90 £ million	1990-91 £ million
Expenditure (England)	[1]7·4	[1]15·30	[2]22·30
Number of participants (England)	1,241	2,320	3,064
Expenditure (Wales)	[1]0·129	[1]0·231	[2]0·355
Number of participants (Wales)	30	41	58

[1] Actual
[2] Estimated

Small Cetaceans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what work is being undertaken by his Department to assess the level of by-catch of small cetaceans in United Kingdom fisheries; and what measures are being taken to reduce this level.

Mr. Gummer: A national scheme to monitor accidental catches by fishermen of marine mammals will commence early next year. Fishermen will be asked to report details of such catches to fishery officers. The Fisheries Departments will be writing to all major fishery organisations, which have already been consulted about the scheme, to confirm the details. Special forms and identification booklets will be provided. The recent EC agreement to restrict the length of drift nets to 2·5 km should help to reduce the accidental catches of small cetaceans.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of expenditure in 1990-91 and 1991-92 by the Intervention Board executive agency and the Agriculture Departments on market regulation under the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 28 November, Official Report, c. 652]:* Details of the outturn for 1990-91 and the latest forecast of outturn for 1991-92 in relation to market regulation are given in the table.

£ million

	1990-91 (Actual outturn)	1991-92 (Forecast outturn)
Expenditure by the Intervention Board executive agency		
Cereals	120·8	197·3
Oilseeds	236·4	250·6
Sugar	110·7	111·1
Beef and Veal	357·6	341·0
Sheepmeat	126·5	154·7
Pigmeat	6·6	3·5
Milk products	203·9	165·9
Processed goods	44·6	54·6
Others	55·2	54·4
Total	1,262·3	1,324·1
Expenditure by the Agricultural Departments		
Repayments of cereals levies	19·2	1·7
Suckler cow premium scheme	73·7	70·4
Annual premium on ewes	201·8	276·1
Payments to producers giving up some milk production	59·6	54·5
Beef special premium scheme (Northern Ireland)	6·2	7·3
Orchard grubbing scheme	—	1·5
Total	360·5	411·7
Grand total	1,622·8	1,735·8

Some of the expenditure shown benefits consumers and trade interests rather than United Kingdom producers.

The figures for the Intervention Board executive agency are net of various receipts treated as negative expenditure. Receipts from levies on the production and storage of sugar and isoglucose and on third country exports, which are regarded as Community own resources, are excluded.

Of the estimated outturn for 1991-92, £1,664 million is expected to be offset by receipts from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund including those in respect of financing intervention buying and the set-aside scheme; in 1990-91, the comparable figure was £1,584 million. However, because the United Kingdom is a net contributor to the European Community budget, the whole of this expenditure is attributable to the Exchequer. Receipts from the European Community do not always relate to expenditure in the period.

This information, coupled with my previous answer which focused on grants and subsidies, provides full details of MAFF expenditure on market regulation under the CAP and agricultural grants and subsidies.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

16. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received over the position of pensioners during the winter months.

Miss Widdecombe: We have received representations from various pensioner groups, and others, over the position of pensioners during the winter months. In June my right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced major improvements to the cold weather payments scheme, which include fast automatic payments, forecasts made by the Meteorological Office which can anticipate periods of very cold weather, and the removal of the old capital rule. These improvements will directly benefit many pensioners this winter.

21. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he next plans to meet the Pensioners Association in Wales to discuss additional assistance for the winter months.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to meet the Pensioners Association in Wales. In June my right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced major improvements to the cold weather payments scheme, which include fast automatic payments, forecasts made by the Meteorological Office which can anticipate periods of very cold weather, and the removal of the old capital rule. These improvements will directly benefit many pensioners this winter.

Child Benefit

17. **Mr. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of British families have only one child; and how much such families receive in child benefit per week.

Mr. Jack: Over 40 per cent. of families have only one child eligible for child benefit. They currently receive £9·25 a week which will increase to £9·65 from next April, that is, equivalent to £500 a year tax free. For families paying standard rate tax and national insurance contributions this would be equivalent to additional gross earnings of £750.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year costs of raising child benefit to £9·55 (i) for 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in linked means-tested and national insurance benefits, for Great Britain.

Mr. Jack: The rates of child benefit from April 1991 were £8·25 for the eldest eligible child and £7·25 for each other child, and these rates increased to £9·25 and £7·50 from October. On the basis of our latest estimates, the gross cost of increasing child benefit from those rates to £9·55 for each child throughout 1991-92 would be about £895 million. If the October rates had applied throughout 1991-92, the cost would reduce to around £685 million. The gross full-year cost in 1992-93 of paying £9·55 for all children instead of the rates of £9·65 and £7·80 which will be in payment from April 1992, would be about £465 million.

25. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of child benefit.

Mr. Jack: Child benefit is, and will remain, a strong element in our policies for family support. We are committed to index-link child benefit for future years.

Income Support

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the level of income support for people living in residential care.

Miss Widdecombe: We have recently received a small number of representations about the proposed April 1992 increases, which have generally been welcomed.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received following the computerisation of claims for income support; what information he has on the error rate in computerised assessments and on the number of checks by supervisors of the assessments of claims; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Family Credit

18. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the highest level of net earnings that a married man with two children can have and still qualify for family credit.

Mr. Jack: In the case of the family type my hon. Friend describes, the answer is £196, but both children would have to be aged 18 and still at school. The figure will be £209 when the benefit rates are increased next April.

19. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many single parents are currently in receipt of family credit.

Mr. Jack: The latest available information is for April 1991, when there were 131,000 lone parent families in receipt of family credit, out of a total caseload at that time of 341,000.

27. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many family credit awards have been made since this benefit was first introduced.

Mr. Jack: Since April 1988, when the scheme started, over 2·4 million awards have been made.

Child Support Act

22. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to consult on the regulations connected with the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Jack: On 1 November a consultation document setting out the proposed contents of the child support regulations was issued to interested organisations and made available to hon. Members. The formal consultation period ends today. The regulations concerning child support appeal tribunals and child support commissioners will be referred to the Council on Tribunals.

Occupational Pension Funds

23. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the need to review the legal basis of occupational pension funds.

Mr. Newton: Occupational pension schemes are mostly administered under trust law. In 1988 the Occupational Pensions Board recommended that trust law should continue as the legal basis of the law relating to occupational pension schemes. I have received representations in the last few days about various aspects of the legal basis of occupational pension funds.

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to bring into force regulations restricting company pension funds from investing more than a specified proportion of their assets in their own company.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 12 December at cols. *527-28*.

Attendance Allowance

24. **Mr. Ground:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently receive attendance allowance; and how many did in 1978-79.

Mr. Scott: The latest estimate is that, on average, 975,000 people will receive attendance allowance at any one time in 1991-92, compared to 265,000 in 1978-79.

Cold Weather Payments

26. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about the changes to the cold weather payments scheme announced last month.

Mr. Scott: I have received representations from a variety of organisations about the changes to the cold weather payments scheme. The improved scheme meets the needs of those groups of people who are most at risk from very cold weather and also makes the most effective use of public resources.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the amount of heat that can be purchased for the allowance to people who qualify under the cold weather payment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The amount of heat that could be purchased by a cold weather payment will vary depending on the type, and condition, of the heating system in use.

Social Fund

28. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were granted loans from the social fund from April to September 1991; and how many have been refused loans during that period on grounds which included an assumption that they lacked resources to ensure that repayment would be made.

Mr. Scott: Nearly 730,000 loans have been awarded from the social fund between April and October 1991. In the same period just under 19,900, or 1·7 per cent. of applications were refused due to the applicant's inability to repay.

Residential Homes

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about the level of benefits for people in residential care and nursing homes.

Miss Widdecombe: I have recently received a small number of representations about the proposed April 1992 increases, which have generally been welcomed.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have benefited from real increases in the income support limits for those in residential care and nursing homes over the last three years.

Miss Widdecombe: Over the past three years there have been four increases in the income support limits for people in residential care and nursing homes. Further increases, well above inflation in most cases, are proposed from April 1992. Some 265,000 income support recipients are expected to benefit from these increases.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the extra help which will be available to people in residential care homes from April 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: We have recently received a small number of representations about the proposed April 1992 increases which have generally been welcomed.

SERPS

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plan to modify the state earnings-related pension scheme.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to do so.

Community Care Grant

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for community care grant have been received in each of the Liverpool offices.

Mr. Scott: The total numbers of applications for community care grants received by each of the Liverpool offices for the year to date up to the end of October are:

	Total
Knowsley	4,777
Liverpool Central	3,541
Liverpool North	3,832
Liverpool South	5,276
Sefton	4,027

Disablement Benefits

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what improvements he plans to make in benefits for disabled people.

Mr. Scott: From April next year we are introducing two new benefits for disabled people. Disability living allowance which will bring extra cash help of at least £11·55 per week to around 300,000 people with the extra costs of their disability; and disability working allowance which will give help for the first time to up to 50,000 disabled people who wish to work, but have a limited earning capacity, by topping up their earnings. As well as these significant improvements we are also making other changes to benefits for disabled people: the residence conditions for severe disablement allowance will be aligned with those for attendance allowance and disability living allowance, making it easier for people coming to or returning to this country to qualify; families with children under 16 who will receive disability living allowance for care costs will, if the child has to go into hospital, keep that help for up to 12 weeks instead of four as under attendance allowance currently; and the earnings limit for invalid care allowance will be increased from £30 to £40.

Local Offices

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will issue guidelines to local benefit offices to simplify procedures for claiming benefits, especially for individuals over the age of 60 years who are claiming benefits for the first time.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pregnant Girls (Severe Hardship)

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pregnant girls aged 16 and under 18 years claimed income support on grounds of severe hardship in the latest 12 months for which figures are available; and how many were successful.

Mr. Jack: From December 1990 to November 1991 2,495 pregnant girls aged 16 and 17 claimed income support on grounds of severe hardship; of these less than one fifth of the claims were unsuccessful.

Source: Severe Hardship Claims Unit records.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to publicise the change in regulations bringing the residence qualifications for severe disablement allowance into line with those for comparable benefits.

Mr. Scott: We shall bring the amending regulations before the House shortly. We are currently considering what steps will be necessary to draw those amendments to the attention of people who may be affected.

Divorce

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to amend the law relating to the division of occupation pension benefits on divorce.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no such plans at present.

Carers Premium

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to pay the carers premium on the basis of caring responsibilities regardless of age.

Miss Widdecombe: The carer premium was introduced in October 1990 in the relevant income-related benefits on top of all other premiums, primarily to provide extra benefit to people of working age who are unable to work or whose employment is restricted because they care for a severely disabled person. It goes to carers who can establish entitlement to invalid care allowance.

A person over pension age who commences caring for another cannot establish entitlement to invalid care

allowance. A person who has established entitlement to invalid care allowance and the carer premium before reaching pension age retains the carer premium beyond pension age, in recognition of the limitations on employment caused by the caring role. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Self-investment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the report commissioned by his Department by Ernst and Young into the degree of self-investment by companies.

Miss Widdecombe: I am arranging for copies of the Ernst and Young report on self-investment to be placed in the Library.

Spastics Society

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received a copy of the Spastics Society's 1991 annual review, entitled "Progress in Partnership".

Mr. Scott: We have recently received a copy of the document which we shall read with interest.

National Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate for 1991-92 the numbers paying national insurance contributions in Great Britain, distinguishing *(a)* between the different classes of contribution and between employees and employers.

Mr. Jack: The information in respect of class 1, class 2 and class 4 contributions is given in the table.

Class of contribution	*Estimated average weekly numbers million*
Class 1 (employees)	18·75
Class 1 (employers)	[1]1·40
Class 2 (self employed)	2·25
Class 4 (self employed)	[2]2·00

[1]The latest available information is for 1990-91.
[2]Class 4 contributors also paying class 2 contributions.

In addition, some 250,000 individuals are expected to pay class 3 voluntary contributions at some point in the year, many of whom will also be paying another class of contribution.

Hospital Visits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received since 1988 concerning provision of help towards the cost of visits to hospital for families not on income support, and on the difficulties of families on income support obtaining community care grants towards hospital visits; what plans he has to assist families who are finding it difficult to travel to hospital to visit their relatives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Since 1988 we have received various representations concerning help with the cost of visiting people who are ill. The hospital travel costs scheme run by the Department of Health provides help for patients to attend hospital. Community care grants from the social fund may be available to help someone in receipt of income support visit a person who is ill. These arrangements are designed to ensure that help is targeted on the most needy families.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total amount of income support, or supplementary benefit, paid out each year to homeless families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, for each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Widow's Pension

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state for each year since 1979 the value of widow's pension for a widow aged 50 when her husband died, as a percentage of the index of average earnings.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the table.

Table

A *Date*	*B* *Average Weekly Earnings*	*C* *Standard Rate of Basic Widows Pension*	*D* *Percentage C to B*
November 1979	114·10	23·30	20·4
November 1980	135·10	27·15	20·1
November 1981	149·50	29·60	19·8
November 1982	160·60	32·85	20·5
November 1983	175·30	34·05	19·4
November 1984	187·40	35·80	19·1
November 1985	199·50	38·30	19·2
July 1986	210·90	38·70	18·3
April 1987	224·00	39·50	17·6
April 1988	245·80	41·15 (26·75)	16·7 (10·9)
April 1989	269·50	43·60 (28·34)	16·2 (10·5)
April 1990	295·60	46·90 (30·49)	15·9 (10·3)
April 1991	320·60	52·00 (33·80)	16·2 (10·5)

Note:
Column A—Uprating Date.
Column B—Average weekly earnings are taken from the New Earnings Survey and are for full-time adult males in April of each year.
Column C—Standard rate of Widows Pension—age 50 (age 55 after April 1988) at husband's death. The figures in brackets show the rate paid to a widow age 50 at the time of her husband's death (after April 1988).

Full-time Work

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has carried out into the effect of the proposed change in the definition of full-time work from 24 hours to 16 hours; and if he will state *(a)* the number of families where the head of the household works between 16 and 24 hours a week who are likely to gain from this proposal and *(b)* the number of families where the head of the household works from 16 to 24 hours a week where the family will lose as a result of the proposed change.

Mr. Jack: Estimates of the effects of the change in the hours rules in income support and family credit are based on a model derived from research using family expenditure survey data carried out for the Department of Social Security by the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

We estimate that 65,000 families where a parent is currently working between 16 and 24 hours will be able to gain from the extension of the family credit scheme. No one who is working between 16 and 24 hours and is receiving income support at the time of the change next April should lose, because they will either be able to move on to family credit and be better off, or continue to receive income support.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families on income support who currently receive help towards their mortgage costs will be removed from the income support scheme entirely as a result of the proposed change in the definition of full-time work from 24 hours to 16 hours; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: No family working 16 or more hours a week up to April 1992 will be removed from income support as a result of the change in the remunerative work rule. We expect about 5,000 families with mortgages to move off income support on to family credit and be better off, even after paying their mortgages. All other families will be able to remain on income support and continue to receive help with their mortgages exactly as before.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the entitlement to housing benefit of a single person aged 18 to 24 years with an income of £2,845 who has taken a room at £40 per week.

Miss Widdecombe: The housing benefit entitlement of a single person aged 18 to 24 years not entitled to any premiums, with an income of £2,845 and a rent liability of £40 would be £28·20. This calculation is based on the assumption that the income quoted is net earnings to which a disregard of £5 per week is appropriate. It also assumes that the amount of rent for which the person is liable is fully eligible for housing benefit and is not considered to be unreasonably expensive by the local authority.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is in percentage terms the value of the state retirement pension for single people and couples, in relation to the index of average earnings, for each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Basic retirement pension is not a complete/relevant indicator of pensioners' well-being. What counts is their total income from all sources. Between 1979 and 1988 pensioners' average net incomes rose by 34 per cent. in real terms. However, the information requested is given in the tables.

Table 1
Value, in percentage terms, of basic state retirement pension for a single person in relation to average earnings[1].

Date[2]	Average Weekly[3] Earnings £	Standard Rate Retirement Pension £	Percentage
November 1979	114·10	23·30	20·4
November 1980	135·10	27·15	20·1
November 1981	149·50	29·60	19·8
November 1982	160·60	32·85	20·5
November 1983	175·30	34·05	19·4
November 1984	187·40	35·80	19·1
November 1985	199·50	38·30	19·2
July 1986	210·90	38·70	18·3
April 1987	224·00	39·50	17·6
April 1988	245·80	41·15	16·7
April 1989	269·50	43·60	16·2
April 1990	295·60	46·90	15·9
April 1991	320·60	52·00	16·2

[1] Average earnings are taken from the New Earnings Survey and are for all full-time adult males.
[2] As at the date of uprating each year.
[3] As at April each year.

Table 2
Value, in percentage terms, of basic state retirement pension for a married couple in relation to average earnings[1].

Date[2]	Average weekly[3] earnings £	Standard rate retirement pension £	Percentage
November 1979	114·10	37·30	32·7
November 1980	135·10	43·45	32·2
November 1981	149·50	47·35	31·7
November 1982	160·60	52·55	32·7
November 1983	175·30	54·50	31·1
November 1984	187·40	57·30	30·6
November 1985	199·50	61·30	30·7
July 1986	210·90	61·95	29·4
April 1987	224·00	63·25	28·2
April 1988	245·80	65·90	26·8
April 1989	269·50	69·80	25·9
April 1990	295·60	75·10	25·4
April 1991	320·60	83·25	26·0

[1] The index of average earnings used is the all adult male new earnings survey.
[2] As at the date of uprating each year.
[3] As at April of each year.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for each year since 1979, what amount is payable under the industrial injuries and disablement scheme for a worker injured in the course of his employment who becomes 10 per cent. disabled for life.

Mr. Scott: The rates of disablement gratuities and pensions since 1979 are in the table. In addition reduced earnings allowance—formerly special hardship allowance—might have been payable for industrial accidents/diseases occurring prior to 1 October 1990.

For awards from:	Gratuity £	Weekly pension - (for pneumoconiosis, byssinosis or diffuse mesothelioma cases) £
15 November 1978 to 13 November 1979	1,166·00	3·19
14 November 1979 to 25 November 1980	1,391·50	3·80
26 November 1980 to 24 November 1981	1,622·50	4·45
25 November 1981 to 23 November 1982	1,765·50	4·83
24 November 1982 to 22 November 1983	1,958·00	5·36
23 November 1983 to 27 November 1984	2,029·50	5·56
28 November 1984 to 26 November 1985	2,134·00	5·84
27 November 1985 to 29 July 1986	2,282·50	6·25
30 July 1986 to 7 April 1987	2,310·00	6·32
8 April 1987 to 12 April 1988	—	6·45
13 April 1988 to 11 April 1989	—	6·72
12 April 1989 to 10 April 1990	—	7·12
11 April 1990 to 9 April 1991	—	7·66
10 April 1991 to 7 April 1992	—	8·49
8 April 1992	—	8·84

Youth Training

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the difficulties of placing 16 and 17-year-olds on youth training schemes and the consequent difficulties they face in claiming income support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on 9 December at columns *353-54*.

SCOTLAND

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why unreprocessed highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel is being put in dry storage at Torness and Hunterston; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Any firm proposal that spent AGR fuel be put in dry storage on Scottish Nuclear Ltd's generating sites would require the Secretary of State's consent in terms of section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. No application for such consent has been submitted.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations have been made at the GATT talks regarding the textile industries of Scotland.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* The Government's aims in the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations take account of the interests of the textile industry in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom and of the interests of the economy as a whole.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many landowners in Scotland are currently receiving annual payments under the set-aside scheme of *(a)* between £5,000 and £9,999, *(b)* between £10,000 and £19,999, *(c)* between £20,000 and £29,999, *(d)* between £30,000 and £39,999, *(e)* between £40,000 and £49,999, *(f)* between £50,000 and £59,999, *(g)* between £60,000 and £69,999 and *(h)* £70,000 and over.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* For set-aside participants who joined in the first two years the number of set-aside agreements recorded centrally in Scotland involving annual payments within the bands given is as follows:

Annual payment	Number of agreements
(a) £ 5,000-£ 9,999	108
(b) £10,000-£19,999	55
(c) £20,000-£29,999	24
(d) £30,000-£39,999	11
(e) £40,000-£49,999	2
(f) £50,000-£59,999	3
(g) £60,000-£69,999	Nil
(h) £70,000 and over	1

A further 317 agreements involved sums of less than £5,000. These figures include payments to both landowners and tenants. Information on payments to landowners alone and to participants who joined in the third year of the scheme is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Plutonium

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instigate an inquiry to ascertain the extent of the spread of plutonium traces from Sellafield in Cumbria along the west coast of Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* The levels of radioactivity in the Scottish marine environment are monitored regularly on behalf of the Secretary of State by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's directorate of fisheries research, and the programme includes samples from the west coast.

The results are published annually in reports in the series "Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters in the British Isles" and these are in the Library. They confirm that the levels of artificial radionuclides including plutonium in samples from Scottish waters are very low and well within the limits based on the recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection.

Training Schemes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of *(a)* persons aged 16 years and *(b)* persons aged 17 years have been on youth training schemes in every year since youth training started in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 27 November 1991]:* The percentage of *(a)* persons aged 16 years and *(b)* persons aged 17 years who have been on youth training schemes in every year since youth training started in Scotland is set out in the table.

Percentage of Scottish 16 and 17 year olds on Youth Training schemes[1]

Year	*Age 16*[2]	*Age 17*[3]
Autumn 1982[3]	16·5	11·7
1983[3]	16·1	11·1
1984	18·0	12·1
1985[4]	23·0	16·5
1986	20·8	16·4
1987	16·5	19·7
1988	16·2	22·0
January 1989	22·0	19·2
1990	19·9	17·3

[1] The figures relate to the numbers in training at a point in time during the year not to the total numbers who took part in a training programme in the course of a year. There is no available data on total participants.

[2] Age at the end of December up to 1988 and age at the end of August for 1989 and 1990.

[3] Includes trainees on the Youth Opportunities Programme.

[4] December 1985 extimate based on Youth Training figures for October 1985 and January 1986.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 17 December 1991

TRANSPORT

Cornelis Johanna BM 204

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to pay compensation to the owners of Cornelis Johanna BM 204 for the defective test carried out by his Department in 1977; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Matters relating to the surveys of this vessel under the Fishing Vessels (Safety Provisions) Rules 1975, including the test carried out in 1977, have been referred to the Treasury solicitor for advice.

Metropolitan Passenger Transport Authorities

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has met representatives of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to discuss the case for restoring the precepting status of the six metropolitan passenger transport authorities.

Mr. Freeman: I met a delegation from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on 1 July to discuss this.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will restore the precepting powers to the six metropolitan passenger transport authorities.

Mr. Freeman: I am considering the representations which I have received on this subject.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from *(a)* the six metropolitan passenger transport authorities and *(b)* others about their change in status from precepting to levying authorities.

Mr. Freeman: I have received a number of representations from the metropolitan county passenger transport authorities, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities and Members with constituency interests in PTA areas.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has made any assessment of the likely effect of seismic disturbance on the operation of the channel tunnel; and what discussions have taken place with the channel tunnel safety authority on this subject.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that Eurotunnel is currently carrying out a programme of studies, which has been agreed by a group of seismic experts appointed by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority and Eurotunnel, to satisfy the safety authority that the Eurotunnel design criterion for the tunnel affords an appropriate level of assurance against seismic risk. The studies are examining whether passengers can be evacuated safely and within a reasonable period in the event of an earthquake equivalent to the most serious ever known in the area. These studies should be complete by February 1992.

InterCity (Faults)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give for InterCity *(a)* the number of faults which resulted in delays of 30 minutes or more and *(b)* the number of cancellations in each of the last two years, broken down by service area, date and cause where available.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that there have been the following delays and cancellations on InterCity services:

	Number of trains delayed over 30 minutes (percentage)				*Number of trains cancelled (percentage)*			
	1990-91		*1990-91 (to 31 October 1991)*		*1990-91*		*1991-92 (to 31 October 1991)*	
Region		*per cent.*		*per cent.*		*per cent.*		*per cent.*
WCML	4,947	(7·7)	2,776	(7·9)	2,513	(3·9)	523	(1·5)
MML	619	(2·8)	259	(2·1)	878	(3·9)	153	(1·2)
CROSS COUNTRY	3,118	(8·1)	1,341	(6·4)	711	(1·8)	364	(1·7)
GWML	1,316	(2·8)	578	(2·2)	1,081	(2·3)	535	(2·0)
GATWICK EXPRESS	301	(0·7)	149	(0·6)	1,438	(3·3)	1,592	(6·5)
ECML	3,268	(9·2)	1,384	(6·6)	904	(2·5)	424	(2·0)
ANGLIA	960	(5·9)	310	(3·6)	616	(3·8)	119	(1·4)

The Department does not hold data on the date and cause of delays and cancellations. These are management matters for British Rail.

THE ARTS

Exhibition, Upper Waiting Hall

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister for the Arts if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to an exhibition by the Yorkshire mining museum, entitled "Out of the Pits", to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Renton: Yes. I am glad to sponsor the "Out of the Pits" exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service College

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what surveys have been made of the cost effectiveness of the Civil Service college.

Mr. Renton: This is an operational matter for the Civil Service college, and I have asked the chief executive to reply directly to the hon. Member.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list, in percentage terms, the number of disabled people employed in each Department of State.

Mr. Renton: Information is collected centrally only on the employment in the civil service of people registered as disabled. There are more who have chosen not to register.

The percentage of people registered as disabled employed in each Department of State at 1 June 1990, the latest date for which complete figures are available, was:

	Per cent.
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1·4
Cabinet Office	1·0
Crown Estate Office	4·4
Crown Prosecution Service	0·6
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	1·3
Defence	0·9
Education and Science	2·6
Employment Group	3·2
Energy	1·1
Environment	0·9
Export Credit Guarantee Department	1·5
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	0·3
Health	0·6
Home Office	0·3
Inland Revenue	1·6
Land Registry	4·2
Lord Chancellor's Department	1·43
National Investment Loans Office	4·7
National Savings	2·8
Office of Population Census Surveys	2·1
Ordnance Survey	0·8
Overseas Development Administration	1·4
Paymaster General's Office	3·9
Property Service Agency	1·2
Scottish Office	1·2
Scottish Prison Service	0·1
Social Security	1·7
Her Majesty's Stationery Office	1·7
Her Majesty's Treasury	1·0
Trade and Industry	1·2
Transport	1·2
Welsh Office	1·4

There are also over 400 people working in Departments and agencies under the Department of Employment's sheltered placement scheme.

ENERGY

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what trials, experiments or other modes of operation which would deviate from normal operational practice are included in the proposal by Nuclear Electric to restart one of the reactors at Trawsfynydd power station for a period of six months; and what revision to the temperature of operation of each of the reactor core, fuel, coolant gas and reactor presure vessel shell is included in the proposed operations;

(2) if he will make a statement about his current assessment of the frequency probability of failure incidents in the reactor pressure vessels deployed at each of the Magnox nuclear power stations;

(3) what effect delays in the reactor pressure vessel surveying programme at Trawsfynydd and other Magnox nuclear power stations have had on the timing of Nuclear Electric's preparation and submission of a revised safety case to the nuclear installations inspectorate;

(4) on what date Nuclear Electric submitted a revised nuclear safety case for the continued operation of each of the Magnox power stations to the nuclear installations inspectorate; and what materials data, determined from the recent inspections of the reactor pressure vessel at Trawsfynydd and other Magnox nuclear power stations, are included in the revised safety case;

(5) if he will make a statement on the progress of the reactor pressure vessel inspection and surveying programmes currently under way at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station; and if physical obstacles encountered during these inspections have now been overcome.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The details of any operational changes proposed in the revised safety case for a return to power at Trawsfynydd are a matter for Nuclear Electric plc. The assessment of the safety case is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate. The NII will not consent to the restart of the station until it is convinced that it is safe to do so.

In the light of developments at Trawsfynydd, NE has reviewed the position at its four other Magnox stations with steel pressure vessels, and following certain operational changes the NII has agreed to their continued operation up to the end of 1991. Full safety cases to enable the stations to operate beyond the end of the year were submitted to the NII on 11 September and are currently under consideration. I understand that the NII propose's to make an announcement by the end of this month.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will make a statement on details of the temperature excursion that occurred in reactor 1 at Bradwell nuclear power station on 17 June 1991; what caused the increase in temperature; and whether he has been informed of any disciplinary action by Nuclear Electric as a result of this incident;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the full report of the Nuclear Electric board of inquiry into the temperature excursion incident at Bradwell nuclear power station on 17 June 1991, and the report of the nuclear installations inspectorate; and if he will also place in the Library details of any equipment modifications and revisions to management procedures that have been implemented as a result of the incident.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand from the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate that, during the return to service of Bradwell's reactor 1 on 17 June 1991, it was observed that the gas temperature limit in a small area of the reactor core was exceeded by 30 deg C. The temperature deviation was readily brought

back within limits by control rod insertion. This incident has been classified at level 2 on the international nuclear event scale—that is, a technical incident or anomaly not directly affecting plant safety.

I am advised by Nuclear Electric plc that incident inquiries are undertaken on a confidential basis in order to encourage the maximum disclosure of information. The details of such investigations are not, therefore, published. The conclusions and actions arising are, however, provided to the regulatory authorities.

Coal Imports

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, by year for the last four years and for the current year to date, the tonnages of coal imported into the United Kingdom, showing in his answer *(a)* the port the coal was unloaded at and *(b)* the country of origin of the coal.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Breakdowns of coal imports by port of entry, and by country of origin, for the periods requested, are as follows:

Thousand tonnes

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*[3]
Port of entry					
Immingham	669	999	1,268	2,182	2,482
London (including Tilbury)	538	743	782	2,104	2,395
Middlesbrough	2,501	2,570	2,812	2,385	2,328
Port Talbot	1,958	1,997	2,610	2,885	2,259
Medway	556	565	652	855	1,930
Greenock	1,216	1,164	1,162	1,027	1,081
Liverpool	65	31	286	948	1,080
Cardiff	222	294	229	410	435
Swansea	—	92	134	162	377
Hull	19	1	44	152	364
Belfast	172	192	182	332	326
Others	1,865	3,036	1,975	1,340	1,284
Total	9,781	11,685	12,137	14,783	16,341
Country of origin					
United States of America[1]	2,890	4,073	4,874	6,176	6,817
Australia[1]	3,459	3,416	2,676	3,044	3,924
Colombia[1]	319	574	874	1,506	2,059
USSR	89	375	181	592	730
Canada	362	553	729	986	592
South Africa	188	276	346	356	526
Poland	1,083	1,270	1,055	1,043	431
China	146	319	450	69	289
Belgium	192	122	78	60	219
Germany[2]	261	191	288	250	188
Venezuela	—	92	86	169	159
Others[1]	790	424	501	532	407
Total	9,781	11,685	12,137	14,783	16,341

[1] Some imports previously recorded by Customs and Excise as originating in the Netherlands have been re-allocated to the other countries indicated or, where revised country of origin data is not available, included in the residual entry, "Others". This re-allocation has been carried out for 1991 and estimates of such imports previously classified to the Netherlands have been included for 1990. Figures for earlier years have not been re-allocated to individual countries.

[2] Includes imports previously recorded separately for the German Democratic Republic.

[3] January to October.

Source: HM Customs and Excise.

Non-fossil Fuel Levy

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what sum was received by Nuclear Electric from the non-fossil fuel levy and from the electricity supply industry in the first six months of 1991-92 and in the year 1990-91;

(2) what proportion of *(a)* the income received by Nuclear Electric and *(b)* the cost of providing electricity by Nuclear Electric in 1990-91 was provided from the non-fossil fuel levy;

(3) what was the total value of the non-fossil fuel levy in the first six months of 1991-92 and in the full year 1990-91.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Office of Electricity Regulation estimates that total receipts for the fossil fuel levy in 1990-91 were £1,175 million. OFFER's estimate of receipts for 1991-92 will be published in due course. Levy receipts are shared between the companies which have contracts under the qualifying arrangements for the various non-fossil fuel obligation orders, in accordance with the terms of those contracts. The details of those contracts, and hence the share of the levy due to individual companies, are commercially confidential.

Offshore Oil Wells

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the number of *(a)* United Kingdom offshore oil wells currently in production and *(b)* the number which were in production 10 years ago.

Mr. Moynihan: The number of wells in the United Kingdom continental shelf from which oil was produced during October 1991 was 634. The corresponding figure for October 1981 was 286.

Magnox Nuclear Stations

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the life expectancy of the Magnox stations currently operated by Nuclear Electric.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The lifetimes of Nuclear Electric's Magnox stations are a commercial matter for the company. On 9 November 1989, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House at column 1176 that it should be possible, subject to the views of the nuclear installations inspectorate, for the lifetime of at least some of the Magnox stations to be extended. It remains the Government's policy that capital approval will be given for such projects if a suitable safety and economic case can be made.

EC Competence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement outlining the areas of his responsibility in which the EC will have competence following the implementation of agreements at Maastricht.

Mr. Wakeham: The agreements reached at Maastricht will not extend the competence of the EC in areas directly related to energy.

Solar Energy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has to encourage research and development into and the manufacture of commercial photovoltaic cell-based solar energy devices in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department is undertaking a two-year programme to assess the potential and opportunities for photovoltaic electricity generation in the United Kingdom, to identify any barriers to its use and to seek methods to overcome them.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Passes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members have *(a)* one full researcher pass, *(b)* more than one full researcher pass, *(c)* a place on the waiting list for a researcher pass and *(d)* a place on the waiting list and are Front Bench spokespersons.

Mr. MacGregor: The latest Pass Office records show that:

(a) 168 hon. Members have one full researcher's pass;
(b) 2 hon. Members have two full researcher's passes;
(c) 11 hon. Members are on the waiting list for a full researcher's pass;
(d) 4 Front Bench spokespersons are on the waiting list for a full researcher's pass;
58 Members have places on the Research Assistant's list which are currently not filled.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dogs

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of incidents which have occurred in which dogs suspected to have been covered by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 have actually been found to be or to be likely to be cross-breeds and therefore excluded from the provisions of the Act.

Mrs. Rumbold: Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which creates criminal offences relating to dogs that are dangerously out of control in a public place, already applies to any dog, whether or not it is a cross-breed.

The fact that a dog is a cross-breed of one of those types of fighting dog specially controlled by section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 does not mean that it is necessarily excluded from those controls. Section 1 currently applies to any dog of the type known as the pit bull terrier, the Japanese tosa, the dogo Argentino and fila Braziliero. A cross-breed of any of these types of dog is also subject to the special controls of section 1 if it has the characteristics of these types of dogs. Ultimately it will be for the courts to decide in each case whether a particular dog is of the type covered by section 1 of the Act. In any proceedings where it is alleged by the prosecution that a dog is one to which section 1 applies, the onus is on the accused to prove the contrary.

Central records are not kept of incidents in which dogs are involved but which do not result in prosecutions. Statistics for prosecutions under section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 are not yet available, but they will not, in any case, specify whether the dog involved was alleged to have been a cross-breed.

Thorn Cross

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders were transferred from Hewell Grange to the young offenders institution at Thorn Cross during September 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: Twenty-six.

RSPCA (Exhibition)

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 23 March to Friday 27 March 1992.

Maastricht

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement outlining the areas of his responsibility in which the EC will have competence following the implementation of agreements at Maastricht.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Community already has competence in relation to freedom of movement and residence of Community nationals and under the single market provisions of the treaty of Rome to aspects of certain other of my responsibilities, including some aspects of transborder data flow and the illicit drugs trade. Implementation of the Maastricht agreement will add the common list of countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the community's external borders; measures related to a uniform format for visas; measures on civil protection; and aspects of drug dependence.

LEAs (Funding)

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the allocation to local education authorities for 1992-93 of section 11 funding.

Mrs. Rumbold: We hope to announce the allocation to education authorities and others very shortly.

Animal Experiments

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce any further appointments to the Animal Procedures Committee.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am pleased to be able to announce the appointment to the Animal Procedures Committee with effect from 1 January 1992 of Dr. A. J. Suckling, chief scientific officer of the RSPCA. I am grateful to Dr. Suckling for agreeing to serve on this committee.

Mr. George Capelo

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter sent to him on 21 August 1991 by the hon. Member for East Lothian concerning Mr. George Capelo.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: An investigation is continuing into Mr. Capelo's complaint about delays at immigration control at Edinburgh and Heathrow airports. The investigation is now nearing completion and I will write to the hon. Member with the outcome early in the new year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Yugoslavia

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Britain has any plans to withdraw landing rights from the airline of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no such plans.

Croatia and Slovenia

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the alleged massacre of civilians at Dalj on 1 August 1991, Lovinac on 13 August 1991, Banija on 16 August 1991, and near Podravska Slatina on 13 September 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are investigating these incidents, and I shall report as soon as possible.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of civilian and Red Cross ambulances that have been destroyed by the action of Serbian forces in Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no reliable information on the number of ambulances destroyed by the Serbian forces in Croatia.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of civilians who have been killed during the fighting in Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Conflicting claims and an absence of reliable independent sources mean that it is difficult to give precise figures for casualties in Croatia. Most estimates fall between 5,000 and 10,000 deaths.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the number of hospitals, churches and cultural monuments which have been damaged or destroyed by federal army action in Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have no reliable figures for the number of hospitals, churches and cultural monuments damaged or destroyed by Yugoslav federal army action in Croatia.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of Red Cross medical personnel missing in Croatia; and what does he know of their fate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 13 December 1991, no ICRC personnel were missing in Croatia. We have no reliable information on the number of local Croatian Red Cross personnel missing.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Yugoslavian authorities about the repeated shelling of Dubrovnik.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have publicly and strongly condemned the Yugoslav federal army's aggression against Dubrovnik, a city of no military significance. And at our initiative, a group of ambassadors have made strong representations to the Ministry of Defence in Belgrade.

EC Social Action

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with the President of the European Commission concerning the facilities available within the Commission to foster multilateral agreements covering the provisions of the social chapter in the Netherlands Government draft of the proposed treaty of European union prepared for signature at the Maastricht summit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: None. This issue remains to be discussed.

Social Chapter

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the provisions governing the competence of the European Court of Justice in considering the non-adherence of the United Kingdom to the social chapter of the proposed EC treaty at Maastricht.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The ECJ has jurisdiction to interpret the treaty as it stands, not to rule on its validity.

Children's Rights

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government intend to ratify the United Nations convention on the rights of the child; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[pursuant to his answer, 2 December 1991]:* The United Kingdom ratified the United Nations convention on the rights of the child on 16 December 1991. Progress is being made towards extending ratification to the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and dependent territories.

A copy of the instrument of ratification has been placed in the Library of the House.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Judges (Kenya)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what terms and conditions the United Kingdom Government support the employment of judges in Kenya; on what criteria judges are seconded to that country; and on what criteria judges seconded to serve in Kenya are reappointed or removed.

Mrs. Chalker: Judges working in Kenya under the British aid programme—there are three at the present time

—are employed by the Government of Kenya on contract. They are not seconded. The Government of Kenya pays the salaries of judges employed under these arrangements and the ODA pays salary supplements and certain other benefits. Decisions to reappoint or terminate the appointments of judges are normally made following consultations between the Government of Kenya and Her Majesty's Government and taking account of a wide range of considerations.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities Credit Management Advisory Board

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what communication his Department has received about the Local Authorities Credit Management Advisory Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department has received three inquiries from companies asking for confirmation of the bona fides of Local Authorities Credit Management Advisory Board.

The companies from whom the inquiries were received had responded to an advertisement in the *Financial Times* in September and were considering entering into contracts with LACMAB for the collection of debt owed to local authorities. These contracts involved them placing £250,000 on deposit with LACMAB for six months.

According to these companies, LACMAB had claimed to be known to my Department, and to be working under its auspices. Any such claim would be untrue. This organisation is not known to my Department, and has not carried out any work under its auspices. My officials also ascertained that the organisation had not previously been known to the Association of County Councils, Association of District Councils, Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Audit Commission or Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. We have informed the firms from whom inquiries have been received accordingly.

Carbon Dioxide

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to achieve stabilisation of carbon dioxide emissions; what estimates he has of the contributions of the transport and energy sectors to the reduction in emissions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200) set out the Government's strategy for achieving our conditional target of returning Britain's CO_2 emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2005. The first year report (Cm 1655) showed how the first set of measures is being put into practice. Action is being taken across all sectors of the economy taking into account the relative cost-effectiveness of measures in different sectors and other wider costs and benefits.

Playing Fields

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to issue final planning policy guidance on the disposal of playing fields.

Mr. Heseltine: We have already done so, in planning policy guidance note 17, "Sport and Recreation", published in September this year.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to introduce a statutory obligation for local authorities to provide housing for those covered by community care programmes.

Mr. Yeo: Social services authorities will be responsible for community care assessments. Section 46(2) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1991 requires them to consult other agencies, including housing authorities, when drawing up their community care plans to meet the needs of their area. At the same time, housing authorities should consult social services authorities in preparing their own housing investment strategies each year. When making assessments for community care, social services authorities will be expected to involve the housing authority whenever an individual's assessment indicates a possible housing need. Those who are homeless and considered vulnerable would be protected under part III of the Housing Act 1985.

It does not follow that everyone who is assessed under the new community care arrangements will be in need of housing. There will be a majority who will be able to go on living in their existing homes with suitable domiciliary care or, perhaps, custom adaptations. Local authorities are able to award mandatory disabled facilities grants for essential adaptations where an applicant qualifies for help under the test of resources. Discretionary grants may also be available for other adaptations, including minor works assistance for the elderly.

We see no reason, therefore, to take new statutory powers.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives from Anchor housing association to discuss the development of sheltered housing schemes.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has had no contact with Anchor housing association on this subject.

Planning Applications

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the statutory provisions that relate to control of repetitious and vexatious planning applications.

Sir George Young: Section 70A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, inserted by section 17 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, gives local planning authorities the power to turn away planning applications if within the previous two years the Secretary of State has refused a substantially similar proposal on appeal or following call-in, and there has been no significant change in any material consideration.

EC Meetings

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council held on 12 to 13 December.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all meetings he and his officials have had with his counterparts in European Community countries over the past six weeks; and if he will set out the issues discussed and decisions taken at each meeting.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and I represented the United Kingdom at a joint session of the Environment and Energy Councils on 13 December to discuss the Commission's recent communication on a Community strategy to limit carbon dioxide emissions and to improve energy efficiency. Conclusions were agreed which recognised the need for a strategy at Community level based on a wide-ranging package of Community and national measures. It was agreed that national programmes should be formulated for limiting CO_2 emissions. It was also agreed that specific measures at Community level and a move to higher energy pricing through the use of fiscal instruments were likely to be needed. The Council invited the Commission to put forward formal proposals for measures arising from the Community strategy, including any necessary proposals for Communitywide taxations, taking into account the further studies needed and the conclusions of separate discussions by Finance Ministers.

These conclusions are a positive step foward in the process of agreeing a coherent and coordinated approach across the Community to limiting CO_2 emissions, as part of the global efforts to tackle the threat of climate change. At the same time, they clearly recognise the need for further analytical work before a decision on the questions of energy/carbon taxation can be reached. The United Kingdom will be participating in this further analysis.

My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council on 12 December.

The Council agreed a regulation setting up a Communitywide eco-labelling scheme. The scheme will provide consumers with authoritative guidance as to which products are less damaging to the environment than alternatives on the basis of an assessment of their impact over the whole of their life cycle. The scheme will be voluntary. The United Kingdom has played a leading role in the development of this scheme, and in the design of the logo which will be awarded to products meeting Community criteria. Work will now begin on defining criteria for an initial tranche of 10 to 12 product groups, with a view to the scheme being launched next autumn.

After several years of discussion, the Council finally agreed the directive to protect habitats and wild flora and fauna. The directive will establish a network of special areas of conservation for rare, endangered and vulnerable species and habitats across the Community. The network will be known as Natura 2000 and will consist of sites of international importance on the Community scale. The directive also enshrines the Berne convention into the Community's legal framework. This important measure represents a major step forward for nature conservation in the Community.

A regulation establishing a new Community fund for the environment (LIFE) was agreed. This brings together several existing funds and also incorporates a number of new areas for Community support. The projects which could benefit from Community assistance include nature protection measures under the habitats directive, development of clean technologies, measures to protect the marine environment, and environmental education, training and information initiatives.

The Council agreed a new regulation amending regulation 1734/88/EEC concerning exports and imports of certain dangerous chemicals. This will introduce the prior informed consent procedure into European Community law. It enables importing countries to decide whether or not to allow the import of an internationally agreed list of dangerous chemicals. Exporters in the Community will be prohibited from supplying these if the receiving country withholds consent. Risks to human health and the environment from chemicals in third-world countries should be reduced by this measure.

The Council adopted a common position on a regulation which provides for the collection and evaluation of data on existing chemical substances and, if necessary, proposals for control action. The regulation is complementary to the recently revised notification scheme for new chemical substances.

In the course of a discussion on the implementation and enforcement of Community legislation, there was a favourable response to ideas put forward by the United Kingdom for a Community environment inspectorate. These envisaged an audit-type inspectorate charged with ensuring that enforcement agencies within the member states were applying EC legislation effectively and consistently. It would report its findings to the Commission who would remain responsible for any necessary follow-up action. The Commission expressed its support in principle for the United Kingdom initiative and undertook to bring forward proposals next year.

Council conclusions on a common approach to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development next year were agreed. These set out the results which EC countries hope to achieve at UNCED and address in particular the financial, technological, legal and institutional issues on the UNCED agenda. EC Environment and Development Ministers will continue their preparations for UNCED at a joint Council in February.

The Council formally adopted directives against hazardous waste and on the protection of water against pollution by nitrate from agricultural sources which were agreed in principle earlier this year.

The Council also discussed the proposed regulation on the movement of waste, and new proposals on the sulphur content of gasoil and on trade in endangered species of wild flora and fauna.

The United Kingdom drew the Council's attention to new scientific evidence on the rate of depletion of the ozone layer and called for new measures to bring forward still further the deadlines agreed last year for phasing out the use of ozone-depleting substances.

Municipal Bonds

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to extending the right of local authorities to raise long-term capital finance by means of issuing municipal bonds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Local authorities are already able to raise long-term capital finance by issuing bonds. We are not currently contemplating any change in authorities' powers in this field.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received since March 1991 on the issue of the capital financing arrangements of local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The many representations received on various capital finance issues could be listed only at disproportionate cost. All are considered carefully, and legislative changes made when necessary.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assumptions he has made, in his revenue support grant announcement, regarding the level of permitted borrowing, by individual block allocation, in 1992-93 to finance capital programmes; what were the equivalent figures in the current year; and what is the basis of his assumption that the charges in 1992-93 will fall by 11 per cent.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The estimated borrowing limits assumed for the 1992-93 RSG consultation announcement and those used for the 1991-92 settlement are shown in the table.

The standard spending assessment element for debt charges proposed for 1992-93 is based on a number of factors. One of the most important of these is expected interest rates for which a fall has been assumed from 11 per cent. used in the 1991-92 settlement to 10 per cent. being proposed for 1992-93.

Annual capital guidelines and supplementary credit approvals

£ million

	1991-92	*1992-93*
Annual capital guidelines:		
Education	516·2	276·6
PSS	98·0	106·0
Home Office	21·7	22·6
Transport	389·7	497·3
Housing (non-HRA)	404·5	318·5
Other services	261·7	278·4
Total annual capital guidelines	1,691·7	1,499·4
Less receipts taken into account	473·9	375·0
Total basic credit approvals	1,217·8	1,124·4
Plus supplementary credit approvals		
Education	4·8	42·1
PSS	18·0	60·0
Home Office	49·5	80·6
Transport	102·4	131·7
Other services	68·9	71·3
Total supplementary credit approvals	243·6	385·8
Total credit approvals (the sum of BCAs and SCAs)	1,461·4	1,510·2

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the future of local authorities' capital financing arrangements in his review of local government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The outcome of the review of local government has not led to any proposals for changes in the existing arrangements for capital financing of local authorities.

Local Authorities (Financial Difficulties)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards central funding of local authorities which have financial difficulties due to *(a)* the collapse of BCCI, *(b)* late rating appeals and *(c)* interest rate swaps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The local authorities affected by such financial difficulties should expect to resolve them for themselves, rather than expect funds from central Government, but the Government will always consider on their merits any proposals which affected local authorities may make.

Planning Proposals (Polls)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 for calling a community poll concerning a planning proposal affecting that community have been used in England and Wales; and if he will list those occasions and the costs of each poll.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not collected centrally.

Shared Housing Ownership

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what recent representations he has received from housing associations about the shared ownership value limits imposed by the Housing Corporation;

(2) what provision is made by the shared ownership value limits imposed by the Housing Corporation in order to take account of the variation of average property prices within large conurbations, rural areas, and compact market towns within the same region.

Mr. Key: Representations have recently been received from Templar Housing Society Ltd. and Manchester and District Housing Association Ltd. Value limits are normally pitched at a slightly higher level than the average prices being paid in the regions by first-time buyers, in order to allow for some variation of prices within regions. In addition, value limits may be exceeded by up to 10 per cent. in certain rural areas and in towns which are growth areas for employment. The Housing Corporation is currently considering revised cost control arrangements for shared ownership.

Housing Revenue Accounts

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the net value of transfers—gross transfers minus reverse transfers from housing revenue accounts to general funds—from local authority general funds to their housing revenue accounts for each calendar year since 1980 for Great Britain.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 19 November, at column 97.

Environment Protection Act

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish the regulations and code of practice on the duty of care under section 34 of the Environment Protection Act 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, together with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales, has today laid before Parliament the code of practice and the regulations made under section 34 (duty of care) of the Environment Protection Act. An associated circular will be issued to local authorities.

The duty of care will come into force on 1 April 1992. From that date, every business in Britain will be responsible for taking measures to ensure that their waste goes only to authorised, responsible destinations, whether that is for recycling or for disposal. Anyone who fails to take care of their waste will be guilty of a criminal offence.

The regulations, code of practice and circular have been further improved and clarified in the light of the many comments received. The code of practice offers practical advice for all those subject to the duty.

I believe that this measure will be widely welcomed by responsible industry, as well as by all who care about what happens to waste. It must be right for the producers and holders of waste to take responsibility and account for where they send their waste. This should go a long way towards cutting off at source the supplies of waste that are now heedlessly and illegally dumped.

This is a great advance in the legal control of waste.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Textile and Clothing Industry

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in the GATT Uruguay round of trade negotiations towards international harmonisation of tariffs on textiles and clothing and the reduction of other trade barriers facing United Kingdom exports.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* There has been some support from participants in the GATT Uruguay round for the international harmonisation of textile and clothing tariffs (i.e. maximum levels would be agreed for each type of product). The European Community continues to press for agreement. We are aware of the textile and clothing industry's concerns about other trade barriers facing United Kingdom exports and these have been drawn to the attention of the European Commission, which continues to work for their elimination.

British Petroleum

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to BP—The Way Forward to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Leigh: Yes. Arrangements have been made for such an exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall to take place from Monday 3 to Friday 7 February 1992.

Trading Standards and Environmental Health

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if British officials listed as trading standards officers and environmental health officers will be able to participate in the European Community action plan for the exchange of officials engaged in the enforcement of Community legislation required to build the single market, as set out in *Official Journal* C229 of 20 November; and what information he has on the record of the United Kingdom and other EC member states on the enforcement of European Community legislation as they relate to trading standards and environmental health matters.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Commission's proposal for an action plan for the exchange of national officials between member state administrations engaged in the enforcement of single market legislation has only just been presented to the Council. The proposal will now be the subject of discussion in the Council and the Parliament. It is too early to say what the final shape of the proposal will be. A pilot project for the scheme earlier this year involved a British trading standards officer in an exchange visit to France. There is insufficient evidence at present to produce a meaningful comparison of the performance of member states on enforcement.

Maxwell Companies (Pension Funds)

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he received any representations before 5 November 1991 from the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation about the pension funds of any companies of which the late Robert Maxwell was a director.

Mr. Lilley: None.

Telecommunication Companies

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply of 9 December, *Official Report*, column 281, if he will take steps to ensure that his consultation with other Departments is completed in time for a response to be sent to the Council on Tribunals concerning their potential interest in the disputes procedure of telecommunications companies as covered by the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill prior to the Report stage of that Bill in this House.

Mr. Redwood: Consultation between Departments and the regulators has been carried out as a matter of urgency, and information has already been passed to the Council on Tribunals.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply of 9 December, *Official Report*, column 281, if he will indicate the nature of the potential interest in the disputes procedure of telecommunications companies as covered by the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill that has been expressed by the Council on Tribunals.

Mr. Redwood: In its approach to the Department, the Council on Tribunals expressed potential interest in clauses which conferred new functions on the directors general in relation to dispute resolution. Clauses 1 and 5 to 7 inclusive have been mentioned for telecommunications. The council wishes to consider whether any formal procedures to hold oral hearings, similar to those held by tribunals under the Council's supervision, are likely to be established by the directors general. I would emphasise that it is dispute procedures set up by the regulators in which the Council has expressed interest, not procedures of the utilities they monitor.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply of 9 December, *Official*

Report, column 281, if he will publish the response his Department has sent to the Council on Tribunals concerning their potential interest in the disputes procedures of telecommunications companies as covered by the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill.

Mr. Redwood: Correspondence and discussions are continuing between the Council on Tribunals, the Department and the regulators. It is not appropriate to publish this ongoing consultation. I made a statement to Standing Committee on the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill on 17 December about the issues involved.

Shipbuilding

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which shipyards participated in the study to compare build costs in Europe and the far east, undertaken for the European Commission by TECNECON, giving the figures by country for each ship type examined.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* The TECNECON study for the European Commission covered 12 ship types. Twenty-one shipyards from member states participated in the provision of cost data. Details are as follows:

Ship type	*Shipyard/Country*
VLCC (280,000 dwt) (double skin)	Harland and Wolff (United Kingdom) Odense (Denmark) HDW (Germany)
Suezmax tanker (140,000 dwt) (double skin)	Harland and Wolff (United Kingdom) Solisner-Estalieros Navais SA (Portugal) Odense (Denmark) Astilleros Espanoles (Spain) Fincantieri (Italy)
Aframax tanker (85,000 dwt) (double skin)	Fincantieri (Italy) B & W (Denmark) Astilleros Espanoles (Spain)
Product tanker (40,000 dwt)	Kvaerner Govan (United Kingdom) B & W (Denmark) Astilleros Espanoles (Spain)
Cape bulker (150,000 dwt)	Fincantieri (Italy) Harland and Wolff (United Kingdom) Odense (Denmark)
Large container (3,500 TEU)	Bremer Vulkan (Germany) HDW (Germany) Odense (Denmark)
Small container (1,700 TEU) (geared)	HDW (Germany) Bremer Vulkan (Germany) Chantiers de l'Atlantique (France) Odense (Denmark) Verolme (Netherlands)
Chemical carrier (3,000 dwt)	Sietas (Germany) Verolme (Netherlands) Aarhus (Denmark) Cochrane (United Kingdom)
LPG carrier (18,000 cm)	Odense (Denmark) Kvaerner Govan (United Kingdom) Meyer (Germany)
Reefer (600,000 ft³)	Bremer Vulkan (Germany) Astilleros Espanoles (Spain) Boelwerf NV (Belgium) Van der Giessen (Netherlands) Kvaerner Govan (United Kingdom) Danyard (Denmark)
Ferry (2,000 passengers) (600 cars)	Chantier de l'Atlantique (France) Bremer Vulkan (Germany) Boelwerf NV (Belgium) Van der Giessen (Netherlands) Fincantieri (Italy) Astilleros Espanoles (Spain)
Tug (4,000 bhp)	Dunston (United Kingdom) Damen (Netherlands) Aarhus (Denmark) Chantiers Naval De Rupelmonde (Belgium)

Cost data submitted by individual shipyards are commercially confidential.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations his Department has had with United Kingdom shipbuilders on the level of aid for EC shipbuilding for 1992 under the terms of the EC seventh shipbuilding directive.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* I met representatives of the Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers Association, at their request, on 26 November to discuss a number of issues including the 1992 levels of aid for shipbuilding within the European Community.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his Department's position on the level of state aid for shipbuilding for 1992 under the terms of the seventh EC shipbuilding directive.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* The Government's position on state aid for shipbuilding remains unchanged. We are in favour of the multilateral phasing out of subsidies.

The European Commission is expected to announce shortly its aid ceilings for 1992 under the seventh directive on aid to shipbuilding. Our own levels will be decided in the light of the announcement and will come into effect on 1 January 1992. Details will be given to the House in due course.

Welsh Consumer Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what salary is paid to the chair of the Welsh Consumer Council.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* The appointment of chair of the WCC attracts a salary of £4,420 per annum, plus, as a member of the National Consumer Council, an additional £4,420 per annum, both of which are subject to tax and national insurance.

British Steel

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had on proposals or decisions to close existing capacity in British Steel in Great Britain.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* Any such proposals or decisions are a matter for the board of British Steel. My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Steel from time to time, but their discussions are confidential.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the

effect British Steel's investment plans overseas will have on capacity in specific areas of production in Britain with regard to general steels.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 16 December 1991:* None. Such matters are for the board of British Steel and the industry itself.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on British Steel's plans with regard to existing capacity utilisation over the next 12 months and for continuing production at *(a)* Scunthorpe, *(b)* Ravenscraig, *(c)* Dalzell and *(d)* Llanwern.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* Such information as British Steel have published in its annual reports. Investment has continued at Llanwern, where a new hot dip galvanising line was commissioned last year. British Steel is considering investment in a new plate mill facility at Teeside, which would replace in due course the existing plate mills at Dalzell and Scunthorpe, but no final decision has yet been taken. Production of steel will continue at Ravenscraig until at least 1994, subject to economic and commercial conditions and the demand for steel slab.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Special Needs Education

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had from the international information centre on special needs education; what reply he is sending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend received a letter from the international information centre on special needs education on 4 December 1991. The letter is receiving consideration within the Department and a reply will be sent as soon as possible.

EC Competence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement outlining the areas of his responsibility in which the EC will have competence following the implementation of agreements at Maastricht.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Following the agreement reached at Maastricht last week, the European Community will have a role in contributing to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between member states and if necessary by supporting and supplementing their action.

Action by the Community is to be aimed at: developing the European dimension in education; the teaching and dissemination of languages; promoting co-operation between education establishments; developing exchanges of information and experience; encouraging the development of youth exchanges; and encouraging the development of distance education.

The Community is required by the agreement fully to respect the responsibility of the member states for the content of teaching and the organisation of educational systems, and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Community's existing competence in relation to vocational training is clarified. Again the Community is required to respect the responsibility of member states for the content and organisation of vocational training.

The measures available to the Community in relation to education and vocational training expressly exclude any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the member states.

The European Community will gain no new competence in those areas of scientific research under DES responsibility. The Community's existing competence allows it to undertake certain actions which will strengthen the scientific and technological basis of European industry and encourage it to become more competitive at international level.

Primary Education

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if the three-person inquiry team on primary education will be visiting any primary schools in the course of its inquiry;

(2) what terms of reference have been given to the three-person inquiry team into primary education.

Mr. Fallon: The terms of reference for the report on primary education, commissioned by my right hon. and learned Friend, are

"Taking into account available evidence about the delivery of education in primary schools, to make recommendations about curriculum organisation, teaching methods and classroom practice appropriate for the successful implementation of the National Curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 2."

In writing the report, Professor Alexander, Chief Inspector Mr. Rose and Mr. Woodhead will draw on their extensive knowledge of primary education and the national curriculum, including visits to primary schools in connection with their normal responsibilities.

National Curriculum

Mr. Bidwell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will visit schools in Ealing to discuss the level of resources required next year to implement the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have no present plans to visit schools in Ealing.

In addition to the standing spending assessment, the Government are supporting expenditure through grants for education support and training on the national curriculum of some £170 million in 1991-92.

Schools Budget (Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will itemise, with costings, those elements of the education budgets of (separately) Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, which constitute, in the most recent year for which information is available *(a)* each LEA's general schools budget, *(b)* each LEA's potential schools budget, *(c)* each LEA's real schools budget (as proposed by the Association of County Councils), *(d)* each LEA's aggregate schools budget and *(e)* that part of each LEA's budget which is attributable to services provided from the annual maintenance grant of a grant-maintained school.

Mr. Fallon: The information we have is as follows, taken from the LEAs' section 42 budget statements for 1991-92:

	Norfolk LEA	*Suffolk LEA*	*Essex LEA*
	£000s	£000s	£000s
General schools budget[1]	206,948	185,231	431,033
Potential schools budget[2]	177,015	152,305	372,734
Aggregated schools budget[3]	149,344	133,358	317,119
GM-relevant costs[4]	182,665	151,542	369,221

[1] The *general schools budget* (GSB) of a local education authority is the amount appropriated by the authority for meeting expenditure in respect of all schools covered by a scheme for the local management of schools (LMS), ie all county and voluntary schools.

[2] The *potential schools budget* (PSB) consists of a part of the general schools budget (GSB)—ie the GSB less expenditure on certain excepted items: capital expenditure; expenditure supported by central government grants; and expenditure on school meals, home to school transport and transitional exceptions (eg cleaning and grounds maintenance).

[3] The *aggregated schools budget* (ASB) is that part of an authority's GSB which is allocated according to a formula to individual LEA schools, ie the amount which the schools themselves decide how to spend, once they have delegated powers and responsibilities under LMS.

[4] The *GM-relevant costs* constitute the total budget in respect of the LEA's maintained schools which corresponds to the *total* annual maintenance grant (AMG) of grant-maintained (GM) schools, ie the GSB less expenditure on items for which provision is made outside the AMG of GM schools, those items being: central Government specific grants; capital expenditure; and expenditure on home to school transport, education welfare officers and psychologists, pupil support, statemented pupils and special units.

The "real schools budget" is a construct suggested in a report by Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte for the Association of County Councils. The Department does not have the information to calculate it.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Municipal Bonds

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to extending the right of local authorities to raise long-term capital finance by means of municipal bonds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Local authorities are already able to raise long-term capital finance by issuing bonds. We are not currently contemplating any change in authorities' powers in this field.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

Mr. Maples: Following is the information requested for each of the five executive agencies concerned in respect of 1991-92.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

The chief executive has standard terms and conditions for a grade 2. All increases in pay are performance related. The grade 2 pay range from 1 December 1991 is £60,100 to £70,400.

Royal Mint

The chief executive's maximum salary, including bonus, payable in respect of the agency's performance is £66,000. The appointment is for five years starting from January 1988.

Central Office of Information

The chief executive has additional responsibilities as head of profession for the Government information service and is paid as a grade 3. The grade 3 range in London from 1 December 1991 is £51,300 to £59,000. All pay increases are performance-related. The performance element in respect of his duties as chief executive is under discussion. His appointment is for a three-year term starting from 5 April 1990.

Valuation Office

The chief executive is a grade 2 and his maximum salary, including individual bonus, payable in respect of the agency's performance is £69,465. He has been appointed for a period ending no later than 31 March 1994.

Central Statistical Office

The salary from 1 December 1991 of the director (chief executive), is £77,500, the standard rate of pay at grade 1A level. It is intended that, following Sir Jack Hibbert's retirement at the end of February 1992, his successor will be appointed for a period of five years.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Maples: Following is the information for each of the five executive agencies concerned.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

	1991 Target Per cent.
Print orders delivered to time	
Vital	100·0
Overall	95·0
Print orders delivered without fault	100·0
Print production jobs delivered to time	
Basic	100·0
Overall	95·0
Print production jobs delivered without fault	100·0
Stock catalogue items	
92 per cent. of customer orders despatched within five working days of receipt	
95 per cent. of items despatched first time from existing stocks	
Publications—Mail, EDI and telephone orders (Publications centre)	
85 per cent. of customer orders despatched within four working days of receipt	
95 per cent. within five working days of receipt	

Prior to agency status, the following quality of service performance indicators were operative.

	1987-88 Target Per cent.
Print orders delivered to time	
Vital	95·0
Overall	90·0
Print orders delivered without fault	100·0
Print production jobs delivered to time	90·0
Print production jobs delivered without fault	100·0
Stock catalogue items	
Time taken between receipt of customer order and despatch of goods—80 per cent. within one week	
Publications ordered by post—6 days average	

Royal Mint

The Royal Mint's published financial target covering the three-year period 1990-91 to 1992-93 is to achieve a 12·5 per cent. current cost return on net assets. Other targets are commercially sensitive and details are not published.

Central Office of Information

to deliver all work in accordance with client specification; and

to deliver all work on time.

The COI had no formal quality of service targets before it became an executive agency on 5 April 1990.

Valuation Office

timeliness (percentage of work completed to external and internal time limits)

valuation accuracy (percentage of valuations settled within plus 10 per cent. of initial valuation when facts settled).

Both indicators were first introduced, following pilot studies, in April 1991, before establishment as an agency on 30 September 1991. Targets for 1991-92 are, respectively, 82 per cent. and 80 per cent.

Central Statistical Office

The Central Statistical Office was established as an executive agency on 19 November 1991. The current quality of service targets for the CSO are included in annex E of its agency framework document, copies of which have been placed in the Library. None of the targets relating to quality of service were in force prior to the CSO's establishment as an executive agency.

Volunteer Drivers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about his proposals for taxation on volunteer drivers' mileage allowance.

Mr. Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) on 12 December at column *480*.

Business and the Environment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has met, or has plans to meet, representatives of the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment; if he plans to meet representatives of any other environmental groups between the present time and March 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: At present, I have no plans to meet representatives of the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment. In the run-up to the Budget, my Treasury colleagues and I meet a wide range of groups. Environmental issues are discussed.

Rent-free Periods (VAT)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the decision of Customs and Excise to treat rent-free periods as benefit subject to value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is long-standing Customs policy that rent-free periods are outside the scope of VAT unless services are performed in return by the tenant for the landlord. As this is uncommon, in practice only a few cases will lead to VAT being charged.

Taxation

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the occasions on which announcements of proposals for abolishing or reducing taxes have been made other than on Budget day since 1979.

Mr. Maude: Since 1979, no specific proposals for abolishing central Government taxes or reducing tax rates have been announced other than on Budget day or during the passage of the Finance Bill.

Privatisation

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much have total privatisation proceeds been since 1979.

Mr. Maude: Total privatisation proceeds from May 1979 to end 1990-91 are about £33·5 billion.

Direct Taxation

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the consultative document on proposals to implement the three direct tax measures adopted by the Economic and Finance Council in July 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: On 23 July 1990, the Economic and Finance Council adopted three proposals to remove possible tax obstacles to Communitywide business activity and cross-border expansion. The measures are the mergers directive, to defer certain tax charges that could otherwise arise on a cross-border merger or demerger; the parents/subsidiaries directive, to eliminate the double taxation of dividends and abolish withholding taxes on them when they are paid to a parent company in another member state; and the arbitration convention, to set up a mechanism to resolve transfer pricing disputes between taxing authorities in different member states.

In the Government's view, these are issues on which there should be full consultation before implementing legislation is brought forward. Accordingly, the Inland Revenue is today issuing a consultative document including draft clauses. Comments on the consultative document and draft legislation are invited by 14 February 1992. We shall carefully consider all comments and representations which are made before introducing the necessary legislative provisions at the earliest opportunity. I have placed copies of the document, including the draft clauses, in the Library.

Public Services Survey

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, columns *508-9*, if he will publish the details requested of him when he announces the date and arrangements of the opinion survey, or at the point it commences, whichever is the earlier.

Mr. Maude: Details of the survey will be announced in due course.

Interest Rates

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the margin between Public Works Loan Board interest rates and the Government gilt rates.

Mr. Maples: The Public Works Loan Board lending rates for quota loans are set so that they are close to but below the rates at which local authorities can borrow on the market. The rates are calculated by adding a margin of ½ to 1 per cent. depending on maturity to the per yield curve Government gilts. The formula for calculating the per yield curve was described in the February 1990 issue of the *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*.

Inward Investment

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much inward investment into the United Kingdom has been made by the other EC countries for each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The available information on the inward direct investment into the United Kingdom by other

member countries of the European Community between 1987 and 1989 is given in table 2.4 of "Business Monitor MA4" (1989 overseas transactions) published by the Central Statistical Office, a copy of which is in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will be able to provide up-to-date figures on the same basis as those provided to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East in his answer of 8 January 1990, *Official Report*, columns *558-64*, revising his figures to include an estimate of the effects of the introduction of the community charge; and what estimate he has made to date of the effect on the tax burden of the introduction of the community charge.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* Updated figures for 1990-91, including estimates of community charge payments in 1990-91, are given on a basis similar to that provided to the hon. Member in his answer of 8 January 1990, at columns *559-64*. No figures of the impact of the community charge in 1991-92 can be provided until the 1991 family expenditure survey is published.

The latest estimates for 1991-92 for direct taxes and indirect taxes excluding the community charge were given in the reply to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 20 November 1991, at columns *174-76*.

Income tax, NICs and indirect tax payments at multiples of average earnings, 1990-91

	Multiples of Average Earnings										
	0·5	*0·75*	*1*	*1·5*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*7*	*10*	*20*
Single											
Amounts, £ per week											
Income Tax	23·83	42·97	62·10	100·89	162·13	284·61	407·09	529·57	774·53	1,141·97	2,366·77
NICs	10·56	17·45	24·34	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28
Total income tax and NICs	34·39	60·42	86·44	129·17	190·41	312·89	435·37	557·85	802·81	1,170·25	2,395·05
VAT	—	11·17	14·97	23·26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	17·01	21·18	30·29	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	8·48	8·97	9·95	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		97·08	131·56	192·67							
Percentage of Earnings											
Income Tax	15·6	18·7	20·3	22·0	26·5	31·0	33·2	34·6	36·1	37·3	38·6
NICs	6·9	7·6	7·9	6·2	4·6	3·1	2·3	1·8	1·3	0·9	0·5
Total income tax and NICs	22·5	26·3	28·2	28·1	31·1	34·1	35·5	36·4	37·5	38·2	39·1
VAT	—	4·9	4·9	5·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	7·4	6·9	6·6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	3·7	2·9	2·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		42·3	43·0	41·9							
Married, no children											
Amounts, £ per week											
Income Tax	15·56	34·70	53·83	92·11	148·90	271·38	393·86	516·34	761·30	1,128·74	2,353·54
NICs	10·56	17·45	24·34	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28
Total income tax and NICs	26·12	52·15	78·17	120·39	177·18	299·66	422·14	544·62	789·58	1,157·02	2,381·82
VAT	—	10·25	14·39	23·46	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	18·91	23·10	32·29	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	14·65	15·04	15·82	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		95·96	130·70	191·96							
Percentage of Earnings											
Income Tax	10·2	15·1	17·6	20·1	24·3	29·5	32·2	33·7	35·5	36·9	38·4
NICs	6·9	7·6	7·9	6·2	4·6	3·1	2·3	1·8	1·3	0·9	0·5
Total income tax and NICs	17·1	22·7	25·5	26·2	28·9	32·6	34·5	35·6	36·8	37·8	38·9
VAT	—	4·5	4·7	5·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	8·2	7·5	7·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	6·4	4·9	3·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		41·8	42·7	41·8							
Married, both working											
Amounts, £ per week											
Income Tax	1·11	20·25	39·39	77·66	115·94	201·82	311·03	433·51	678·47	1,045·91	2,270·71
NICs	7·34	14·23	21·12	34·90	47·11	56·56	56·56	56·56	56·56	56·56	56·56
Total income tax and NICs	8·45	34·48	60·51	112·56	163·05	258·38	367·59	490·07	735·03	1,102·47	2,327·27
VAT	—	11·66	16·15	25·12	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	21·83	25·56	33·03	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	15·01	15·13	15·36	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		82·98	117·35	186·06							
Percentage of Earnings											
Income Tax	0·7	8·8	12·9	16·9	18·9	22·0	25·4	28·3	31·7	34·2	37·1
NICs	4·8	6·2	6·9	7·6	7·7	6·2	4·6	3·7	2·6	1·8	0·9
Total income tax and NICs	5·5	15·0	19·8	24·5	26·6	28·1	30·0	32·0	34·3	36·0	38·0

	Multiples of Average Earnings										
	0·5	*0·75*	*1*	*1·5*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*7*	*10*	*20*
VAT	—	5·1	5·3	5·5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	9·5	8·3	7·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	6·5	4·9	3·3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		36·1	38·3	40·5							
Married, 2 children											
Amounts, £ per week											
Income Tax	1·06	20·20	39·33	77·61	134·40	256·88	379·36	501·84	746·80	1,114·24	2,339·04
NICs	10·56	17·45	24·34	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28	28·28
Total income tax and NICs	11·62	37·65	63·67	105·89	162·68	285·16	407·64	530·12	775·08	1,142·52	2,367·32
VAT	—	9·98	14·67	24·95	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	18·40	21·72	29·01	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	14·13	14·68	15·79	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		80·16	114·74	175·64							
Percentage of Earnings											
Income Tax	0·7	8·8	12·8	16·9	21·9	28·0	31·0	32·8	34·8	36·4	38·2
NICs	6·9	7·6	7·9	6·2	4·6	3·1	2·3	1·8	1·3	0·9	0·5
Total income tax and NICs	7·6	16·4	20·8	23·1	26·6	31·0	33·3	34·6	36·2	37·3	38·7
VAT	—	4·3	4·8	5·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other indirect	—	8·0	7·1	6·3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Charge	—	6·2	4·8	3·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		34·9	37·5	38·2							

Notes:

[1] Income tax payments are calculated on the assumption that the households receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earners, including wives, are assumed to pay class 1 NI contributions at the contracted-in rate.

[2] Since 1990-91, husbands and wives have been taxed independently. Previously the tax liability of couples depended on their joint income. To permit comparisons with earlier years, the table therefore shows income tax and national insurance contributions paid by a married couple as a proportion of their joint income, assuming, as in the earlier years, that where both partners are earners, the husband and wife share the relevant multiple of earnings in the ratio 60:40.

[3] In order to provide comparability with 1978-79, when support for children was given partly through child tax allowance, child benefit is treated as a negative income tax for the married couple with two children.

[4] Average earnings are taken to be the average gross weekly earnings of all full-time males on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. These are estimated to be £306·20 per week in 1990-91.

[5] The estimates of indirect taxes apart from the community charge are based on equations derived from the 1985 family expenditure survey, uprated to later years using forecasts of aggregate tax receipts. They are based on the illustrative assumption that 10 per cent. of disposable income is saved. There are wide variations in spending patterns between households with the same composition and similar incomes and estimated payments of VAT and other indirect taxes are therefore approximate, even within the income range for which figures are shown. Outside this range, the margin of error is even higher and reliable estimates cannot be made. Because of sampling variation, there can be substantial differences between estimates obtained from family expenditure surveys for different years.

[6] Estimates of the burden of the community charge have been derived from the 1990 family expenditure survey. All respondents were assumed to pay the charge to which they were liable. The calculations include water charges in order to put the estimates on a comparable basis to the estimates for earlier years. Community charge payments are net of transitional relief and community charge benefit. Since community charge payments vary widely between households with similar incomes, the estimated charge payments are only approximate.

UN Economic Commission for Europe

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his Department routinely reviews the work conducted and reports produced by the United Nation's Economic Commission for Europe.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The papers and reports of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe are received by my Department. They are one of the many sources of information used to keep abreast of developments in Europe, particularly in the former centrally planned economies.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers would be affected by the restriction of all tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, giving the numbers who have gross incomes of *(a)* less than £30,000, *(b)* £25,000, *(c)* £20,000, *(d)* earnings below the higher rate threshold and *(e)* earnings below the national insurance upper earnings limit.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* Latest estimates for 1991-92 are as follows:

Restriction of allowances[1] and reliefs to the basic rate
Number of taxpaying individuals affected

	Thousands
(a) Total income under £30,000	290
(b) Total income under £25,000	0
(c) Total income under £20,000	0
(d) Total earned income[2] under £26,995[3]	200
(e) Total earned income[2] under £20,280[4]	100

[1] Except for the basic personal allowance.

[2] Includes income from employment, self employment and occupational pensions.

[3] The sum of the basic rate limit and the level of the basic personal allowance for those under 65.

[4] National Insurance upper earnings limit.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Andrew Miller

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Prime Minister when his office answered or proposes to answer the letter from Mr. Andrew Miller, Flat 2-2, 2049 Paisley road west, Glasgow.

The Prime Minister: There is no record of my office having received Mr. Miller's letter.

European Central Bank

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from Manchester city council about the location of the proposed European central bank; what reply he is sending; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The leader of Manchester city council wrote to me on 29 November in connection with Manchester's proposed bid to host the European central bank and its precursor, the European Monetary Institute. I will send the right hon. Member a copy of my reply.

Social Charter

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out all the provisions of the social charter which have been agreed by the other members of the Community.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the explanatory memorandum on the social charter, which was submitted by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment on 24 November 1989. A copy of the explanatory memorandum and the text of the social charter are available in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Businesses (East Midlands)

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the net change month on month in the number of businesses in *(a)* Amber Valley, *(b)* Derbyshire and *(c)* the east midlands in the latest month for which figures are available and two previous months.

Mr. Forth: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Unemployment Benefit (Disqualification)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people were disqualified for unemployment benefit under each paragraph of section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975 in the area covered by the Newport, Gwent, unemployment benefit office, in the latest month for which information can be obtained; in how many cases disqualification was imposed for the maximum period of 26 weeks; and whether he will arrange for records of the lengths of disqualifications to be kept on a routine basis in future.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

South Glamorgan TEC

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what form of contribution he now envisages towards the costs of establishing a new headquarters for the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council to which he referred in his answer of 28 February 1991, *Official Report*, column *571*; in what financial year that contribution will take place; what level it will be; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: A contribution towards the cost of the new South Glamorgan TEC headquarters continues to be part of the Department's expenditure plans for 1991-92.

Adaptations to premises at Waterfront 2000 in Cardiff commenced in November this year and occupancy is anticipated towards the end of January 1992. The Department's contribution towards the cost of adaptation work is likely to be around £280,000.

Prince of Wales Youth Business Trust

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Prince of Wales Youth Business Trust to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 24 to Friday 28 February 1992.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to his answers of 18 November, *Official Report*, columns *50-51*, concerning Coventry unemployment and the numbers of vacancies, he will review his policy of referring hon. Members' questions about labour market statistics to the Library.

Mr. Jackson: No. The decision to refer questioners to the NOMIS database, which can be accessed on line by the House of Commons Library staff, follows the established principle of referring to published sources. It is good resource management to refer to information which is publicly available when the effort has already been made to provide an easily accessible, up-to-date and accurate computer database.

HEALTH

Infant and Maternal Mortality

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state *(a)* the infant mortality rate, *(b)* the maternal mortality rate and *(c)* the perinatal and neonatal death rates for each of the years 1988, 1989 and 1990 in the United Kingdom, each other country of the EC and the WHO European region.

Mr. Dorrell: Complete data are not available in the form requested. The latest data from the WHO European regional office indicator presentation system are shown in the tables, together with any later estimates from other sources.

Caution should be used in interpreting international rates, particularly those relating to perinatal mortality, due to differences in ascertainment between countries.

Infant mortality rates in the United Kingdom, EEC countries and countries in the WHO European Region

Area	1988	1989	1990
United Kingdom	9·0	8·4	7·9
Other EEC countries			
Belgium 1986 9·7	9·1[1]	8·7[1]	—
Denmark	7·6	8·0[1]	—
France	7·8	7·5[1]	—
German Federal Republic	7·5	7·4	—
Greece	11·0	9·7[1]	—
Irish Republic	8·9	7·5[1]	—
Italy	9·2	8·3[1]	—
Luxembourg	7·6	8·6	—
Netherlands	6·8	6·8[1]	—
Portugal	13·1	12·2	—
Spain 1986 9·2	8·1[1]	8·4[1]	—
Others in WHO European Region			
Austria	8·1	8·3	—
Bulgaria	13·6	14·4	—
Czechoslovakia	11·9	11·3	—
Finland	6·1	5·8[1]	—
German Democratic Republic	8·1	7·6	—
Hungary	15·8	15·7	—
Iceland	6·2	5·3	—
Israel 1987 11·1	10·0[1]	N/A	—
Malta	9·2	10·6	—
Norway	8·3	N/A	—
Poland	16·2	16·0	—
Romania	25·3	26·9	—
Sweden 1987 6·1	5·8[1]	6·0[1]	—
Switzerland	6·8	7·3	—
Yugoslavia	24·5	23·7[1]	—

Notes:
Deaths under 1 year per 1,000 live births.
Data, except for United Kingdom, from WHO European Regional Office Indicator Presentation System.
[1] Provisional from other sources.

Maternal mortality in the United Kingdom, EEC countries and countries in the WHO European Region.

Area	1988	1989	1990
United Kingdom	6·3	7·7	[1]7·8
Other EEC countries			
Belgium 1986 3·4	n/a	n/a	—
Denmark	3·4	n/a	—
France	9·3	n/a	—
German Federal Republic	8·9	5·3	—
Greece	5·6	n/a	—
Irish Republic	1·8	n/a	—
Italy	7·6	n/a	—
Luxembourg	0·0	0·0	—
Netherlands	9·6	n/a	—
Portugal	6·6	10·1	—
Spain 1986 5·5	n/a	n/a	—
Others in WHO European Region			
Austria	5·7	7·9	—
Bulgaria	9·4	18·7	—
Czechoslovakia	13·0	9·6	—
Finland	11·1	n/a	—
German Democratic Republic	14·8	11·6	—
Hungary	16·9	15·4	—
Iceland	0·0	0·0	—
Israel 1987 3·0	n/a	n/a	—
Malta	0·0	0·0	—
Norway	3·5	n/a	—
Poland	11·6	10·7	—
Romania 1984 148·8	n/a	n/a	—
Sweden 1987 4·8	n/a	n/a	—
Switzerland	10·0	3·7	—
Yugoslavia	16·3	n/a	—

Deaths attributed to complications of pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium per 100,000 live births.
Data, except for United Kingdom, from WHO European Regional Office Indicator Presentation System.
[1] Provisional from other sources.

Perinatal mortality rates in the United Kingdom, EEC countries and countries in the WHO European Region.

Area	1988	1989	1990
United Kingdom	8·8	8·3	[1]8·1
Other EEC countries			
Belgium 1986 10·4	n/a	n/a	—
Denmark	7·4	n/a	—
France	9·2	8·9	—
German Federal Republic 1986 7·6	[1]6·5	[1]6·4	—
Greece	12·9	[1]12·1	—
Irish Republic 1987 10·3	[1]11·3	[1]9·9	—
Italy	12·0	[1]11·0	—
Luxembourg	18·1	27·1	—
Netherlands	9·2	[1]9·6	—
Portugal	15·2	14·6	—
Spain 1986 10·6	n/a	n/a	—
Others in WHO European Region			
Austria	7·4	n/a	—
Bulgaria 1986 11·8	[1]10·9	10·6	—
Czechoslovakia 1985 12·7	n/a	9·6	—
Finland	8·4	n/a	—
German Democratic Republic	[1]8·8	n/a	—
Hungary 1986 18·3	[1]15·8	14·6	—
Iceland	20·8	14·3	—
Israel	[1]10·3	n/a	—
Malta	13·8	15·9	—
Norway 1987 7·9	[1]8·2	n/a	—
Poland	14·7	n/a	—
Romania 1985 [1]12·4	n/a	n/a	—
Sweden 1986 7·5	n/a	n/a	—
Switzerland 1986 7·7	[1]7·2	n/a	—
Yugoslavia	16·4	n/a	—

Notes:
Deaths 0-6 days + stillbirths per 1,000 total births.
Data, except for United Kingdom from WHO European Regional Office Indicator Presentation System.
[1] Provisional from other sources.

Neonatal mortality rates in the United Kingdom, EEC countries and countries in the WHO European region

Area	1988	1989	1990
United Kingdom	4·9	4·7	[1]4·5
Other EEC countries			
Belgium 1986 5·2	n/a	n/a	—
Denmark	4·6	[1]4·7	—
France	4·1	[1]3·8	—
German Federal Republic	4·0	[1]4·0	—
Greece 1987 8·5	[1]8·1	[1]6·6	—
Irish Republic 1987 4·3	[1]5·3	[1]4·3	—
Italy 1986 7·9	[1]7·5	[1]6·5	—
Luxembourg	4·3	[1]6·4	—
Netherlands	4·6	[1]4·6	—
Portugal	8·6	[1]8·1	—
Spain 1985 5·9	n/a	n/a	—
Others in WHO European region			
Austria	4·7	[1]4·9	—
Bulgaria 1987 7·9	[1]7·4	n/a	—
Czechoslovakia	8·1	[1]7·8	—
Finland 1987 4·2	[1]3·9	n/a	—
German Democratic Republic	[1]5·0	n/a	—
Hungary	11·8	n/a	—
Iceland	4·1	n/a	—
Israel	[1]6·5	n/a	—
Malta	6·3	n/a	—
Norway 1987 4·7	[1]4·5	n/a	—
Poland	11·6	[1]11·5	—
Romania 1984 8·8	n/a	n/a	—
Sweden 1987 3·8	n/a	n/a	—

Area	1988	1989	1990
Switzerland	4·2	[1]4·4	—
Yugoslavia	13·5	n/a	—

Notes:
Deaths under 28 days per 1,000 live births.
Data, except for United Kingdom, from WHO European Regional Office Indicator Presentation System.
[1] Provisional from other sources.

Oral Tobacco

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether, prior to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's attendance at the EC Health Ministers Council in November, he commissioned an independent review of the scientific evidence offered by the European Commission in support of its proposed ban on oral tobacco.

Mr. Dorrell: We receive independent advice on the health hazards posed by oral snuff from the Committee on Carcinogenicity, an independent advisory committee to the Department of Health.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the published scientific evidence studied by his Department in support of the EC directive banning oral tobacco, before the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State attended the EC Health Ministers Council in November.

Mr. Dorrell: The list of published scientific evidence is extensive. I will therefore send my hon. Friend a copy of the list and place a copy in the Library.

Eye Tests

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to reinstate free sight tests for *(a)* all age groups and *(b)* elderly people.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have made provision for vulnerable members of the community such as children, adults on low incomes and those with certain special needs to continue to be entitled to free sight tests but we believe that those who can afford to pay should do so.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the continued imposition of a charge for NHS sight tests.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received a number of representations. There is no charge for NHS sight tests: they continue to be available free to the most vulnerable groups in the community, accounting for approximately 40 per cent. of the population. There are no plans to change the current arrangements.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the numbers of people over pensionable age who presented themselves for sight tests in each year since 1988.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Baby Deaths (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the results of the epidemiological survey into the causes of brain damage to babies at Doncaster royal infirmary will be complete; with what other areas and hospitals it is being compared; and if copies of the findings will be sent to the Doncaster Members of Parliament and the Doncaster community health council.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Trent regional health authority has appointed two experts from outside the region to determine whether or not the occurrence of brain damaged births within the Doncaster district is comparable with other districts, and if necessary in the light of findings to make any recommendations. I understand that the study should be completed by March 1992. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Michael Carlisle, the chairman of Trent regional health authority, for details.

Dysentry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by month for the last 12 months the number of cases of dysentry that have been confirmed in the United Kingdom, the locations of the outbreaks and the cause of the outbreaks.

Mr. Dorrell: In the year 1991 to week 49, there have been community outbreaks of dysentry in the following towns and cities in England and Wales: Grimsby; Manchester; Leeds; Bradford; Hull; Scunthorpe; Halifax; Huddersfield; Cardiff; Bristol; Darlington; Easington; Carmarthen; Haverfordwest; Gainsborough; Sheffield; Doncaster; Birmingham.

The PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre has received 9,006 reports of isolations of shigella sonnei, the main causative organisms for dysentry in this country, from laboratories in England and Wales in 1991. They are as listed in the table, with weeks 49 to 52 of 1990 included to complete a 12-month period.

Weeks	Total
1990	
49-52	314
1991	
1-4	367
5-8	237
9-12	417
13-16	707
17-20	821
21-24	806
25-28	905
29-32	947
33-36	449
37-40	504
41-44	970
45-48	1,471

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when registration of premises used for food business will be a statutory requirement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991 have been laid before Parliament. The objective of these regulations is to ensure that local authorities responsible for the enforcement of food

legislation have information about the food businesses operating in their area so that they can target their enforcement resources to those which represent the highest risk to health. The regulations take effect on 1 February 1992. Existing businesses must register with their local authority by 30 April 1992. There will be a national publicity campaign to alert the owners of food businesses to the new requirements.

Hypothermia

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has received any statistical data relating to the above-average deaths from hypothermia and related conditions during or arising from the severe cold weather in the first half of February 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys analysis of the excess deaths in February 1991 shows that there were a total of 15 deaths where hypothermia was mentioned as a cause of death.

Carers

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline the services available for carers now supporting elderly and disabled people in the community.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provision of practical support for carers is the second of the key objectives identified in the White Paper "Caring for People". In meeting carers' needs, health and local authorities should consult carers about their wishes and needs, and ensure that services are available. The King's Fund's recent publication "Focus on Carers", a copy of which will be placed in the Library, funded by the Department, outlines the kinds of services which can be made available to support carers. It is for health and local authorities to decide what services should be provided in their areas depending upon local needs and circumstances.

NHS (Non-British Patients)

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of national health service expenditure is spent on treating non-British subjects who are bona-fide reciprocal arrangement patients;

(2) what proportion of national health service annual expenditure is spent on patients who are not British subjects and whose country of origin has no reciprocal arrangements.

Mr. Dorrell: The possession of British nationality is not of itself a requirement for free NHS hospital treatment. Anyone not ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom has to pay for NHS hospital treatment unless he or she is covered by one of a number of specific exemptions, including reciprocal arrangements.

Comprehensive information is not collected centrally on the cost to the NHS of treatment to patients exempted from charges.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those countries which enjoy reciprocal arrangements whereby production of a national health service number is not necessary but where free treatment is available in the United Kingdom on production of an ID card of country of origin.

Mr. Dorrell: The territories are as follows: Anguilla, Australia, Austria. Belgium, British Virgin Islands, Bulgaria, Channel Islands, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Falkland Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Irish Republic, Isle of Man, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Montserrat, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, St. Helena, Spain, Sweden, Turks and Caicos Islands, USSR and Yugoslavia.

NHS (Patients' Numbers)

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients using national health service doctors' surgeries or receiving national health service treatment are asked to give their national health service number.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Cranage Hall Hospital

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice he has given to Mersey regional health authority about the possible establishment of a village community for mentally handicapped patients on the site of the Cranage Hall hospital; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give details of the progress which has been made towards the closure, disposal and subsequent use of the Cranage Hall hospital and its grounds.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department does not offer advice about the future of specific hospitals. The future of services at Cranage Hall hospital is a matter for Crewe health authority.

NHS Numbers

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new national health service numbers have been issued over the last three years.

Mr. Dorrell: The national health service central register, which is part of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, controls the issue of national health service numbers in England and Wales.

For births in England and Wales, the registrars of births and deaths issue a national health service number, on behalf of the national health service central register, as part of the process of the legal registration of the birth.

Numbers issued this way over the last three years are:

Mid year to mid year	*Number (000s)*
1988-89	687·4
1989-90	691·6
1990-91	706·7

Additionally, the national health service central register issues, centrally, national health service numbers where the allocation of a number is necessary in all circumstances other than birth. Examples are the allocation of numbers to immigrants and provision of a number in adoption cases but allocation can occur whenever a patient registers with a general practitioner without providing a number and the patient cannot be positively traced on the central register. The number of allocations have been:

Year	Number (000s)
1989	153·2
1990	135·1
1991	[1]362·6

[1] The high number of allocations this year is a consequence of resolving queries during computerisation of the central register and a return to pre-1991 levels is expected in the future.

WALES

Highways

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will show total expenditure by all Welsh local highway authorities from 1980-81 to 1991-92 on *(a)* new construction and improvement, *(b)* structural maintenance and *(c)* current maintenance.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Expenditure since 1980 is as follows:

(£ million)

	New construction and improvement	Structural maintenance including bridge repair	Other highway maintenance including lighting and road safety	Total
1980-81	50·1	66·2		116·3
1981-82	48·0	86·7		134·8
1982-83	65·8	78·6		144·3
1983-84	58·2	87·4		145·7
1984-85	54·9	88·2		143·1
1985-86	64·6	89·1		153·7
1986-87	66·9	97·3		164·2
1987-88	78·5	109·6		188·0
1988-89	63·4	115·7		179·0
1989-90	73·3	47·5	77·1	197·8
1990-91[1]	78·3	58·8	75·1	212·2
1991-92[1]	97·4	65·5	76·8	239·7

Figures do not necessarily add up because of rounding.
Separate figures for structural and current maintenance were not collected before 1989-90.
[1]Provisional figures.

Schools Budget

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide, on a basis consistent with the answer of 14 October 1991, *Official Report*, columns *68-73*, a list of local education authorities in rank order by the proportion of the potential schools budget held back in 1991-92 showing in each case the proportion held back in 1990-91.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is shown in the table:

Extent of LEAs delegation to schools in 1991-92

Local Education Authority	PSB Delegated to Schools		PSB not Delegated per pupil in 1991-92 (£)	Central Administration as proportion of PSB		Schools with Delegated Budgets in 1991-92 Per cent.
	1991-92 Per cent.	1990-91 Per cent.		1991-92 Per cent.	1990-91 Per cent.	
West Glamorgan	84·30	85·16	284	1·8	2·1	14
South Glamorgan	83·96	85·49	270	3·2	3·4	32
Dyfed	83·36	80·65	285	4·0	3·9	0
Mid Glamorgan	82·60	81·58	313	4·9	5·0	39
Clwyd	82·50	81·90	300	4·8	5·0	74
Powys	82·19	82·07	336	4·5	4·0	100
Gwynedd	82·18	82·48	328	5·5	5·2	37
Gwent	81·79	81·71	320	3·9	3·9	52
National Averages	82·90	82·59	301	4·0	4·0	38

Notes:
1. It should be noted that the figures are not readily comparable across LEAs because of variations in the treatment of items of expenditure in relation to the General Schools Budget (GSB) from which the PSB is derived.
2. The PSB consists of the GSB less expenditure on certain excepted items: capital expenditure; expenditure supported by central government grants; and expenditure on school meals, home to school transport and transitional exceptions such as grounds maintenance. From 1993 LEAs are required to delegate a minimum of 85 per cent. of PSB to schools.
3. The 1990-91 details are taken from the outturn budget statements for 1990-91 where they are available.
4. Pupil numbers have been taken from the latest statistical information available to the Department ie, the September 1991 STATS 1 forms.
5. The percentages stated may differ from the percentages calculated by individual LEAs because of the effects of rounding.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the latest available estimate of the number of houses in multiple occupation in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not available.

Land Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much land has been sold in the last few years by his Department giving the acreage and the estimated receipts.

Mr. David Hunt: In the last three financial years up to 31 March 1991, 177·4 acres of land were sold by my

Department amounting to estimated receipts of £9,697,000. In addition the Forestry Commission sold 8,057 acres of forest land and 2,119 acres of non-forest land on behalf of my Department. The receipts for the forest land amounted to £5,269,000. Records of receipts for non-forest land are not kept separately by country and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales from what time signs on the M4 in the area of Newport indicated the closure on Sunday 8 December of the Severn bridge and the M4; and at what time the signs were switched off.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Signs in the Gwent police area indicating a bridge closure were set at 20:48 hours. The incident was dealt with and the messages displayed on the signs were removed at 23:17 hours, when it was considered safe to allow traffic to resume using the crossing.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what alternative route was signposted for drivers during the closure of Severn bridge and part of the M4 on Sunday 8 December; and why the chosen route was recommended.

Sir Wyn Roberts: During the closure of the Severn bridge, traffic was diverted along the A449, A40, M50 and M5 roads. This is the recognised and pre-arranged diversionary route.

A low bridge at the Gloucestershire village of Newnham makes the A48 road unsuitable as a diversionary route, although there is little doubt that drivers of light vehicles such as cars and motorcycles who had knowledge of this route, chose to use it.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to meet health board chairmen to discuss *(a)* hospital trusts and *(b)* finance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend last met district health authority chairmen on 20 November and intends to meet them again on 25 March 1992.

Cockles

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to prevent overfishing of the foreshore cocklebeds.

Mr. David Hunt: The gathering of cockles is, where appropriate, regulated through byelaws made by sea fisheries committees.

University of Wales

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish target student intake figures for each constituent college in the university of Wales in each year from the current year until 1998; and state in each case what proportion of the intake is estimated to come from schools within Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are no target intake figures set centrally for universities. The number of students in the constituent colleges of the university of Wales being funded by the Universities Funding Council in 1991-92 are:

	Number
Aberystwyth	3,485
Bangor	2,882
Cardiff	7,148
St. David's Lampeter	812
Swansea	4,235
College of Medicine	980

For the years from 1993-94, subject to parliamentary approval of the Further and Higher Education Bill, funding of higher education institutions in Wales will be the responsibility of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. No assumption is made centrally about the proportion of entrants to the university of Wales that come from schools within Wales.

Lesser Horseshoe Bats

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will produce guidelines for local planning authorities in Wales so as to enable them to ensure the survival of roosts of lesser horseshoe bats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 gives special protection to horseshoe bats. Guidance on the operation of these controls is contained in Welsh Office Circular 38/82 (DOE24/82), Welsh Office Circular 52/87 (DOE27/87) and in the joint Welsh Office/DOE booklet "Planning—a Householders Guide".

Welsh Water plc

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent consultations he has had and proposes to have with the Director General of OFWAT concerning the diversification proposals of Welsh Water plc with the public electricity supply industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The diversification proposals of Welsh Water plc are a matter for the company and its shareholders. The Water Industry Act 1991 and the licence appointing water and sewerage companies protects the core business, in this case Dwr Cymru Cyfymgedig, and the interests of customers. The Director General of Water Services has amended the licence to ensure sufficent information is available to allow him to protect the interests of customers.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Director General of OFWAT concerning the commercial value and content of the consultancy work placed by Welsh Water plc with the LEK Partnership since Mr. Iain Evans became a non-executive director of Welsh Water.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. This is a matter for the company and its shareholders.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the

units of administrative headquarters work for that authority which are to be relocated to the new headquarters building at the Roath basin, Cardiff; if those units unclude the artifical limb and appliance service, currently based at Rookwood hospital, Llandarf, Cardiff and the National Blood Transfusion Service currently co-located with the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar, Llantrisant road, Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A full option appraisal was prepared by the authority, which considered various alternatives for its relocation. The appraisal concluded that neither the artifical limb and appliance service nor the National Blood Transfusion Service should be housed in the proposed new accommodation due to the nature of the services they provide and the nature of the building in Roath basin.

River Ely

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority regarding the deterioration in the water condition of the lower reaches and estuary of the River Ely; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The National Rivers Authority has a carefully planned strategy to improve the quality of the River Ely including the rebuilding of the sewage treatment works serving Tonyrefail, the construction of a new trunk sewer from Rhiwsaeson sewage treatment works to improve the quality of the River Clun, which flows into the Ely, and the transfer of the effluent from the Cogan outfall to the proposed new sewage treatment works at Lavernock. The strategy is being vigorously pursued by the authority. A number of benefits have already accrued and there should be further major improvements in the next three to five years. My right hon. Friend sees no need to consult the authority's chairman in these circumstances.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total increase in spending by the national health service in Wales in each year since 1979 after adjustment for the health costs deflator.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In order to show the dramatic difference between the funding of the NHS under a Labour Government and under this administration I have taken the opportunity to provide the information requested by the hon. Gentleman for each year since 1974. He will note the marked improvement under this Government compared with the period 1974-79.

Year	*NHS gross expenditure adjusted for changes in input unit costs*[1] *£ million (1990-91 prices)*	*NHS gross expenditure adjusted by the GDP deflator £ million (1991-92 prices)*
1974-75	1,106	1,024
1975-76	1,153	1,095
1976-77	1,146	1,084
1977-78	1,189	1,077
1978-79	1,235	1,115
1979-80	1,204	1,118
1980-81	1,223	1,216
1981-82	1,284	1,263
1982-83	1,330	1,301
1983-84	1,346	1,320
1984-85	1,371	1,360
1985-86	1,390	1,375
1986-87	1,407	1,432
1987-88	1,446	1,506
1988-89	1,471	1,571
1989-90	1,489	1,598
1990-91	1,544	1,652
1991-92	[2]—	[3]1,781

Notes:
[1] Calculated against service inflation reflecting pay and price movements in English authorities.
[2] Index for 1991-92 is not available as estimates are not made until after the financial year has ended.
[3] Current provision.

Changes in input volumes are an inadequate guide to the level of services the NHS can be expected to achieve since they do not reflect the continuing success of NHS management in increasing the efficiency with which it uses resources.

The final column therefore gives expenditure in real terms after adjustment by the GDP deflator.

Tenovus Cancer Research Centre

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had regarding the future funding and research activities of the Tenovus cancer research centre at the University hospital of Wales, Heath, Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To date I have received no official representations regarding the future funding and research activities of the Tenovus institute for cancer research located at the University hospital.

Smoking

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take as a result of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales report, "Implementation of Non-Smoking Policies in Hospitals in Wales 1987-89."

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My officials have today issued revised guidance to the NHS in Wales. Most patients and staff do not smoke and they are therefore entitled to a smoke-free environment. There should be a progressive move to no smoking by staff and patients, except in limited segregated smoking areas, to take effect by the end of 1993.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hepatitis B

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of hepatitis B have occurred within each health board area during each of the last five years; and what fatalities have resulted therefrom.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

	Eastern	Northern	Southern	Western	Area unknown	Total
1986	6	2	1	1	3	13
1987	4	2	—	1	—	7
1988	2	1	—	2	—	5
1989	3	2	—	3	—	8
1990	2	—	—	2	—	4
TOTAL 1986-90	17	7	1	9	3	37

There was one fatality in the Western board in 1987 and one in the Eastern board in 1989.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what progress is being made in promoting an immunisation programme against hepatitis B in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what groups have been identified as at risk from hepatitis B; and if he can provide figures, as a percentage of each group, for those who have been immunised.

Mr. Hanley: Government policy is that only certain groups and individuals at high risk of contracting the disease should be immunised because of the low incidence of hepatitis B infection in the United Kingdom.

Details of the groups and individuals for whom vaccination against hepatitis B should be considered are given in paragraphs 13.3.5 to 13.3.7 of the United Kingdom Health Departments' 1990 handbook on "Immunisation against Infectious Disease," a copy of which has been placed in the Library. As those at high risk are identified and immunised locally by occupational health physicians or family doctors immunisation figures are not maintained centrally.

AIDS

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the year-by-year number of deaths from AIDS in each health board area.

Mr. Hanley: The number of persons with AIDS who are known to have died each year in Northern Ireland is given in the table. In line with the procedure followed in reports under the AIDS (Control) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and to safeguard confidentiality, actual figures in the range of one to nine reported in individual health board areas are not published.

	Number
1985	1
1986	—
1987	1
1988	1
1989	7
1990	9
[1]1991	4

[1] To 30 November.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are presently known to have tested HIV positive in each health board area; and how many of these have developed AIDS.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows.

Board area	Cases diagnosed HIV	AIDS
Eastern	53	15
Northern	10	[1]11
Southern	15	
Western	13	

[1] In line with the procedure followed in reports under the AIDS (Control) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and to safeguard confidentiality actual figures in the range of one to nine in individual board areas are not published.

HIV

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if all nursing, medical and auxiliary staff in hospitals, general practices and on-district duties are formally notified when they are dealing with HIV positive patients.

Mr. Hanley: It is the responsibility of health and social services boards to ensure that an assessment is made of the risk of HIV infection to staff from their patients and, with due regard to confidentiality, to inform those who need to know of the potential danger.

Swimming Lessons

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many primary schools in each of the education and library board areas which were participating in swimming instruction programmes before the introduction of the local management of schools system of funding have now ceased to do so; and if he will give numbers for each of the years 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Cross-border Terrorism

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has had specific discussions at meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference about Republican terrorist incidents with a cross-frontier element which have occurred in Northern Ireland since 1 January 1990; and whether he has had any commitment from the Irish Republic that further security measures are to be put in place.

Dr. Mawhinney: Discussions on security matters form a major part of the business of all Anglo-Irish Conference meetings. Both Governments have been constant in their determination to achieve the greatest possible security co-operation. Progress has been made in a number of areas, including joint threat assessment, liaison structures,

technical co-operation and communications. The commitment of both Governments to improving the effectiveness of cross-border co-operation remains unswerving.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Republican terrorist incidents which have occurred in Northern Ireland since 1 January 1990 are estimated to have had a cross-frontier element; and if he will give details.

Dr. Mawhinney: It would not be appropriate to disclose detailed information held by the Royal Ulster Constabulary about incidents in which charges may be brought.

Castlereagh (Ill-treatment Allegations)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much of the compensation paid for alleged ill-treatment in Castlereagh holding centre since June 1989 to clients represented by solicitors Madden and Finucane, was made by way of out-of-court settlements; how many of these complaints were substantiated by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how much compensation has been paid for alleged ill-treatment in Castlereagh holding centre since June 1989 to individuals other than clients represented by solicitors Madden and Finucane; what proportion was made by way of out-of-court settlements; how many of these complaints were substantiated by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information about compensation payments is not available in the form requested. Compensation claims against the Chief Constable and complaints against individual members of the RUC are handled separately. Persons claiming compensation do not necessarily allege misconduct by individual officers and records held by the RUC and the police authority do not show whether these persons have also made complaints; nor do their records, or those of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints, show whether complainants are also seeking compensation. The commission, however, in its annual reports, provides information on complaints made by persons arrested under the emergency legislation. From the period 1 January 1989 to 30 September 1991, it dealt with 1,065 such cases of complaint. In 788 cases, the complainant failed to co-operate with the investigating officer, 31 cases were withdrawn and 245 were regarded as unsubstantiated because of insufficient evidence. The commission considered one case to have been substantiated, and the officer concerned was subsequently found not guilty of a disciplinary offence.

Terrorist Murders

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the number of terrorist murders for the period 15 November 1984 to 14 November 1985 and for each succeeding comparable period until 14 November 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of 469 murders, believed to be terrorist-related, were committed during the period 15 November 1984 to 14 November 1991.

The figures for each successive 12-month period are as follows:

	Number
1984-85	43
1985-86	58
1986-87	80
1987-88	82
1988-89	54
1989-90	70
1990-91	82

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will detail the percentage of murders in each of the last six years which are attributable to *(a)* republican terror groups and *(b)* Loyalist terror groups.

Dr. Mawhinney: Set out in the table are the percentage of murders believed to have been carried out by republican and loyalist groups.

	Republican groups per cent.	*Loyalist groups per cent.*
1985	89	11
1986	75	25
1987	79	21
1988	74	26
1989	68	32
1990	71	29

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy that any licence issued under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 should *(a)* be to a named individual, *(b)* refer to a specific badger sett, *(c)* specify the circumstances under which sett interference may occur and *(d)* be for a limited period of time.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 12 December at col. *550*.

Vegetarian Diets

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the research projects his Ministry is funding into the nutritional aspects of vegetarian diets, giving the amount spent on each project, the establishment where the work is being carried out, and when the project is due to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My Department is funding one project on nutritional aspects of vegetarian diets. The project is entitled "The Effects of Vegetarian Diet on Hormone Levels and Risks of Osteoporosis". The research is being done in the Department of Chemical Pathology at University College London and the Middlesex School of Medicine. The project will be completed on 17 February 1993 at a cost of £150,000. It is aimed at studying the effects of a vegetarian diet on bone density in women aged 30-55 years. The data gained overall will be of importance to the Department in its responsibility for giving dietary advice to population groups who may be at risk of developing disease.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what scientific evidence he has of *(a)* nutritional or *(b)* other deficiencies of a diet which contains no meat; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: This Ministry is committed to the promotion of healthy eating. This is based on a balanced diet, which normally contains a proper proportion of meat. Those who do not eat meat need to take extra care that their diet contains enough of all the nutrients for health. Meat is a particularly rich source of B vitamins and well absorbed minerals, including iron. People habitually consuming diets which contain little or no meat may need higher iron intakes and thus diet selection needs to be made with much more care. Adolescent girls who avoid meat may be particularly at risk of iron deficiency.

Irradiated Food

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his current policy in respect of seeking an exemption under the EC rules for food labelling for irradiated ingredients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am fully committed to providing consumers with information on food labels to enable them to choose between foods which have been irradiated and those which have not. Rules for the labelling of all foods and listed food ingredients which have been irradiated have already been agreed by the EC. Further proposals on food irradiation currently before the Council of Ministers include more detailed rules on the labelling of irradiated ingredients. I am seeking to ensure that the further requirements on ingredient declarations are as comprehensive as practicable.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Severe Hardship

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long it takes to process a claim by an under 18-year-old for income support on grounds of severe hardship.

Mr. Jack: Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, has informed me that separate information about the processing of claims from under 18-year-olds on grounds of severe hardship is not available. However, the average clearance time for all income support claims was 3·1 days in October 1991. Claims from under 18-year-olds are given priority and a direction for income support under the severe hardship provision is made within 24 hours of the customer being interviewed in the local office.

Source: Benefits Agency management information systems database.

Income Support

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of pensioners who are in receipt of income support.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 5 November at column *82*.

There are about 1·4 million pensioners in receipt of income support where "pensioners" is taken to mean income support claimants who also receive retirement pension. The number is about 1·7 million if the definition is taken as income support claimants aged 60 or over.

Source: 1990 Annual Statistical Enquiry.

Local Offices

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide translation and interpretation facilities in local offices to meet the needs of the ethnic minorities communities.

Miss Widdecombe: The provision of translation and interpreting services in local offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number and proportion of unemployed people were receiving *(a)* income support only, *(b)* unemployment benefit only, *(c)* income support and unemployment benefit, broken down by sex in each case, at the date for which the most up-to-date information is available.

Mr. Jack: The latest information is shown in the table.

	Income support only	*Unemployment benefit only*	*Income support Unemployment benefit*
Males	969,906 (55 per cent.)	315,290 (18 per cent.)	93,094 (5 per cent.)
Females	242,460 (14 per cent.)	137,865 (8 per cent.)	9,062 (1 per cent.)

Note: This information is taken from the Unemployment Benefit Statistics Quarterly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants, May 1991, a copy of which is available in the Library.

The figures in brackets illustrate the number shown as a percentage of all unemployed people receiving benefits for unemployment.

Maxwell Companies (Pension Funds)

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he has received any representations before 5 November 1991 from the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation about the pension funds of any companies of which the late Robert Maxwell was a director;

(2) whether he has received any representations before 5 November 1991 from the Occupational Pension Board about the pension funds of any companies of which the late Robert Maxwell was a director.

Miss Widdecombe: No such representations were received.

Social Fund Inspectors

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many social fund inspectors were employed on 31 October;

(2) how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month on 31 October.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the Social Fund Commissioner that on 31 October 1991 there were 66 social fund inspectors employed and 3,043 review applications outstanding for more than one month.

Pension Equalisation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on the effect of the protocol relating to equalisation of pensions signed at Maastricht;

(2) when he expects to introduce legislation to enforce the protocol on equalisation of pension ages signed at Maastricht; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The implications of the protocol are still being discussed.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to issue the Government's discussion paper on equalisation of pension age for the state scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The discussion paper "Options for Equality in State Pension Age"—which, as I said when I made my statement to the House on 26 June, will help to inform debate by exploring the issues and providing background information—will be published tomorrow.

Occupational Pension Funds

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will bring forward regulations relating to *(a)* the disclosure of information on occupational pension funds arising from the Social Security Act 1988, *(b)* limited price indication, *(c)* self-investment (both arising from the Social Security Act 1990) and *(d)* contracting-out rebates for the next quinquennium.

Miss Widdecombe: We shall bring forward amending regulations relating to disclosure of information in the new year, shortly after the publication of a booklet giving guidance to trustees on the exercise of their function.

Implementation of limited price indexation was delayed because of the uncertainties arising from the Barber judgment. In the light of the Maastricht protocol we are considering whether and when the necessary regulations should now be introduced. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 12 December at column *527* in relation to self-investment regulations, and my reply to the hon. Member on 15 November at column *685* in relation to the contracting-out rebate.

Chief Adjudication Officer's Report

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the seventh annual report of the Chief Adjudication Officer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The report is being published today. Its findings point to improvement in some areas of adjudication, including those in the Employment Service, while in some others, standards remain disappointing. The Chief Adjudication Officer welcomes the positive response made to the majority of recommendations in his 1989-90 report, and goes on to make further recommendations to build on the progress made so far. He welcomes the commitment of the chief executives of both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service to the improvement of adjudication standards as an integral part of customer service.

The recommendations are being considered, and will be the subject of a formal response in due course.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been, in percentage terms, the proportion to the index of average earnings, for a family consisting of husband, wife, and two children aged five and 10, of *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* unemployment benefit and *(c)* sickness benefit during the first six months of sickness, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* For many families, unemployment benefit and sickness benefit are not the sole sources of benefit income.

The information requested is given in the table:

Date[1]	*Child benefit (per cent. of earnings)*	*Unemployment benefit (per cent. of earnings)*	*Sickness benefit (per cent. of earnings)*
November 1979	7·0	29·2	29·2
November 1980	7·0	26·6	26·6
November 1981	7·0	25·4	25·4
November 1982	7·3	25·6	25·6
November 1983	7·4	25·1	24·1
November 1984	7·3	24·5	23·5
November 1985	7·0	24·7	23·6
July 1986	6·7	23·6	22·6
April 1987	6·5	22·7	21·7
April 1988	5·9	21·5	20·6
April 1989	5·4	20·8	19·9
April 1990	4·9	20·4	19·6
April 1991	4·8	20·9	20·0

[1] Date used is month of uprating for the year in question.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of pensioners who are in receipt of housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: In May 1990, there were 2,067,000 housing benefit cases in Great Britain where either the claimant, or the partner, or both were aged 60 or over.

Source: Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample May 1990.

DEFENCE

Women Employees

16. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many women are employed in each of the top three civil servant grades in his Department.

Mr. Alan Clark: At present, none. My Department did not recruit women into the fast stream until 1971 and those in the first intakes have yet to attain the most senior positions.

RNAD Ernesettle

17. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends announcing his decision about the future of RNAD Ernesettle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall announce a decision after giving full consideration to the representations made by the trade unions and other interested parties.

Competitive Tendering

19. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the competitive tendering process.

Mr. Alan Clark: I believe that competition in the procurement of defence equipment has been successful in providing value for money both to my Department and to the taxpayer. This assessment is supported by the Committee of Public Accounts in its recent report on "Initiatives in Defence Procurement".

Diversification

20. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about diversification in the defence industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: Decisions affecting the future of a company, including its product lines, are best left to the commercial judgment of its management.

Peace-keeping Forces

21. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account he has taken of future United Kingdom involvement in European and United Nations peace-keeping forces in determining the reorganisation of British regiments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The size and structure of Britain's Army for the 1990s has been determined in the light of a thorough assessment of its likely future commitments.

Horses (Ceremonial Duties)

22. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on procuring additional horses for ceremonial purposes during the past year; from which sources the horses were procured; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of £170,000 was spent in 1990-91 on horses purchased from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. About 55 horses are purchased each year to replace those which are retired from active duty.

Territorial Army

23. **Mr. Churchill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the military effectiveness of individual units is one of the factors he is taking into account in deciding the fate of Territorial Army battalions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. There is no objective definition of military effectiveness, which is therefore not a suitable criterion to use in formulating such decisions.

27. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future role and size of the Territorial Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made on 10 December at columns *733-48*.

Nuclear Testing

24. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, when he next meets the Secretary General of NATO, he will discuss with him the implications of a moratorium on nuclear testing.

Mr. King: I last met the Secretary General of NATO at the NATO Defence Planning Committee in Brussels on 12 and 13 December.

Scottish Regiments

25. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current total numbers of regiments recruited in Scotland and the projected numbers after the envisaged cutbacks in the number of battalions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 12 regiments from the Infantry, Royal Armoured Corps and Royal Artillery who recruit from Scotland. Following restructuring there will be 10. Other arms and services are drawn from all parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland.

Property Sales

26. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much Ministry of Defence property has been sold in the last five years; and what value was received for it.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the five years to 1990-91, the last year for which records are complete, the Ministry of Defence sold its freehold interest in land totalling 7,280 acres, and 8,073 service and civilian dwellings which, taken together, generated receipts totalling £454 million.

Libya

28. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions Ministers and officials of his Department have had with their Libyan counterparts over the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Sleeping Accommodation

29. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total of unused sleeping accommodation on Ministry of Defence premises in the Greater London area and surrounding counties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Royal Navy

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for reductions in personnel and vessels in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our plans to move to a smaller and better equipped Navy remain as set out in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991. We will move to these lower force levels while introducing newer and more capable vessels. Navy manpower will reduce from the present total requirement of 63,000 to around 55,000 by the mid-1990s.

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the medical service of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital is for civilians.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: About 60 per cent of patients treated in 1990 were civilians (including service dependants).

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Her Majesty's Government first learned of the military testing role of the Al-Atheer site in Iraq.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Al-Atheer site was visited by the second (22 June to 3 July 1991) and fourth (27 July to 10 August 1991) nuclear inspections teams. The sixth nuclear inspection team (22 to 30 September 1991) confirmed the linkage between Al-Atheer and the Iraqi nuclear weapons programme.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name the vessels currently in service with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, giving the date of construction and the life expectancy of each vessel.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The names and construction completion dates of the ships currently in service with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary are listed below.

Ship	*Completion date*
Olwen	1965
Olna	1966
Olmeda	1965
Grey Rover	1970
Blue Rover	1970
Gold Rover	1974
Black Rover	1974
Brambleleaf	1976
Bayleaf	1982
Orangeleaf	1982
Oakleaf	1981
Resource	1967
Regent	1967
Fort Grange	1978
Fort Austin	1979
Sir Bedivere	1967
Sir Geraint	1967
Sir Percivale	1968
Sir Tristram	[1]1965
Sir Galahad	1987
Argus	[2]1988
Diligence	[2]1984

Notes:
[1] Rebuilt in 1985.
[2] RFA in-service date after conversion from commercial use.

All RFA vessels are maintained to Department of Transport and Lloyd's survey standards and their service life expectancy is kept under regular review. It is not our policy to provide details on the life expectancy of individual vessels.

Naval Procurement

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which major naval procurement decisions are due in *(a)* the next three months, *(b)* the next six months and *(c)* the next financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On current plans we hope to make announcements on the order of further type 23 frigates, and on our procurement plans for an aviation support ship early next year. We plan to place the order for the fourth Trident submarine, subject to the satisfactory outcome of negotiations.

HMS Challenger

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in relation to the shipping companies or others bidding for HMS Challenger; and what terms have been agreed to by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 8 July at column *285*. The position is unchanged.

"Options for Change"

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the number of Her Majesty's forces from whom he expects to receive requests for financial assistance in relation to housing finance in relation to the decline in numbers arising from "Options for Change", the proportion of these in Scotland, the total sums involved and the Scottish proportion, and information of the relationship between his Department and relevant local authorities in order to overcome the problems arising from service personnel leaving the forces in considerable numbers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not possible to predict the number or geographical distribution of those leaving the armed forces over the next few years who might seek such assistance.

My Department is liaising closely with the Department of the Environment and the Scottish Office concerning the problems which may be faced by those service personnel leaving the forces as a result of restructuring.

Army Resources, York

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to inspect Army resources in York.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend visited units in north Yorkshire last month, although not York itself.

SCOTLAND

Stonyetts Hospital

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of responding to the petitioners and others who made representations against the closure of Stonyetts hospital in terms of *(a)* administration and personnel, *(b)* stationery and *(c)* postage; and if he will indicate whether the latter was first or second class.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows: *(a)* £3,796; *(b)* £318 and *(c)* £1,350.

Of the 7,401 responses, only 130 were issued by first class post.

Oak Trees

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Forestry Commission's policy on giving grants for the growing of traditional English oak, Quercus robur; and what proposals the European Commission has made on genetic purity of tree species.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The Forestry Commission pays a higher rate of grant for the planting or regeneration of broadleaved species, including Quercus robur. In ancient semi-natural woodlands, the commission will grant-aid the establishment only of species which are appropriate to the ecology of the site; this will often include Quercus robur.

EC directive No. 66/404 introduced arrangements for the registration of sources of good quality seed with the aim of improving the genetic quality of trees being used within the Community. EC directive No. 71/161 requires that tree seed offered for sale must have less than 1 per cent. impurities, which includes seed from another species. There are, however, derogations from these requirements in favour of the United Kingdom which permit the collection and planting of acorns from non-registered stands of native oak.

Cetaceans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on the establishment of a programme for the retrieval of carcases of stranded small cetaceans in Scotland to conduct post-mortems on these animals and to analyse tissue samples for contaminants.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* A contract, funded by the Department of the Environment, has been offered to the veterinary investigation service of the Scottish Agricultural College. The co-ordinator for the programme of retrieval of carcases and research on stranded small cetaceans in Scotland is expected to take up post early in the new year.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what work is being carried out by his Department to investigate the status of small cetaceans and the threats facing them; and how much money has been allocated to this work each year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The Department's scientists work closely with other researchers in the United Kingdom and take part in international groups such as the ICES study group on seals and small cetaceans. A number of groups are funding research into the status of the bottle-nosed dolphin colony in the Moray firth. The Government's own effort will be increased in 1992 with the appointment of a co-ordinator on strandings of cetaceans in Scotland and introduction of new arrangements for voluntary reporting of accidental capture of cetaceans by fishermen. Much of the Department's work is ad hoc, when strandings or accidental captures occur, and detailed costings of this effort are not available.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what budget has been allocated to the analysis of contaminant levels in stranded small cetaceans; and which body or institution will be conducting this work.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* Research on levels and significance of contaminants in small cetaceans is undertaken by Scottish Office scientists as part of a wider programme of studies on contaminants in the aquatic environment. Additional work on stranded or accidentally captured cetaceans will be undertaken next year and reports and analyses of strandings in Scotland will be co-ordinated through funds provided by DOE. A new system for fishermen to report, voluntarily, accidental capture of cetaceans is also being introduced. The full costs of this work will depend on the number of carcases reported and retrieved for analysis.

Glenesk Foods, Brechin

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has made of the financial consequences for the local economy of the closure of the Glenesk Foods Ltd. factory in Brechin; and what action he intends to take.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The information received by my Department from HL Foods indicates that the Glenesk Foods Ltd. factory in Brechin is not faced with complete closure. HL Foods has decided to cease the factory's canning operations but will continue to produce ready meals at the site. Such matters are best left to the commercial judgment of the company concerned.

The local enterprise company, Scottish Enterprise Tayside, is actively involved in the soft fruit and vegetable industries in Tayside through a number of initiatives. The enterprise company has already held meetings with those involved at Glenesk Foods to establish the likely effect on soft fruit suppliers and to develop, in partnership with others, an action plan to minimise the effect of the job losses. The full range of Employment Service activities will also be available to assist those who have lost their jobs to gain employment.

Set-aside Scheme

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farmers in Scotland have applied for the set-aside scheme for 1991-92; how many hectares of land are involved; what was the total expenditure for set-aside schemes for each year since 1988; how many farmers benefited; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* A total of 131 farmers have applied to enter the one-year set-aside scheme for 1991-92, proposing to set aside a total of 2,345 hectares; 122 farmers have applied to enter into an agreement under the five-year set-aside scheme, with effect from 1 October 1991, proposing to set aside a total of 4,542 hectares.

Claims made and expenditure incurred on the five-year set-aside scheme are as follows:

Set-aside year	*Number of claims*	*Expenditure £*
1988-89	364	2,312,558
1989-90	529	3,522,265

Claims for the 1990-91 year, ended 30 September 1991, are currently being processed. It is estimated that 658 claims will be paid, amounting in total to £4,670,000.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which crops were proposed for each acre of agreed set-aside land for each year since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* No agricultural crops may be produced on set-aside land. A green plant cover must be established on land set-aside as fallow, by sowing or by allowing the naturally occurring vegetation to regenerate. No plant species are prescribed for sown plant cover.

Under the non-agricultural use option, set-aside land may be used to produce hay for horses or to grow crops intended as cover for game birds in a commercial shooting enterprise. Such cover crops must include a mixture of appropriate species and may not be harvested. No records are kept of the specific areas used for hay or game crops under this option.

Helicopter Companies

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the regulations governing foreign ownership of British passenger fixed-wing airlines apply to British passenger helicopter companies.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

There are no such regulations. However, under section 65(3) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, if the Civil Aviation Authority is not satisfied that an applicant for an air transport licence is either a United Kingdom national or a body specified in section 65(3), it must refuse to grant a licence unless the Secretary of State for Transport gives his consent. Similarly, under section 66(3) of the Act, if the CAA has reason to believe that the holder of a licence is no longer either a United Kingdom national or a body specified in section 65(3), it has a duty to inform the Secretary of State accordingly and, if he so directs, revoke the licence. Sections 65(3) and 66(3) of the 1982 Act apply both to passenger fixed-wing aircraft and to passenger helicopter companies.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 18 December 1991

HEALTH

Adoption

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the information available to him on the range of charges levied by local authorities on couples wishing to adopt from abroad.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. The Department has advised local authorities that there is no objection to prospective adopters being asked to meet such charges as the authorities consider reasonable for work associated with intercountry adoption.

General Practitioners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much general practitioners in the United Kingdom have been overpaid under their last year's contract; what is the average overpayment per general practitioner; how much has been reclaimed; how much has been written off; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Mr. Butler) on 7 November at columns *259-60*.

In 1990-91 estimated gross payments to GPs in Great Britain, under the terms of their contract, exceeded the intended level by approximately £178 million. The average overpayment per GP was £5,951.

As an interim measure, an amount of £7·5 million—£250 per GP—was reclaimed from GPs' remuneration in 1991-92, in accordance with the recommendations of the Doctors and Dentists Review Body in its 21st report.

The Government decided this autumn to waive recovery of £63 million of the overpayment, or £2,100 per GP, which was attributable to special factors unique to the first year of the new GP contract. Further decisions will be taken on the handling of the remaining sum in 1992, when we have further information.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the non-executive directors of the Freeman hospital trust and the Northumbria ambulance services trust, and give the remuneration presently received by them.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The non-executive directors of the Freeman hospital trust are:

Mr. Richard Middleton
Mrs. Marion Border
Miss Hilary Goodworth
Mr. John Ward
Dr. Roger Freeman

The non-executive directors of the Northumbria ambulance services trust are:

Mr. Alan Ferguson
Mr. Peter Moth
Mrs. Jacqueline Higson
Mr. Albert Knight
Mr. Douglas Smith

All non-executive directors currently receive £5,000 per annum.

Northern RHA

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the services of the chief executive of the Northern regional health authority ceased.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Mr. Douglas Hague stood down from the post of chief executive of Northern regional health authority on 13 November 1991.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the present non-executive directors of the Northern regional health authority; what recent resignations or new appointments have been made and when they became effective; and what remunerations are currently received by non-executive directors.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The non-executive members of the Northern regional health authority are:

Mr. Tony Brown
Professor Michael Rawlins
Mr. Peter Reay
Mr. Roger Spoor

There has been one vacancy since 31 October when Mrs. Anne Galbraith resigned her position to become chairman of the Royal Victoria infirmary and associated hospitals NHS trust on 1 November 1991.

All non-executive members receive £5,000 per annum.

Mental Health Hospitals (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were committed under the terms of the Mental Health Act 1983 to care in mental health hospitals in Liverpool during each of the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest figures of patients formally admitted to NHS hospitals and units in Liverpool district health authority under the terms of the Mental Health Act 1983 are shown in the table.

Year	*Formal admissions Liverpool DHA*
1987-88	129
1988-89	141
1989-90	162

Source: 1987-88 onwards—Korner aggregate KH15.

Comparable figures are not available centrally for the period before 1987-88.

Mental Health

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the percentages from each ethnic group of patients committed under the terms of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

St. Thomas's Hospital

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to St. Thomas's hospital to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand that under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 10 to 14 February 1992.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department supports a link line telephone service which provides guidance to small firms wishing to know how to do business with the national health service, and has published a guide "Businesslinks: A suppliers' guide", which was revised in January 1991, a copy of which is available in the Library.

ENERGY

Piper B Platform

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Piper B platform to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Wakeham: I understand that, under the procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 20 January to Friday 24 January.

Orimulsion

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the studies carried out by National Power and PowerGen by Mr. G. H. Hadley on orimulsion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. The type and quantity of fuel used by the electricity companies is an operational matter for the companies concerned, subject to emission limits imposed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on the level of subsidy being offered to the United Kingdom generators by the Venezuelan Government in relation to sales of orimulsion fuel oil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have no evidence of any subsidies being offered by the Venezuelan Government in relation to sales of orimulsion.

Home Energy Labelling

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps have been taken to develop and encourage schemes for home energy labelling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Home energy labelling tells householders, landlords and those responsible for housing stock how energy efficient their housing is. The Government have been considering how to promote the take-up of energy labelling in the United Kingdom and how best to ensure that the existence of different labelling schemes does not confuse the consumer.

With the co-operation of the National Energy Foundation and MVM Starpoint, two organisations at the forefront of home energy labelling, the Government have decided to introduce a standard assessment procedure—SAP—for rating the energy performance of homes. This will provide consumers with a reference point and so enable them to make comparisons between labels, such as those issued on the MVM Starpoint scheme and the national home energy rating—NHER—scheme. Like MVM Starpoint and NHER labels, the Government's procedure is based on the Building Research Establishment's domestic energy model. It will be published as a BRE paper.

The Government will require any labelling scheme wishing to use the SAP to meet certain quality standards. They will therefore only authorise organisations to use the SAP only if they undertake to:

obtain a BS5750 certificate of quality assurance based on a Government quality statement. The quality statement will be designed to ensure reliability and consistency of SAP ratings, for example through a requirement that the labelling schemes deliver ratings within a specified number of points in the SAP scale in a specified proportion of cases. The required quality statement will be published after further consultation

obtain confirmation from the Building Research Establishment that their computer software properly incorporates the new standard assessment procedure;

provide the Government with certain statistical data.

In view of their proven record and in order to avoid any disruption to the activities of the existing labelling schemes, the Government will give interim authorisation to MVM Starpoint and the National Energy Foundation to use the Government's SAP, upon confirmation by BRE that their software properly incorporates the SAP. This authorisation will be for 12 months, during which period they will be expected to seek certification under BS5750.

The Government hope by this initiative to expand the market for home energy labels by reducing the risk of confusion arising from an inability to compare ratings. They will be keeping developments under close review and will further refine these arrangements should that prove desirable. They will in due course bring forward proposals for consultation on the incorporation of the SAP into the requirements of building regulations.

WALES

Bats

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the European bats agreement is now binding on local planning authorities in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is hoped that the agreement on the conservation of bats in Europe, which was signed by the United Kingdom earlier this month, will come into force next year. The agreement will be binding, on the national Governments who are parties to it and not on local authorities. The United Kingdom already meets its

potential obligations through the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which apply where relevant to local authorities.

Political Initiatives

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans for new political initiatives in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have plans for several new such initiatives for Wales which I shall announce at the appropriate time.

"The Rural Initiative"

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost of publishing "The Rural Initiative"; and how many copies were printed.

Mr. David Hunt: The rural initiative publication cost £18,444. A total of 1,750 copies were printed in English and 750 copies in Welsh. Printers and designers were selected as a result of competitive tendering.

Housing Revenue Accounts (Subsidy)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has completed his consideration of his 1992-93 housing revenue account subsidy proposals; and when he expects to make his subsidy determinations.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The housing revenue account subsidy determinations for 1992-93 have been made today following consideration of the responses to consultation. I am placing copies of the determinations in the Library of the House.

For rent guidelines the proposal for an average increase of £2.14 is confirmed. As usual, guideline increases for individual authorities vary according to the capital value of their stock.

For management and maintenance allowances, the proposed average increase from £712 per dwelling in the current year to £766 per dwelling in 1992-93, an average increase of 7·5 per cent., is similarly confirmed. Under targeting arrangements, increases for individual authorities take account of the condition of their housing stock.

The rent guidelines and management and maintenance allowances are the assumptions to be made for subsidy purposes. It is for councils to set their own rents and to decide how much to spend on managing and repairing their housing stock within their legal obligations.

DEFENCE

Pensions

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the differences in percentage terms between the outright annuality anomaly for 31 March 1976 and 31 March to 1 April 1991 for *(a)* a brigadier's pension, *(b)* an air commodore's pension, *(c)* a senior naval captain's pension; and what steps he intends taking to remove these anomalies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Scales of retired pay for brigadiers, air commodores and senior naval captains are the same. For officers in those ranks retiring on the maximum point on the scale, which is achieved by 34 years reckonable service, the retired pay currently received expressed as a percentage of the rate awarded for retirement on 1st April 1991 is as follows:

90·3 per cent, where retired pay first came into payment on 31 March 1976.

84·7 per cent, where retired pay first came into payment on 31 March 1991.

Initial awards of retired pay are derived from rates of military salary in force at the date of retirement. They are subsequently increased through index-linking arrangements which take into account movements in the retail prices index. The Ministry of Defence has no plans to adjust rates of retired pay previously awarded in accordance with normal rules, other than through the normal index-linking arrangements.

National and Wildlife Parks (Military Use)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid in each of the last five years to the Duchy of Cornwall for permission to use land in the Dartmoor national park for military use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is commercially confidential between the Duchy of Cornwall and the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what grants were paid to Dartmoor hill farmers in each of the last five years as compensation for restricted grazing as a result of live firing in the National Park.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Compensation is paid to registered commoners. Over the last five years the amounts approved for payment as a result of live firing are as follows:

Year	*£*
1987	81,576
1988	81,101
1989	81,101
1990	91,668
1991	91,668

Empty Property

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long the 24 houses between 2 and 48 Nyland road, Swindon, have been empty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence houses in Nyland road have been vacant since they were handed back to the Ministry of Defence by the United States Air Force. The houses were handed back in three stages in December 1990 and in April and September 1991.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will enter into a management agreement with a housing association or the local authority to use the 24 empty houses in Nyland road, Swindon, for rented accommodation;

(2) if he will transfer immediately the ownership of the 24 houses between 2 and 48 Nyland road, Swindon, to a housing association or local authority.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. A number of the houses are being retained for use by the Ministry of Defence and will be occupied in January 1992. Those houses which are

surplus are to be offered for sale through the scheme to sell surplus married quarters at a discount to service personnel.

Royal Marines

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce opportunities for the employment of women in the Royal Marines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is intended to extend the employment of women in the armed forces to include service in the Royal Marine band service. The recruiting process will be started shortly with a view to receiving the first female recruits at the Royal Marine school of music in the autumn of 1992. Women will serve on the same terms and conditions as male bandsmen. They will receive the same training, including weapons training, and will be expected to achieve the same standards as their male counterparts. Studies into the feasibility of women serving in the corps as commandos are continuing.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"Juliette"

Mr. Hind: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration has been given to the prosecution of Arrow, publishers of "Juliette", by the Marquis de Sade, under the Obscene Publications Act 1959; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The question of prosecution is a matter for the acting Director of Public Prosecutions and is at present under consideration by him.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Northumbria Police Authority

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors he takes into account when allocating resources to individual police authorities; and how these factors apply to the Northumbria police authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

Car Crime

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given to chief constables on cautioning or arresting young people caught taking away other people's motor vehicles; and what guidance is given to magistrates concerning sentencing policy for these offences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Guidance on the decision to caution is contained in Home Office circular 59/1990, a copy of which is in the Library. There is no guidance about the exercise of the power of arrest.

Within the statutory powers provided by Parliament, sentencing in individual cases is for the courts to decide.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he plans in sentencing policy related to young offenders and *(a)* car crime and *(b)* house breaking.

Mr. John Patten: Sentencing in individual cases is a matter for the courts within the powers given by Parliament. The Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill now before Parliament strengthens courts' powers to deal with the unauthorised taking of motor vehicles where there is dangerous driving, damage or injury. Courts have the power to impose a custodial sentence of up to 14 years on offenders convicted of domestic burglary.

Immigration

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been admitted for settlement in the United Kingdom for each year since 1979 from *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* Bangladesh.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of citizens of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in the years 1979-90 is published in tables 22 and 14, respectively, of the 1987 and 1990 volumes of the annual Home Office Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom"—Cm 415 and Cm 1571). Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Government Security

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he is able to give on the cost of Metropolitan police security operations around the Palace of Westminster, parliamentary outbuildings and Departments of state located in and around Whitehall.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not the practice to give details of security costs.

TRANSPORT

Harbours (Accounts)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, for each county, the statutory harbour undertakings which are required by section 42(2)(b) of the Harbours Act 1964 to send him a copy of their annual accounts, stating in each case, the names of the harbour or harbours covered by the undertaking, and the financial year for which accounts were most recently submitted.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am writing to the hon. Lady with this information.

Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his decision on the recommendation put to him by the board of Tees and Hartlepool port authority concerning the sale of its undertaking.

Mr. Rifkind: Under the provisions of the Ports Act 1991, it was for the THFA board to arrange for the sale of shares in its successor company and to recommend to me which bid should be preferred, having regard to the provisions of the Act and objectives of the sale which were agreed with me.

The agreed objectives included encouraging disposal to managers and staff of the whole or a substantial part of the equity share capital; seeking best open market price

subject to the other objectives; continuing operation of the Port in ways which are beneficial to the local economy; maintenance of a viable and competitive port operation; maintenance of the port as a separate entity with day to day management and control located in Teesside; use of THPA's assets for the development of the port business and for the promotion of developments which are locally beneficial.

My Department and its advisers kept closely in touch with the THPA board as it carried out the sale process. I am satisfied that the board discharged its responsibilities in a fair and proper manner. In particular, I am satisfied that it considered carefully each of the bids in relation to the agreed objectives of sale.

The key issues which the board included in its evaluation were: independence, long-term stability, benefit to the community, contribution to the port, credibility, acceptability, employee participation and price. Having thoroughly scrutinised all the bids, the THPA board concluded that the bid by Teesside Holdings Limited, although not the largest in monetary terms, was the most consistent with the authority's privatisation objectives and, taken overall, the most beneficial to the port, its employees and the Teesside community generally. As regards employee participation, the Teesside Holdings bid includes provision for 475,000 shares to be reserved for THPA employees, who will receive one free share for every share subscribed for—that is, 5 per cent. of the proposed equity share capital. Accordingly, the THPA board has recommended to me that its successor company should be sold to Teesside Holdings Limited.

I have considered the THPA recommendation carefully. In particular, I have noted that the price of £180 million offered by Teesside Holdings is at the top end of the range of an independent valuation carried out by THPA prior to the sale. I have also noted the THPA board's view that the Teesside Holdings' bid makes the most convincing plans for a prosperous and growing future for the port, including specific capital expenditure proposals. The bid is also considered to demonstrate the greatest commitment to the long-term development and stability of the authority's undertaking for the benefit of Teesside.

I am satisfied that the THPA board's recommendation best meets the agreed objectives of the sale. I have therefore written to the chairman of THPA to say that I am minded to give my formal consent to the sale of the authority's undertaking to Teesside Holdings Limited as soon as I am able to do so. This will be possible only after the scheme of transfer submitted by the authority under section 9(1) of the Ports Act 1991 and the order providing for a levy on disposals of land to be made under section 17 of the Act have come into effect. The latter is subject to an affirmative resolution of the House and is expected to be debated immediately after the Christmas recess.

RMS St. Helena

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the operation and management of the RMS St. Helena with particular reference to the proposed working conditions of the officers and ratings.

Mr. McLoughlin: The working conditions of the officers and ratings of the RMS St. Helena are properly the concern of the managers—the St. Helena Shipping Company Limited. They are currently negotiating new terms in line with current practices throughout the shipping industry.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Transport provides guidance on transport matters to any business requiring it, whatever its size. Such financial assistance as the Department provides to businesses, for example towards the costs of transporting goods by rail rather than by unsuitable roads, under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974, is available to eligible businesses whatever the size of the company.

The Department's procurement unit encourages small firms to supply the Department, mainly through the pamphlet "Selling to the Department of Transport". The Department selectively vets the suitability of individual companies in accordance with the Department's particular needs, not the size of the company.

Exeter Bypass

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects *(a)* Acer Consultants to deliver their report on a hypothetical Exeter northern bypass to his Department and *(b)* when he expects it to commence Ministerial consideration.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* I hope to receive the report on whether there is a need for a bypass to the north and west of Exeter in January 1992 and to give it consideration then.

M20 Widening

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to withdraw his 200 notification requirement on the planning authority for land charges searches in relation to properties between junctions 3 and 5 of the M20, following his announcement of the line of his Department's widening scheme.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* Pursuant to an agreement between themselves and the Law Society, local authorities will be required to reveal the existence of the proposals for widening M20 between junctions 3 and 5 in response to searches by prospective purchasers of properties within 200 m of the scheme until such time as the widening is implemented.

A27

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will undertake to conduct a full environmental impact assessment of the proposed routes for improvement of the A27; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* Public consultation is taking place at present on the Lewes-Polegate section of the A27. Consideration of the environmental effects of this road scheme has been a continuous process throughout the planning and design

stages. An appraisal of environmental effects of all the A27 consultation routes is outlined in the consultation brochure and at the local consultation exhibitions. Further detailed environmental appraisal will be carried out as the proposals develop.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Spirits

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue yield to the Exchequer of duties and taxes on spirits in the last financial year.

Mr. Gillian Shephard: The revenue yield in 1990-91 was estimated to be £2·4 billion, of which duties accounted for £1·7 billion and VAT accounted for £0·7 billion.

Oil and Gas Production

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield received by Her Majesty's Government from oil and from gas production in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979 both in terms of actual amounts and by current valuation.

Mr. Maude: Annual revenues to the Exchequer from the North sea, at current prices and at 1991-92 prices, have been as follows:

£ million

	Current prices	*1991-92 prices*[1]
1979-80	2,313	5,349
1980-81	3,743	7,305
1981-82	6,492	11,564
1982-83	7,822	13,007
1983-84	8,798	13,973
1984-85	12,035	18,197
1985-86	11,348	16,276
1986-87	4,783	6,630
1987-88	4,618	6,076
1988-89	3,168	3,880
1989-90	2,368	2,729
1990-91	2,498	2,673
[2]1991-92	1,200	1,200

[1] By reference to movements in the GDP market prices implied deflator.
[2] Forecast.

Departmental Relocation

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to relocate part of Her Majesty's Treasury out of central London.

Mr. Maples: The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—the Government centre for information systems—is part of HM Treasury and is currently located partly in central London and partly in Norwich. I have decided that, with the exception of a small London base, it should be wholly located in Norwich. The move will involve a little over 200 posts and will be phased over the next three years; I expect the greater part to take place in 1993-94.

Business Investment

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table giving business investment measured in current prices as a percentage of gross domestic product, measured in current prices for each year since 1974, including quarterly figures since 1988, and the average for periods 1974 to 1979 and 1979 to 1990.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The latest estimates are available on the CSO database which may be accessed through the House of Commons Library. Business investment is defined as private sector and public corporations gross domestic fixed capital formation, excluding purchases less sales of land and existing buildings and private sector investment in dwellings. The database identifier formula for business investment at current prices is DECR *minus* (GGAG + DFHV + AAUC + AAUG + DEET). The identifier for gross domestic product at current market prices is CAOB.

THE ARTS

Arts and Disability

Ms. Walley: To ask the Minister for the Arts when he received a copy of the Arts Council directory on arts and disability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I received a copy of the arts and disability directory when it was issued by the Arts Council. I warmly welcome this initiative and commend the directory to individuals and organisations seeking information or wishing to extend their work in this important area of arts and disability.

ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a copy of the recent study entitled "The Potential Socio-Economic Effects of Climate Change", produced by the environmental change unit of Oxford University.

Mr. Baldry: Yes.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the London Docklands development corporation about provision of sporting and leisure facilities within the LDDC area.

Mr. Portillo: The promotion of facilities for sport and leisure forms part of the LDDC's agreed strategic aim to improve the social infrastructure of London docklands. The development programmes relating to this aim are set out in the 1991 corporate plan which I discussed with the corporation earlier this year.

"Options for Change"

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide funds for ex-service housing associations and other bodies to help meet the demand for additional houses from the service men and women leaving the armed forces as a result of "Options for Change".

Mr. Yeo: The Government are making available substantially increased resources for housing associations

to provide for people in priority need. This programme will be of benefit to the generality of families in high need of subsidised rented housing, who may include some households leaving services accommodation.

Meadow Well Estate, North Shields

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the projects and programmes that he has specifically targeted at the Meadow Well estate, North Shields, Tyne and Wear since 1979; and how he evaluates their outcome.

Mr. Yeo: The local targeting of expenditure under the urban programme and estate action is primarily the responsibility of the local authorities which bid for and deliver these programmes.

Since 1979, the Department has funded an annual urban programme in North Tyneside, for expenditure on projects related to the defined inner area, which includes the Meadow Well estate. In 1988 an estate action scheme was approved for part of the north Meadow Well. The authority has very recently been given the go-ahead to work up estate action proposals to the rest of north Meadow Well.

In addition, the work of the Tyne and Wear development corporation includes activities of benefit to the Meadow Well estate.

In each of these programmes the local authority, or the UDC respectively, are required to monitor projects, and sample monitoring of a selection of projects is carried out by the Department's regional office.

Waste Regulation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent on advertising material to alert waste carriers to the requirement to register with waste regulation authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Department of the Environment, in conjunction with the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office, issued a free explanatory leaflet entitled "If you carry waste, this will affect you". The cost of printing and distributing 250,000 copies of this leaflet was £17,751. A further 100,000 copies are being printed, at a cost of £2,109.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against assessment of uniform business rate for 1990-91 are awaiting completion; if any extra staff have been employed to speed the progress of such appeals; and when he expects all appeals against assessment of uniform business rate for 1990-91 to be completed.

Mr. Key: Ratepayers had six months from 1 April 1990 in which to make proposals to alter their 1990 rating assessments and valuation officers then had a further six months to settle the proposal before the matter became an appeal. Most proposals were not received as appeals to tribunals until the latter part of that financial year.

At the end of September 1991, valuation and community charge tribunals in England had outstanding some 597,000 non-domestic rating appeals, following the clearance of 90,000. The tribunals have recruited extra staff and were provided with computer systems. Staffing levels are kept under review. The speed at which appeals are cleared is primarily a matter for the individual tribunals.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what aspects of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will affect small firms; and when the regulations will come into effect.

Mr. Trippier: Many aspects of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will affect businesses, large and small; They include:

Part I

Integrated pollution control (applies to new processes and substantial changes to existing processes from 1 April 1991; being phased in for existing processes over five years).

Local authority air pollution control (the final stage of introduction is 1 April 1992; parts were introduced on 1 April and 1 October 1991).

Part II

New and extended controls on waste management (the duty of care together with associated Regulations and a Code of Practice come into force on 1 April 1992; we propose to bring into force other measures governing the collection, treatment and disposal of waste and the waste management licensing system by April 1992).

Part III

Statutory nuisance including emissions from premises of dust, smell, effluvia, noise and non-dark smoke which are prejudicial to health or a nuisance; improvement of existing legislation (came into force on 1 January 1991).

Part IV

Package of measures to deal with litter, including powers for local authorities to tackle litter problems caused by certain businesses (an order specifying types of firms affected came into effect on 1 July 1991).

Part V

Introduction of cost recovery for regulation of premises under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 (started from 1 April 1991).

Part VI

Genetically Modified Organisms (it is intended to make regulations that could come into force in 1992).

Part VIII

Miscellaneous; including the introduction of licensing for dumping waste at sea within UK Continental Shelf Limits; and, of greater relevance to small firms powers to make regulations prohibiting or restricting the importation, supply, use or storage of harmful substances or articles and to require their disposal, as well as to require manufacturers, importers or suppliers of chemicals specified in orders to provide information on their properties and use and to carry out testing to obtain such information.

The Department of the Environment has prepared a publication entitled "A Guide to the Environmental Protection Act 1990", which is available free to small firms and others.

Environmental Research

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list details, at 1991 prices, of expenditure by his Department on environmental research and protection for each available year since 1979-80.

Mr. Baldry: My Department's expenditure in 1991 prices on environmental research broken down by main policy areas since 1979-80 is as follows:

£ million

	Planning, local government and countryside	*Environmental protection*	*Water*	*Radioactive waste*	*Total*
1979-80	12·4	10·2	6·1	11·1	39·7
1980-81	10·7	7·0	8·6	18·0	44·2
1981-82	9·0	8·5	6·5	15·6	39·7
1982-83	6·7	7·4	5·9	13·3	33·3
1983-84	4·8	6·6	5·7	13·4	30·5
1984-85	4·6	5·6	5·0	12·8	27·9
1985-86	5·5	7·7	4·6	15·1	32·9
1986-87	4·7	9·3	4·6	14·2	32·8
1987-88	4·5	8·9	4·8	13·9	32·0
1988-89	4·7	10·7	7·0	11·0	33·5
1989-90	4·0	14·2	9·8	7·9	35·9
1990-91	4·9	20·4	4·5	8·6	38·4

Compiled figures for my Department's expenditure on environmental protection before 1985-86 are not readily available. Overall expenditure by my Department on environmental protection in 1991 prices from 1985-86 to 1990-91 is as follows. Details of this expenditure are given in figure 6, page 11 of the Department's 1991 annual report.

	£ million
1985-86	89·9
1986-87	118·3
1987-88	167·7
1988-89	73·3
1989-90	145·1
1990-91	218·5

Development Plans

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will lay before Parliament the new regulations on development plan procedure; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales today laid before Parliament the Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1991—SI 1991/2794. The Departments are also issuing today a circular describing the arrangements for handling the transition from the current development plans system to the new.

The regulations take account of the responses made to the proposals issued for consultation in September. Overall, the response to our proposals has been positive, with those responding welcoming the standardisation and rationalisation of the different arrangements currently applying to different types of plan. A list of the responses to the proposals, and to the consultation draft planning policy guidance issued at the same time, will be placed in the Library of the House; copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Library.

All the responses have been carefully considered. As a result, we have made some changes to the published proposals. The main changes are:

- a new requirement for local authorities to have regard to environmental considerations in preparing their plans, and to indicate what regard they have had to such considerations;
- English Nature, the Countryside Commission, the Countryside Council for Wales, English Heritage, the National Rivers Authority, and the Secretary of State for Transport to be added to the list of those who must be consulted by authorities on all plan proposals before they are put on deposit; and
- authorities to put on deposit, along with their plans, a statement of the publicity and consultation they have carried out in formulating their plan proposals. The statement should list those whom they have consulted, in addition to the prescribed consultees, and any steps they have taken to publicise their proposals and to provide an opportunity of making representations on them.

A number of those responding expressed concern about our proposal to leave pre-deposit publicity and consultation to authorities' discretion, subject to the list of prescribed consultees. Clearly, authorities should ensure that there is adequate publicity for and consultation on their plan proposals before they are put on deposit, but rather than prescribing such an approach in regulations, we believe that it is right to let authorities use their judgment to determine what degree of publicity and consultation is appropriate. This will give authorities the flexibility to tailor their approach according to circumstances. For example, they may conclude that proposals for a new or replacement plan warrant much wider publicity and consultation than proposals for a relatively minor alteration to an existing plan.

Nevertheless, we intend to make it clear in guidance how important it is for authorities to give their plan proposals adequate publicity and to give people an adequate opportunity to comment. Authorities should also consult organisations with a particular interest in the proposals, including coservation and amenity groups and business, development and infrastructural interests. The knowledge that they will have to prepare a statement of publicity and consultation should encourage authorities to consider carefully those whom they will need to consult at the pre-deposit stage.

It is important that local people and other interested bodies should be able to let authorities know what they think of plan proposals from the earliest stages. In this way

they can be fully involved in decisions about the pattern of development in their area. We shall keep the flexible approach to publicity and consultation under review to ensure that it is working satisfactorily. We shall remind authorities that the Secretary of State has reserve powers to direct an authority to carry out further public participation, which he will be prepared to use if he considers that to be necessary in any particular case.

Today's announcement represents another important step in the development of our planning system. The new development plans process, as part of a plan-led system, will require a positive and constructive approach by all those with interests in development and conservation. We hope all those concerned will rise to this challenge.

Coalite, Bolsover

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the results of testing for dioxins in emissions from the Coalite works, Bolsover, carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, will be available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution today released a report on its investigation into dioxins in emissions from the Coalite chemical works incinerator and the Coalite smokeless fuel plant.

The maximum emission of dioxins to atmosphere, calculated on the basis of the measurements made, from the stack on the Coalite Chemicals incinerator was 18 nanogram/m^3 (toxic equivalent). The maximum measured emission of dioxins to atmosphere at Coalite Fuels was 1·2 nanogram/m^3 (toxic equivalent)

Based on the maximum emission level recorded during the sampling, calculation of the atmospheric dispersion of dioxins from the two Coalite plants gives a maximum predicted concentration in air at groundlevel of 0·05 picogram/m^3 and an associated rate of deposition of 0·0006 picogram/m^2/s. The calculation suggests that these air concentrations and deposition rates would occur in the vicinity of the farms that currently have restrictions placed upon their milk. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has concluded from the results that such emissions from the Coalite Chemical incinerator would probably account for only a part of the dioxins which have been found in the milk on the affected farms. The atmospheric discharges from Coalite Fuels contribute only a few per cent. of the values reported.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution is to test for dioxins in soil samples taken at various distances around the Coalite plants, to complement the work already being undertaken by MAFF. The work is expected to begin in the new year and will take six months to complete.

The incinerator at Coalite Chemicals was closed down by the company during November, to allow substantial modifications to it. When it has been redesigned it will be regulated by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which requires control on releases to all media.

Deposit Refund Systems

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the study commissioned by the Departments of Trade and Industry and the Environment on the subject of deposit refund systems.

Mr. Baldry: The study, carried out by the consultants Environmental Resources Limited, has been published today in a report entitled "Deposit Refund Systems for Beverage Containers and Batteries". Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. The report is available on sale from HMSO book shops.

The Government had indicated in the last year's environmental White Paper that this work would be undertaken. The report's finding are now being considered, and will be taken into account during the further formulation of the Government's waste minimisation and recycling policy. We would welcome any comments that interested parties may have on the report.

Halons

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the use of halons as fire-fighting chemicals in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My Department considered a study, from C. S. Todd and Associates, on halon use in the United Kingdom, which is published today. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The report shows that consumption of halons has fallen by about 25 per cent. since 1986, and that most uses of halons, particularly in portable extinguishers, could be substituted now. It gives a clear indication to industry of the areas where more work is needed to find alternative means of fire protection.

Halons have a very high ozone depletion potential, and therefore we have proposed to other European member states that production and supply of virgin halon should be phased out by 1 January 1995, subject to provisions for essential uses, when we revise the Montreal protocol next year.

Environmental Assessment

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be replying to the European Commission's letter of 17 October 1991 alleging infraction of directive 85/337/EEC on environment assessment.

Mr. Heseltine: The United Kingdom responded on 17 December within the two months requested by the Commission.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for the years 1979-80 to 1991-92 for each service control total a comparison between actual local authority outturn expenditure and the relevant grant-related expenditure assessment or standard spending assessment.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* The service expenditure control totals used in the rate support grant settlements from 1982-83 to 1989-90 are shown in the table. Information on expenditure control totals is not available for years prior to 1982-83.

It is not possible to construct comparable figures for outturn expenditure on the basis of the available returns from local authorities.

The standard spending assessment service control totals used in the 1990-91 and 1991-92 revenue support grant settlements together with budgeted expenditure by local authorities on these services are as follows:

£ million

	1990-91		1991-92	
	SSA control total	Expenditure	SSA control total	Budgeted expenditure
Education	14,753	15,725	17,137	17,198
Personal social services	3.592	4,119	4,418	4,521
Police	2,125	2,163	2,342	2,451
Fire and civil defence	877	964	1,021	1,058
Highway maintenance	1,578	1,705	1,786	1,782
All other services	4,502	5,631	5,933	6,360
Capital financing	2,380	2,922	2,951	2,973
Total revenue expenditure	29,805	33,229	35,587	36,345

1982-83 to 1989-90 total grant related expenditure for the main groups of services

£ million

	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
1. Education, arts and libraries	10,217	10,349	10,624	11,093	11,618	12,576	13,939	14,354
2. Personal social	1,943	2,085	2,205	2,366	2,553	2,756	2,913	3,269
3. Law and order	1,649	1,785	1,890	2,008	2,152	2,363	2,555	2,846
4. Transport	1,373	1,398	1,487	1,733	1,929	2,045	2,024	2,140
5. Employment and consumer protection	107	110	115	118	127	148	159	174
6. Housing	591	536	514	628	826	825	816	872
7. Environmental services	2,405	2,507	2,520	2,652	2,926	3,000	3,137	3,620
8. Financing items	203	461	527	622	660	29	464	386
All services	18,515	19,231	19,882	21,221	22,790	23,742	26,006	27,662

Move-on Programme

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many young people have been housed under the move-on programme.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* A total of 1,550 people aged 16 to 25 moved on from hostels, shared housing, bed and breakfast or other similar temporary accommodation into permanent housing provided by housing associations between 1 July 1990 and 30 June 1991.

Under my Department's rough sleepers initiative in central London, some 600 people aged 16 to 25 had been housed in hostels, flats and houses at the end of September 1991.

Air Pressure Gauges

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce new standards for the maintenance of air pressure gauges on garage forecourts.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has no plans to introduce requirements relating to the maintenance of air pressure gauges on garage forecourts. The testing of hot tyres can produce misleading or inaccurate readings however accurate the gauge might be. Tyres should always be tested cold.

Motorists should therefore use their own gauges to check their tyres when cold. This is why my Department has approved British standard 4613 on portable gauges for the purposes of the general safety requirement under section 10(3) of the Consumer Protection Act 1987.

EMPLOYMENT

Earnings

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the information from the 1991 new earnings survey data on respectively, the numbers of full-time employees on adult rates in *(a)* greater Manchester, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* Cheshire, *(d)* Lancashire and *(e)* the north west region, whose weekly earnings excluding overtime were less than £185, less than £140 and less than £130 per week for (i) manual males, (ii) non-manual males, (iii) all full-time males, (iv) manual females, (v) non-manual females and (vi) all full-time females, giving the total sample size in each case.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey is given in the table.

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross weekly earnings (excluding overtime) were below the folowing specified amounts

	April 1991				
	£130 Numbers in sample	£140 Numbers in sample	£180 Numbers in sample	£190 Numbers in sample	Total in sample
Greater Manchester					
Manual men	153	230	600	716	1,741
Non manual men	73	103	280	325	1,916
All men	226	333	880	1,041	3,657
Manual women	163	211	318	332	386
Non-manual women	205	299	715	815	1,621
All women	368	510	1,033	1,147	1,007

	£130 Numbers in sample	£140 Numbers in sample	April 1991 £180 Numbers in sample	£190 Numbers in sample	Total in sample
Merseyside					
Manual men	50	70	262	303	791
Non manual men	39	58	150	172	861
All men	89	128	412	475	1,652
Manual women	56	69	112	118	146
Non-manual women	116	156	381	432	849
All women	172	225	493	550	995
Cheshire					
Manual men	51	66	229	277	758
Non manual men	16	22	79	90	767
All men	67	88	308	367	1,525
Manual women	54	64	111	116	148
Non-manual women	68	96	250	287	609
All women	122	160	361	403	757
Lancashire					
Manual men	71	108	346	410	878
Non manual men	27	47	144	160	869
All men	98	155	490	570	1,747
Manual women	96	118	184	191	213
Non-manual women	117	167	367	403	755
All women	213	285	551	594	968
North West					
Manual men	325	474	1,437	1,706	4,168
Non manual men	155	230	653	747	4,413
All men	480	704	2,090	2,453	8,581
Manual women	369	462	725	757	893
Non-manual women	506	718	1,713	1,937	3,834
All women	875	1,180	2,438	2,694	4,727

Source: New Earnings Survey

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the information from the 1991 new earnings survey data on the numbers of part-time employees on adult rates in *(a)* greater Manchester, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* Cheshire, *(d)* Lancashire and *(e)* the north-west region whose hourly earnings excluding overtime were less than £5, less than £4·50, less than £4, less than £3·50 and less than £3 per week under the following headings, giving total sample size in each case: manual males, non-manual males, all part-time males, manual females, non-manual females and all part-time females.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey is given in the table. The information is not available for part-time male employees.

Part time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) were below the following specified amounts.
April 1991

	£3·00 Numbers in sample	£3·40 Numbers in sample	£3·60 Numbers in sample	£4·00 Numbers in sample	£4·50 Numbers in sample	£4·80 Numbers in sample	£5·40 Numbers in sample	Total in sample
Greater Manchester								
Manual women	92	204	237	298	341	350	361	373
Non-manual women	76	177	230	321	400	429	462	596
All women	168	381	467	619	741	779	823	969
Merseyside								
Manual women	62	144	160	202	229	234	241	253
Non-manual women	40	106	122	157	203	224	249	326
All women	102	250	282	359	432	458	490	579
Cheshire								
Manual women	53	89	100	123	131	138	144	153
All women	85	177	213	259	295	318	343	394
Non-manual women	32	88	113	136	164	180	199	241
Lancashire								
Manual women	57	128	149	188	207	211	214	225
Non-manual women	53	115	134	166	203	220	258	333
All women	110	243	283	354	410	431	472	558

	£3·00	£3·40	£3·60	£4·00	£4·50	£4·80	£5·40	Total in sample
	Numbers in sample	Numbers in sample	Numbers in sample	Numbers in sample	Numbers in sample	Numbers in sample	Numbers in sample	
North West								
Manual women	264	565	646	811	908	933	960	1,004
Non-manual women	201	486	599	780	970	1,053	1,168	1,496
All women	465	1,051	1,245	1,591	1,878	1,986	2,128	2,500

Source: New Earnings Survey.

EC Social Charter

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he proposes to introduce legislation to implement the EC proposals under the social charter in addition to those which relate to the working hours of miners in British collieries following the proposed repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908.

Mr. Forth: Matters relating to the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Many of the proposals in the European Commission's social action programme are still being considered or have yet to be published. Where legislation is required to implement directives already agreed, proposals will be brought forward within the timetable for implementation set out in each proposal.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Forth: The Department runs or supports three schemes providing help or advice for small firms as well as local schemes through training and enterprise councils. These are:

Information counselling and consultancy
Locally tailored schemes through Training and Enterprise Councils.

Training
Locally tailored schemes through Training and Enterprise Councils.

Finance
Enterprise Allowance through Training and Enterprise Councils.
The Loan Guarantee Scheme
Loan Funds of the Prince's Youth business Trust/Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust.
Informal Investment projects.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Electricity Supply

Sir Gerrard Neale: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made since publication of the Government's White Paper in relation to the development of proposals for the introduction of competition in the supply of electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Proposals for the introduction of competition in the supply of electricity have now been drawn up. They provide for a staged transition from the present situation in which Northern Ireland Electricity enjoys a monopoly position, to the creation of a market in which generators and suppliers will be able to compete freely, with consumers benefiting from the resultant downward pressure on costs. Faster progress to full supply competition is prevented by the physical constraints of the Northern Ireland Electricity system.

This transition is likely to be achieved in three distinct phases. In phase I, immediately following privatisation, authorised alternative suppliers—second tier suppliers—will be able go compete with NIE (Transmission, Distribution, Supply) in the supply of electricity to end users. This will allow consumers choice between suppliers or, in the case of large consumers, allow them to make arrangements to supply themselves under licence.

Phase II will be an intermediate step and will establish a partial electricity trading system which will permit direct trade between some generators and suppliers. The Director General of Electricity Supply will be responsible for the development of this arrangement, in consultation with all interested parties, and, as a further spur to the growth of competition in supply, the Director General of Electricity Supply will have powers to cancel selected power purchase agreements betwen NIE (TDS) and the generators in tranches between November 1996 and 2010. Appropriate safeguards for NIE (TDS) and the generators will be incorporated in the licences.

Phase III will achieve full supply competition in which generators and suppliers will be able to trade freely, thus allowing consumers to derive the maximum benefit from competition in this market. This will probably necessitate the introduction of some form of pooling and settlement arrangement. No date for achieving this has been set.

Cross-border Terrorism

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many arrests have been made in the Irish Republic in connection with Republican terrorist incidents with a cross-frontier element which have occurred in Northern Ireland since 1 January 1990; what charges have been brought; what convictions achieved; and if he will give details.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* This is a matter for the authorities in the Republic of Ireland. Records are not kept in a way which enables statistics of arrests, charges, and convictions in the Republic of Ireland to be linked meaningfully to terrorist incidents with cross-border element. However, statistics on extraterritorial prosecutions in the Republic, which involve a cross-border element in the sense that the offender has fled to the Republic, were given in replies by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) on 19 December 1988, *Official Report*, column *94;* to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 14 May 1990, *Official Report*, column *280;* and by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington on 11 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *352* and 2 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *13*.

PRIME MINISTER

EC Social Chapter

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the propositions in the social chapter of the treaty on European Union which *(a)* have not already been implemented in the United Kingdom and *(b)* would have to be implemented if the United Kingdom were a signatory to the social chapter; and what is his assessment of the effect on British industry of each of the propositions in *(b)*.

The Prime Minister: The treaty on European union confirms that the social provisions chapter within the existing treaty of Rome will be maintained without change. The chapter contains no propositions, but establishes the basis upon which the Community may support member states in the pursuant of their objectives. It is, and will remain, the basis for the development of a sensible social dimension respecting national diversity and subsidiarity and consistent with the priority of employment creation.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kashmir

13. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Kashmir in the near future.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to visit Kashmir.

Brazil

14. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the President of Brazil to discuss relations with Brazil.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no such plans.

Abu Dhabi

15. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens remain unable to leave Abu Dhabi until they receive their passports.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our embassy in Abu Dhabi knows of four such British passport holders. There may be others who have not informed the embassy.

European Community (Presidency)

16. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific plans he has for when the United Kingdom next has the presidency of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Detailed plans for the United Kingdom presidency will be made nearer the time in the light of progress during the Portuguese presidency. Among the issues likely to be at the top of the United Kingdom's agenda are completion of a liberal single market by the end of 1992 and preparations for the future enlargement of the Community. There will be a number of events connected with our presidency including a European organ festival in Bolton.

East Timor

17. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is currently taking to make clear Her Majesty's Government's position to Indonesia in respect of its occupation of East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Indonesian authorities are well aware that we do not recognise their annexation of East Timor.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is now in a position to make a further statement on the incident at Santa Cruz cemetery, Dili, East Timor, on 12 November.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have condemned the killings in Dili. We will discuss with our EC partners what further action, if any, might be appropriate when the contents of the report of the Indonesian national commission of inquiry are known.

38. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to receive a report of the investigation into the recent killings in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We expect the draft report to be available soon.

30. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government has made in the United Nations about the situation in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We continue to support the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to bring about a solution to the problem of East Timor.

Maastricht

18. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advantages he expects to flow from the Maastricht summit.

20. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the discussions at Maastricht.

Mr. Hurd: I refer my hon. Friends to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 11 December. In the ways which my right hon. Friend set out, the Maastricht agreement will equip the Community and its member states to work more closely together, organising each aspect of their work in the most effective way rather than forcing it into a single pattern. We believe that this will add to the strength of the work.

37. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Maastricht negotiations.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 11 December. The agreement reached at Maastricht is good for Britain and for Europe. It provides for strengthened intergovernmental co-operation in the field of foreign policy and in combating cross-border crime, drugs trafficking and in other areas of interior and justice policy. It will make the Community more efficient and accountable. The Community is now in good shape to face the challenges of the rest of the 1990s, including enlargement.

EC Foreign Policies

19. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next proposes to have discussions with his European Community partners concerning the development of common European Community foreign policies.

Mr. Hurd: I meet my European Community partners regularly. The common foreign and security policy agreed at Maastricht will strengthen intergovernmental co-operation and joint action with our partners in agreed areas of policy.

Ukraine

21. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on political and commercial relations with the Ukraine.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are developing an active political and commercial relationship with Ukraine. A British official is based in Kiev to establish a permanent British mission. The British Council also is establishing a prescence. A senior Foreign Office official held talks in Kiev with the Ukrainian leadership on Saturday. Earlier this month a Ukrainian delegation visited Britain, including the deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament and the chairman of the national bank. The know-how fund has sponsored a food distribution project and is looking at projects in banking and privatisation. There are several joint ventures and a number of British companies have offices in Ukraine.

34. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to recognise Ukraine as an independent state.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ukraine and the other republics of the Soviet Union are discussing among themselves their future relationships and their approach to the union's international obligations. We therefore have not taken a decision on recognition, but a British representative now based in Kiev is working to establish a full diplomatic mission there.

28. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to meet the President of Ukraine to discuss the establishment of closer relations following the outcome of the recent referendum.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We actively are developing closer relations with Ukraine. A British representative now based in Kiev is working to establish a permanent British mission. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs very much looks forward to meeting President Kravchuk in due course.

EC Association Agreements

22. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards EC association agreements with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am delighted to be able to tell the House that the European Community's association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, which were the result of a United Kingdom initiative in 1989, were signed in Brussels on Monday 16 December 1991. The agreements contain a variety of measures designed to bolster the economies of these countries and bring them closer to the Community and its member states. They include trade liberalisation provisions to promote economic development through the gradual establishment of a free trade area. The agreements will also help prepare them for the eventual membership of the Community which they seek.

Burma

24. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts Her Majesty's Government are making to increase the pressure on the military Government of Burma to hand over power to the National League for Democracy.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have repeatedly called on the Burmese military junta to respect the results of the elections in May 1990 which the National League for Democracy won by a landslide. The EC suspended all non-humanitarian aid to Burma in 1988 and in 1991, at British initiative, imposed an embargo on defence sales to Burma. On 30 November, we co-sponsored a United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for an improvement in the human rights situation and for progress towards democratic government in Burma.

Tibet

25. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Tibet.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We regularly express concern to the Chinese authorities about reports of human rights abuses in Tibet and press them to provide an acceptable degree of autonomy there.

Indonesia

26. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the ambassador of Indonesia to discuss human rights issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My noble Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs summoned the Indonesian ambassador on 13 November, to express our grave concern about recent human rights abuses in Indonesia.

Our position has also been clearly set out in EC/Council of Europe declarations and in the presidency statement to the third committee of the United Nations on 19 November.

Soviet and Yugoslav Republics

23. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The tragedy of Yugoslavia is one of my main preoccupations. We and our EC partners are devoting great effort to working for a settlement. We hope that the conditions necessary for the deployment of a United Nations peace-keeping force can be met soon. A long-term solution will be possible only when the Yugoslavs themselves show a genuine political will to reach a peaceful settlement.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Kingdom will recognise Croatia and Slovenia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: EC Foreign Ministers agreed on 16 December to recognise those Yugoslav republics which meet certain conditions. A final decision on implementation will be taken on 15 January after advice from the arbitration commission of Lord Carrington's conference on Yugoslavia.

27. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his current policy on recognition of the Soviet and Yugoslavian component republics as they seek or achieve independence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The republics of the Soviet Union continue to discuss among themselves their future relationships. We therefore have not yet taken decisions on recognition.

On Yugoslavia, we fear that recognition now would increase the danger of civil war spreading and undermine current international efforts to negotiate peace. This position is under constant review.

33. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the total number of casualties in Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Conflicting reports and an absence of reliable independent sources mean that it is difficult to give precise figures for casualties in Croatia. Most estimates fall between 5,000 and 10,000 deaths.

Afghanistan

29. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards a solution of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Nations, in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's peace proposals of 21

May continues to play a key role in seeking a political solution. The United Nations is hoping to convene a meeting of representatives of all significant Afghan opinion in the near future to discuss the establishment of a transitional administration.

The United States and Soviet Governments have agreed to end their supply of arms to all sides in the conflict by 1 January 1992. Furthermore, a mujaheddin delegation recently reached a substantial measure of agreement with Soviet leaders on principles regarding transitional arrangements within Afghanistan and the return of prisoners.

All these developments represent encouraging progress towards a resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Middle East

31. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to meet the Israeli Foreign Minister in order to discuss the middle east conference.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs saw the Israeli Foreign Minister in September. He has no plans at present to meet him again, but we have frequent discussions with members of the Israeli Government about the middle east peace process. I met Mr. Netanyahu on 26 November.

EC Union

32. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what definition of subsidiarity it is his policy to accept in the context of EC union.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We strongly endorse the definition of subsidiarity agreed at Maastricht. This is a clear, justiciable definition which states that the Community shall take action only if the objective cannot be sufficiently achieved by the member states.

Cuba

35. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet with representatives of the Cuban Government to discuss that country's role in the security arrangements for the central American region.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no such plans.

Cyprus

36. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between the United Kingdom and Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have close and friendly relations with Cyprus. We continue to work actively in support of the United Nations Secretary-General's efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the intercommunal dispute.

Iran

39. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Anglo-Iranian relations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We restored diplomatic relations with Iran on 27 September 1990 on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference in each others affairs. We are grateful for the role the Iranian Government played in securing the release of British and other hostages. We hope that the relationship with Iran will continue to evolve in a positive direction.

Congo and Gabon

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what administrative arrangements following the closure of the British embassies in Brazzaville and Libreville have been made for the citizens of the Congo and Gabon to acquire visas to visit the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Citizens of Congo and Gabon may apply to the British embassy in Kinshasa, which now has responsibility for diplomatic relations with Congo and Gabon, or to British diplomatic missions on their travel routes, for example, Paris, Amsterdam or Rome.

Spain

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will instruct Her Majesty's ambassador in Madrid to request that the Spanish Government investigate the circumstances in which the defective water heater, held by a British inquest to be the cause of the death of Petty Officer John Black, disappeared from the apartment in Sabinillas, Spain, in which he died.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. Both Spanish and British investigations concluded there were no suspicious circumstances surrounding Petty Officer Black's tragic death. The second inquest held in this country in April this year returned a verdict of accidental death.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Thanet

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to Thanet: Gateway to Europe in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Leigh: Yes. Arrangements have been made for such an exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall to take place from Monday 17 February to Friday 21 February.

European Postal Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the Green Paper on European postal services.

Mr. Leigh: I understand that the EC Commission currently expects to publish its Green Paper on European postal services early in the new year.

Textiles and Clothing

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contacts he has had with the European Commission about the framework for control of state aids in the Community in the fibre, textile and clothing industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department maintains contact with the Commission on all state aids matters, including the rules affecting the textile and clothing sectors. The synthetic fibres discipline which has served United Kingdom industry well was renewed on 11 July 1991 for a further year. The Department will continue to monitor its application.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the European Commission has yet succeeded in enforcing the repayment by the Beaulieu carpet group in Belgium of illegally granted subsidies; what information he has on other instances where textile and clothing companies in EC member states have not yet complied with Commission decisions that illegal aid must be repaid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I fully share the hon. Member's concern that in a number of cases in the textile and clothing sector illegal aid has not yet been repaid. The Beaulieu case referred to by my hon. Friend is at present before the Belgian courts for resolution. The Department takes every opportunity to press the Commission to remedy this unsatisfactory state of affairs. As a result of the treaty agreed at Maastricht the European Court will in due course have the power to fine member states not complying with its judgments. I hope that this will ensure swifter compliance in future.

Defective Water Heaters

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the introduction of European Community directive 90/396/EEC, relating to appliances for burning gaseous fuels; and whether he will draw it to the attention of Her Majesty's consuls in Spain and Portugal, following the deaths of British subjects as a result of defective water heaters in their holiday apartments.

Mr. Leigh: The European Community Directive 90/396/EEC relating to appliances burning gaseous fuels was adopted by the Council of Ministers in June 1990 and will shortly be implemented in United Kingdom legislation and that of the other member states of the Community. However, transitional arrangements will not give mandatory effect to the requirements of the directive until 1 January 1996. It is the responsibility of the Spanish and Portuguese authorities to implement and enforce the directive in their territories.

Cosmetics (Animal Testing)

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has met representatives of the Body Shop to discuss their campaign for a ban on animal testing of finished cosmetic products within the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Department's consumer safety unit is considering with the industry's trade association what can be done to reduce animal testing of cosmetics. It has informed the Body Shop that when the unit has the views of the industry as a whole they will be pleased to talk to individual companies.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects discussions to take place within the EC Council of Ministers on the draft Cosmetics and Toiletries directive COM (96) 488; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The European Parliament is expected to give its opinion on the proposed sixth amendment to the Cosmetics Directive in February. Meanwhile work has been continuing in the Council working group to agree a draft for submission to the Council of Ministers which is expected to be taken forward in the new year under the Portuguese presidency.

Bicycles

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement concerning the effect on the United Kingdom bicycle manufacturing industry of the importation of cheap bicycles manufactured in the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* I am well aware of the concerns of the United Kingdom bicycle manufacturing industry. Last September, import duty was reimposed on imports into the Community of bicycles from China for the remainder of 1991.

The European bicycle industry has made an anti-dumping complaint against bicycles from China and this is currently being investigated by the European Commission.

Regional Assistance

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was provided for regional preferential assistance in constant prices for each year, by region, for the period 1979-80 to 1990-91.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:*

The amounts spent on regional preferential assistance in Great Britain for the period 1979-80 to 1990-91 are set out in the table. The values are all expressed in terms of 1989-90 prices.

Government expenditure on regional preferential assistance to industry at 1989-90 prices[1,5]

Region	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Northern	296·8	256·9	273·0	228·7	177·9	161·1	117·8	164·1	125·3	143·2	117·3	78·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	64·5	89·3	95·2	76·3	49·1	55·8	44·1	49·8	44·6	53·7	32·5	27·3
East Midlands[3]	8·2	8·0	13·3	19·6	23·3	13·4	10·3	12·6	10·7	9·4	9·5	5·1
South West	20·7	21·4	22·9	23·7	16·4	18·7	14·9	27·3	17·0	15·7	10·7	8·3
West Midlands[4]	0·2	—	—	—	—	—	8·0	12·0	22·3	28·3	20·0	16·7
North West	*179·5	*233·1	*268·6	*178·6	*142·2	136·5	107·0	154·8	90·5	87·9	74·5	53·3

Region	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
England[2]	569·9	608·8	673·0	527·0	409·0	385·5	302·1	420·7	310·4	338·2	264·5	189·5
Wales	226·7	297·1	305·3	262·8	165·5	193·8	172·4	181·3	151·3	157·7	131·7	124·0
Scotland	271·5	329·7	359·4	533·0	315·3	245·9	245·3	291·7	175·1	160·9	144·6	147·6
Great Britain[2]	1,068·1	1,235·6	1,337·6	1,322·8	889·8	825·2	719·8	893·7	636·8	656·7	540·8	461·1

[1] All figures are gross and include payments to Nationalised Industries.
[2] The totals do not always equal the sum of the component parts because of rounding.
[3] Includes some minor expenditure in West Midlands in respect of Oswestry TTWA which ceased to be an Assisted Area in 1982-83.
[4] Certain TTWAs in the West Midlands were designated as Assisted Areas on 29 November 1984.
[5] Expenditure on a 1989-90 price basis for each year is calculated by applying the appropriate deflator to expenditure at current prices.
[6] Includes expenditure in Cumbria, otherwise shown within the totals for Northern Region.
The items included in the expenditure are Regional Development Grants, Regional Selective Assistance and Regional Enterprise Grants; expenditure on Land and Factories by the English Industrial Estates Corporation, the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies, the Development Board for Rural Wales, and the Highlands and Islands Development Board.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Poultry

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the differences between tests applied in the United Kingdom and in other EC countries with regard to frozen and fresh poultry presented for export.

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware of any tests specifically required within the European Community with regard to frozen and fresh poultry presented for export, although individual third countries may impose their own requirements.

Eggs

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what labelling or other requirements exist to enable United Kingdom consumers to exercise informed choice about the bacteriological standard of the eggs they purchase.

Mr. Maclean: The labelling of eggs is governed by the European Community Egg Marketing Regulations. These contain no provision for labelling on bacteriological quality. However, all food, including eggs must comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Act 1990.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to place in the public domain full details of all licences issued under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991; if he will ensure that such information specifies the named persons to whom licences have been issued, to which setts they refer, for which purposes they have been authorised, and the duration for which they are valid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: It is intended that cumulative information on licensing under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 will be made available, but it is not Government policy as a general rule to release information on individual licences under wildlife legislation.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will include provision in the section 4 licensing scheme under the Badgers Act 1991 for the return of a written report from each licensee stating the circumstances and outcome of each case of sett interference; and for such reports to be made public.

Mr. Maclean: It is intended that licence holders will be required to submit a report on actions taken under the authority of their licence, but these reports will not be made available to the public.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that any licences issued under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 take into full account the codes of practice of the Masters of Fox Hounds Association forbidding fox hunts, dogs from entering or digging into badger setts.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 12 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *550*.

Tobacco

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current tonnage and value of the EC tobacco mountain; if he will list the places where it is stored; what will be its eventual destination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission's most recent figures show 36,480 tonnes of tobacco in intervention. Definitive figures for intervention of the 1990 and 1991 crop are not yet available. The tobacco is held in a number of intervention stores, mainly in Italy and Greece. Its market value depends on the state of the market when it is put up for sale by tender by the Commission. Destination is a matter for the purchaser who is not obliged to inform the Commission.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority about the implementation of the recommendations of the report on the north east drift net fishery, with particular reference to the conclusion that this fishery should be phased out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: On the day this review was presented to Parliament, my right hon. Friend the Minister wrote to the chairman of the National Rivers Authority explaining the Governments position and seeking the authority's response. He has discussed this issue, among others, with the chairman; and his officials have also been in close contact with the NRA. The phasing out of the north-east coast salmon drift net fishery is one of a number of recommendations made in the review. The NRA will let us have its proposals for implementing the recommendations as soon as they are able.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Maclean: Nearly all farms are small firms and the wide ranging help and finance available from the Department is set out in the booklet "At The Farmer's Service" available in the House of Commons Library. In addition marketing and other help is provided, under various schemes, to businesses, many of which are small firms, in the food and drink sectors, through Food From Britain, and also in the fisheries sector.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the extent to which papain is currently being used in United Kingdom slaughterhouses.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that about 2 per cent. of cattle are treated with the enzyme Papain before slaughter. Single market rules on the production and marketing of fresh meat, Directive 91/497/EEC, due to come into effect on 1 January 1993, will prohibit such treatment. The Government welcome this.

Pesticides and Herbicides

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish details of the number of prosecutions by his Department under the Health and Safety Legislation of importers of unregistered pesticides and herbicides for the past calendar year; and how many were successful.

Mr. Maclean: The Department has taken enforcement action against a number of importers, but there have been no prosecutions.

Regional Panels

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the members of each of his regional panels currently in existence; if he will give the remit of these panels and the criteria for membership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The membership of my five existing regional panels is as follows:

Eastern region
Chairman
Mr. R. C. Bloomfield

Members
Mr. P. Allenson
Mr. D. Barker
Mr. D. Black
Mr. A. K. Bowes
Mrs. R. Eady
Mr. R. F. Horrell
Mr. E. W. Faure-Walker
Mr. S. Hemington
Mr. R. H. Kerkham
Mr. B. E. Newton
Mr. R. Paynter
Mrs. M. Skinner
Mr. J. Taylor
Mr. M. Thomasin-Foster
Mr. R. J. Watts

Midlands and Western
Chairman
Mr. H. Salway TD

Members
Mr. P. A. Atkinson
Mr. W. H. Bainbridge
Mr. B. E. Boot
Mr. C. Briscoe
Mrs. J. Davies
Mr. D. Harper
Mr. A. A. Hignett
The Hon. David Legh
Mr. A. D. Lewis
Mr. R. Marston
Mr. J. J. Molyneux
Mr. W. J. B. Taylor
Mr. M. E. Twidale

Northern Region
Chairman
Mr. A. Jackson

Members
Mr. W. D. Avery
Mr. C. A. F. Baker-Cresswell, OBE
Mrs. J. Bell
Mr. J. C. Cooke
Mr. J. H. Dixon
Mr. D. A. Howard
Mr. J. Howson
Mr. M. D. Pollard
Mr. S. P. W. Redgate
Mr. A. H. Sanderson
Mr. J. Sheard
Mr. A. P. Shirley
Mr. W. S. Towers
Mr. A. Watson

South Western Region
Chairman
Sir Peter Mills

Members
Mrs. R. Berry
Mr. J. M. Eustice
Mr. P. Fielden
Mr. R. Holland
Mr. R. A. Law
Mr. R. Lawton
Mrs. A. Petch
Mr. M. Retallick
Mr. D. Scott
Mr. G. Trehane
Mr. A. E. Webb
Mr. J. Whetman
Mr. H. B. Wright

South Eastern
Chairman
Mr. R. J. Cyster, OBE

Members
Mr. C. P. Boswell
Mr. D. R. A. Brazier
Mr. G. W. Butler
Mr. E. Humphrey
Mr. J. D. Jenkinson
Mr. R. Jones
Mr. P. Lowater
Mr. M. Lowry
Mr. D. G. L. Monnington
Mr. H. Oliver-Bellasis
Mr. A. E. Redsell
Mrs. R. Titterington
Mrs. S. Ward

The regional panels are non-statutory advisory bodies and provide an independent two-way communication link between my Department and the agricultural and food

industries and consumers. The panels can also be called upon to advise on matters in dispute between farmers and officials, for example on decisions on grant and subsidy schemes. Panel members act in an entirely independent capacity, not as the Ministry's agents.

The composition of the panels is designed to reflect the farming systems and food and farming industries in the various regions. Members include farmers, land owners, farm workers, a trade union official, representatives of the food industry and consumers.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the nine regional panels he intends to appoint, to which he referred in his answer of 23 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 455-56, to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine), including the remit of the panels, the criteria of membership and the numbers of members who will be appointed; when he expects them to be in operation; and whether he will appoint people who are currently represented on his regional panels.

Mr. Gummer: The new regional panels will have the same remit as the old ones. They will provide an independent two-way communication link between my Department and the agricultural and food industries and consumers. They will also be available to advise on matters in dispute between farmers and officials, for example on decisions on grant and subsidy schemes.

The new panels will come into operation on 1 April 1992. Their composition and membership are currently under consideration.

Regional Reorganisation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the current regional and divisional offices which deal with his Ministry's grant, subsidy licensing and other work that are due for closure prior to the regional reorganisation; how many staff in each are to be made redundant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: As a result of the restructuring of my Department's regional organisation, grant and subsidy work, licensing and other administrative functions will be transferred from the following regional and divisional offices to the new regional service centres:

Regional Offices
Leeds
Wolverhampton

Divisional Offices
Beverley
Chelmsford
Gloucester
Guildford
Huntingdon
Lincoln
Maidstone
Newcastle
Norwich
Oxford
Preston
Taunton

The location of the regional service centre for Devon and Cornwall is still under review. Meantime grant and subsidy processing and other administrative work will continue to be carried out at the divisional offices at Exeter and Truro.

It is projected that the regional reorganisation will result in a net loss of about 150 posts across the country as a whole. Where posts are to be lost every effort will be made to find staff alternative jobs. We shall be doing all we can to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Chemical Residues

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the levels of maximum daily intakes of Di-(2-ethylhexyl) adipate, acetyltributyl citrate, epoxidised soya bean oil and polymeric plasticisers; the method used to calculate these maximum daily intakes and any assumptions used in the calculations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Estimated maximum daily intakes of the four plasticisers referred to are as follows:

Di-(2-ethylhexyl) adipate	8·2 mg/day
Acetyltributyl citrate	1·5 mg/day
Epoxidised soya bean oil	1·0 mg/day
Polymeric plasticisers	0·4 mg/day

The assumptions and method of calculation used to obtain these figures are described in detail in food surveillance papers Nos. 21 and 30, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has introduced regulations under the Food Act 1984 to ban the use of mineral hydrocarbons as food additives and in food processing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: We have consulted widely over amendment of the current regulations on mineral hydrocarbons in food. This consultation has brought to light a number of complex issues and further research has been requested. I shall make a further announcement as soon as possible.

Veterinary Investigation Centres

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the closure dates for the veterinary investigation centres at *(a)* Bangor, *(b)* Cambridge, *(c)* Lincoln, *(d)* Norwich, *(e)* Reading, *(f)* Worcester, *(g)* Wye and *(h)* Truro; and what is the latest position in plans for the new VICs at Bury St. Edmonds and in Warwickshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 21 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *415*. As far as the Truro Centre is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on 23 July 1991, *Official Report*, column *454*. The latest position in respect of the two new centres at Bury St. Edmunds and Luddington in Warwickshire is that planning approvals have been obtained for both sites, detailed design work has almost been completed, the tender for enabling works at Bury St. Edmunds has been let and the main contracts for both sites are expected to go out to tender early in the new year. Completion is scheduled for both projects in mid to late-1993.

Veterinary Medicines

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to introduce further measures to ensure consumers are protected from residues of veterinary medicines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: New regulations under the Food Safety Act to strengthen existing controls on veterinary residues have been laid before the House today. These controls include the following main features:

to make it an offence to use unauthorised drugs in food producing animals;

to enable animal carcases found to contain residues of illegal drugs, or residues of authorised animal medicines in excess of certain prescribed maximum residue limits (MRLs), to be condemned as unfit for human consumption;

to make it an offence to sell for slaughter animals containing unauthorised drugs or medicinal residues in excess of the prescribed MRLs;

to make it an offence for shops to sell meat containing such residues;

to require farmers using authorised animal medicines to observe specified withdrawal periods prior to slaughter;

to give new powers to Ministry veterinary officers and other officials to detain and check animals or meat if misuse is suspected.

Our record of surveillance on residues in meat is an excellent one. The Ministry carries out a comprehensive programme of sampling checks on animals at slaughterhouses and farms and on meat and meat products obtained from retail outlets and elsewhere. The results tell a good story, but consumers of British meat can now be doubly sure that harmful residues of animal medicines are not being passed on to the food chain.

The new controls provide a mechanism for firm action to be taken, should this be required. Consumers have every right to demand the highest standards. These additional controls will help ensure that British meat stays safe to eat, and at the top of the quality league.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Meals (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the school meals census for the Durham area or equivalent statistics for each year since 1980.

Mr. Fallon: A table showing school meals information for maintained primary, secondary and special schools within Durham local education authority, for each year from 1982 to 1989, follows. Information prior to 1982 and for 1985 is not available. School meal information by school type prior to 1989 is not available for every year. I would refer the hon. Member to my reply given on 11 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *450*, which gave the school meal information for 1990 and 1991.

School Meal Arrangements

Durham LEA	*Paid meals*	*Free meals*	*Own food*	*Other arrangements*	*Total*
[1]1989	40,618	14,437	13,983	25,576	94,614
1988	37,914	13,349	13,780	17,513	82,556
1987	32,244	21,565	10,799	18,954	83,562
1986	33,335	21,820	10,337	20,874	86,366
1985	—	—	—	—	—
1984	34,647	25,243	9,315	21,949	91,154
1983	38,666	21,101	8,922	24,642	93,331
1982	42,106	19,482	10,091	24,515	96,194

[1] Includes pupils in nursery schools and pupils absent on the enumeration date in January. Previous years do not include such pupils.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Eggar: The Department has no specific schemes to provide help or finance to small firms. However, the Department operates a purchasing policy including small firms on tender lists where appropriate.

Natural Environment Research Council

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Natural Environment Research Council for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The annual report of the Natural Environment Research Council has been submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend, under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965, and a copy is being placed in the House today.

I was most interested to read the report of the council's 25th anniversary year. The report highlights research concerned with detecting and understanding changes in environmental systems, the enhanced collaboration between NERC institutes and the higher education sector, and the work of NERC scientists in the forward planning of important international programmes on the environment. I was particularly impressed to learn more about:

(a) the urgent response on environmental issues connected with the Gulf war including development of a model which successfully predicted the fate of oil released into the sea and of environmental impact assessments.

(b) the launch of a new terrestrial initiative in global environmental research—TIGER—to provide data on the carbon cycle, trace greenhouse gases and water and energy balances on land, and on ecosystem impacts, including the monitoring of environmental change.

(c) the expansion of the universities global atmospheric modelling programme, to concentrate on two main themes: natural variability of the atmosphere and its response to greenhouse forcing; and stratospheric chemistry, dynamics and prediction of ozone depletion.

(d) the completion of the 15-year main run of the fine resolution Antarctic model integrated on the research council's Cray X-MP supercomputer. This is the first eddy-resolving model of the southern ocean and represents an important first step in the running of sophisticated, coupled ocean-atmosphere models needed for climate prediction.

(e) the receipt by NERC of the Queen's award for technological achievement, jointly with VG Elemental, for the development of the inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometer, which is of particular value to earth and hydrological scientists.

(f) the countryside survey 1990 undertaken by NERC's institutes of terrestrial and freshwater ecology and the joint NERC/ESRC land use programme at the university of Newcastle upon Tyne, which will, for the first time, use field survey accompanied by satellite remote sensing to produce a digital map of land cover for the whole of Great Britain

I congratulate the Council on these and its many other achievements, and I commend its report to hon. Members.

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much land has been sold by the Forestry Commission in each year since 1989; and what was the amount of revenue raised thereby;

(2) if he will list the areas of land, planted and unplanted, which have been sold by the Forestry Commission in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*Area of land sold (hectares)* *Planted*	*Unplanted*	*Total*	*Receipts (£ million)*
1989	3,786	3,889	7,675	12·6
1990	4,509	3,342	7,851	13·0
1991	3,273	4,155	7,428	12·1

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what safeguards for the rights of access are normally incoporated into the terms of sale of land by the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission gives advance notice to local authorities of intended disposals of woodlands under its management, and offers to enter into legal agreements with them which will provide for continued public access to the woodlands after sale.

The Forestry Commission has drawn up guidelines on these arrangements, in consultation with the countryside commissions and the local authority associations, a copy of which is in the Library.

Evening Betting

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to permit the opening of off-course bookmakers shops during evening hours.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government are considering the various responses to our consultation document, issued on 14 October, on whether licensed betting offices should be open in the evenings and, if so, at what times.

Bail (Re-offenders)

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have re-offended whilst out on bail under the terms of the Bail (Scotland) Act 1980.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1990, 2,742 persons were proceeded against where the main offence was under section 3(1)(b) of the Bail Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, which includes re-offending while on bail.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many United Kingdom fishing vessels have been reported to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland as having failed to notify the Department before crossing the 4 deg. west line as required under the Sea Fish Licensing Order 1989, as amended; and how many masters of such fishing vessels have been *(a)* warned, *(b)* cautioned and *(c)* charged under the relevant Fisheries Acts.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The requirement for certain United Kingdom fishing vessels to contact a designated office of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency before crossing the 4 deg. west line was introduced in March 1989. Since that time the agency has taken action on 734 occasions where there have been reasonable grounds to believe that the reporting-in arrangements have not been complied with. These suspected infringements have been dealt with as follows:

	Number
Warnings issued	538
Cautions issued	196
Charged by prosecuting authorities	7

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his department takes to monitor transhipments of fish to factory vessels in Scottish waters; and what breaches of the regulations have been detected as a result of these checks in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency restricts both the number of ports where transhipments may take place and the hours during which such operations may be carried out to assist in the control of transhipments of fish to factory ships. This allows for a high degree of monitoring. Fishery Officers have in 1991 inspected some 1,900 catching vessels before they begin to transfer fish to factory ships. This accounts for 95 per cent. of transhipment activity. Full monitoring of quantities while fish are being transferred to factory ships takes place in selected cases. This was undertaken in 336 cases in 1991. Monitoring of documents and returns submitted by catching and receiving vessels further assists in controlling transhipments.

The number of offences detected as a result of the above procedures in each of the last five years are:

	Number
1987	6
1988	13
1989	8
1990	3
[1]1991	4

[1] To date.

These detections relate mainly to attempts to understate the quantities of fish which are being transhipped.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any works of art accepted in lieu of inheritance tax have been allocated since he last made an announcement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Arts, announced on 26 April 1991 at column *594* that the following works had been accepted in lieu of inheritance tax.

Item	Amount of Tax satisfied
The C. H. Brackenbury Memorial Collection of Wind Instruments	£126,956

I am pleased to announce that I have decided to allocate these works to the University of Edinburgh where they have been on loan since 1980.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by local authority area in Scotland the proportions of local authority finance derived from central Government, business rates and poll tax for 1990-91 and the estimates for 1992-93, including the estimate for the replacement of poll tax with community tax for 1993-94.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The information for 1990-91 is given in the table. It is not possible to provide figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94 in advance of local authorities setting their local taxation levels for these years.

	(1) Central Government grants 1990-91 Per cent.	(2) Non-domestic rate income 1990-91 Per cent.	(3) Community charge income 1990-91 (provisional outturn) Per cent.
Borders	71·8	12·5	15·7
Central	53·9	25·6	20·5
Dumfries and Galloway	67·4	15·4	17·1
Fife	49·9	27·5	22·5
Grampian	60·1	23·9	16·0
Highland	66·5	19·0	14·5
Lothian	42·9	29·4	27·7
Strathclyde	60·0	21·8	18·1
Tayside	60·1	20·3	19·5
Berwickshire	53·1	21·0	25·9
Ettrick and Lauderdale	39·0	31·0	29·9
Roxburgh	48·0	22·9	29·1
Tweeddale	48·4	20·1	31·4
Clackmannan	18·7	35·6	45·8
Falkirk	19·7	53·7	26·6
Stirling	15·7	42·7	41·6
Annandale and Eskdale	31·1	28·3	40·6
Nithsdale	29·4	35·8	34·8
Stewartry	38·9	25·9	35·2
Wigtown	50·6	20·0	29·4
Dunfermline	15·5	49·0	35·5
Kirkcaldy	14·6	46·1	39·4
North East Fife	32·5	25·6	41·9
Aberdeen City	17·1	47·3	35·7
Banff and Buchan	25·3	39·6	35·1
Gordon	49·9	19·3	30·7
Kincardine and Deeside	56·1	23·5	20·4
Moray	39·1	33·6	27·2
Badenoch and Strathspey	39·4	34·1	26·5
Caithness	47·4	32·2	20·4
Inverness	27·5	53·1	19·4
Lochaber	31·3	42·2	26·5
Nairn	62·9	15·8	21·3
Ross and Cromarty	47·6	28·5	23·9
Skye and Lochalsh	61·7	21·0	17·3
Sutherland	76·9	13·4	9·8
East Lothian	16·7	45·8	37·5
Edinburgh City	17·6	41·2	41·2
Midlothian	43·2	23·5	33·3
West Lothian	29·4	36·0	34·6
Argyll and Bute	31·7	34·1	34·3
Bearsden and Milngavie	43·6	16·1	40·3
Clydebank	39·3	29·7	31·0
Clydesdale	32·6	27·1	40·3
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	28·9	37·9	33·2
Cumnock and Doon Valley	47·8	19·7	32·5
Cunninghame	22·1	45·8	32·1
Dumbarton	21·4	34·4	44·3
East Kilbride	12·9	34·8	52·4
Eastwood	51·1	16·0	32·9
Glasgow City	31·9	46·5	21·6
Hamilton	30·4	32·5	37·1
Inverclyde	44·6	23·5	31·9
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	37·3	31·7	30·9
Kyle and Carrick	24·5	33·6	41·9
Monklands	38·4	25·7	35·9
Motherwell	34·1	34·0	31·9
Renfrew	25·9	34·0	40·2
Strathkelvin	42·8	18·4	38·8
Angus	37·8	28·5	33·7
Dundee City	25·9	40·9	33·3
Perth and Kinross	33·6	34·7	31·7
Orkney	66·0	26·2	7·8
Shetland	59·8	37·5	2·7
Western Isles	83·9	8·8	7·3

Notes:

[1] Central Government Grants shown in Column 1 consist of Revenue Support Grant and Specific Grants.

[2] The Community Charge Income proportions are calculated from provisional outturn amounts taken from the Provisional Outturn/ Budget Estimate returns made to The Scottish Office by local authorities.

[3] The Non-Domestic Rate Income proportions are calculated from outturn amounts taken from returns made by levying authorities to The Scottish Office in September 1991.

Foresterhill Hospital

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what representations from the public he has had in favour of Foresterhill hospital's application for trust status;

(2) what representations from the public he has had *(a)* in favour *(b)* against Foresterhill hospital's application for trust status.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* As I indicated in my statement on 3 December, representations, both for and against Foresterhill applications, were made during the public consultation period. I very much welcome the comments made since the announcement by many associated with Foresterhill pledging themselves to ensure the success of the trust in the interests of improved patient care.

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the value of the Foresterhill site claimed by the proposed trust as part of its application for national health service trust status.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The total value of property assets declared in the trust application was £119 million. This will be revised as at 1 April 1992, the date the trust comes into operation, to reflect the situation then prevailing.

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to ensure that standards of education and training at Foresterhill hospital are maintained when it becomes a trust.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* Trusts, like directly managed hospitals, will be required to participate fully in national education and training arrangements. This obligation was reflected in the Foresterhill hospital's trust application.

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will address a public meeting in Kincardine and Deeside to discuss the Foresterhill hospital complex following his approval of the trust application.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* I expect to undertake a number of public engagements in Grampian in the coming months.

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Raeden complex is to be part of the Foresterhill trust.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* As was made clear in the decision letter sent to the trust sponsors on 3 December, a copy of which was placed in the House Library, the Raeden centre will not form part of the Foresterhill trust.

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the business plan and details of the application for trust status for the Foresterhill hospital complex.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* Copies of the detailed application and of the executive summary were readily available throughout the public consultation period. Grampian health board reports that 639 copies of the former and 956 copies of the latter were issued.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Community Charge

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of introducing a 100 per cent. rebate for community charge payers on income support and equivalent incomes in 1992-93, assuming that no compensatory reduction is made to benefit levels.

Miss Widdecombe: Expenditure on community charge benefit is affected by the community charge levels set by local authorities. The latest estimate is that the cost of introducing 100 per cent. rebates for people on income support or equivalent incomes in 1992-93 would be around £500 million. A maximum community charge benefit of 100 per cent. of the liability would affect all people receiving community charge benefit, including those on income support and equivalent incomes.

Source: Expenditure modelled using data drawn from the 1986-87-88 Family Expenditure Surveys at 1991-92 prices and benefits.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will carry out a review of the present income maintenance system for pensioners;

(2) whether the review of the present income maintenance system for pensioners will include the removal of direct and indirect negative discrimination on grounds of age and sex.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to carry out such a review. The discussion document "Options for Equality in State Pension Age" published today, sets out information on equalising pension ages.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that invalid care allowance will be paid at the same level as other long-term income maintenance benefits.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so at present. Unlike most other income maintenance benefits, invalid care allowance is subject to neither contribution conditions nor a means test. The cost of increasing it to the level of basic retirement pension or invalidity benefit, for example, would be £126 million and would need to be considered in the context of other demands on available resources.

Pensions

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will bring forward proposals to decrease the time between the announcement of pension increases and their implementation.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 7 November at column *240*.

Carers Allowance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce a flat-rate carers allowance which is not meanstested and is disregarded for means-tested benefits.

Mr. Scott: Invalid care allowance (ICA) is a flat-rate non means-tested social security benefit specifically for carers. The number of people in Great Britain receiving the benefit at any one time has increased from 5,000 in 1978-79 to about 155,000 in 1991-92 and the amount spent has increased from £4 million to an estimated £260 million over the same period. We introduced a carer premium (currently £10·80 a week) into the income related benefits in October 1990 specifically to help the less well-off carers. ICA is an income maintenance benefit and to disregard it for income-related benefits would result in double provision from public funds.

Tax/Benefit Model Table

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish figures similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for a lone mother with two children aged four and six years working four hours a day, five days a week for £2 an hour *(a)* under the 1991-92 benefit system and *(b)* under the benefit system as proposed for 1992-93, with Family Credit being paid for work of 16 hours or more a week, at 1991-92 rates;

(2) if he will publish figures similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for each of a single wage married couple *(a)* with two children aged four and six years and *(b)* with three children aged three, eight and eleven years working four hours a day, five days a week for £2 an hour (i) under the 1991-92 benefit system and (ii) under the benefit system as proposed for 1992-93, with Family Credit being paid for work of 16 hours or more a week, at 1991-92 rates;

(3) if he will publish figures similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for a single wage married couple with no children working four hours a day, five days a week for *(a)* £2·00, *(b)* £2·50 and *(c)* £3·00 an hour (i) under the 1991--92 benefit system and (ii) under the benefit system as proposed for 1992-93, with Family Credit being paid for work of 16 hours or more a week, at 1991-92 rates.

Mr. Jack: Anyone in receipt of income support at the moment of change in the rules at the start of 1992-93, will retain entitlement to income support and, therefore, their income need not change. Families with children can obtain advice from the Benefits Agency as to whether or not it would be better for them to claim family credit. Couples without children are not entitled to family credit.

The following table shows the net weekly spending power for people at 1991-92 rates *(a)* in 1991-92, and in 1992-93 if they choose to remain on income support; and *(b)* for those newly claiming in 1992-93.

It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay.

The figures in column *(b)* do not include the increased benefit rates coming into effect from April 1992, when child benefit will be increased by 4·1 per cent. and income-related benefits will be increased by 7 per cent.

Family type	*Gross pay* £ *per hour*	*(a) Net weekly spending power* £ *per week*	*(b) Net weekly spending power* £ *per week*
Lone parent (as specified)	2·00	99·33	111·55
Married couple with two children (as specified)	2·00	106·54	107·54
Married couple with three children (as specified)	2·00	129·57	128·25
Married couple with no children	2·00	65·37	38·12
	2·50	65·37	48·12
	3·00	65·37	56·35

Concessionary Coal

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current arrangements for converting a concessionary coal allowance into cash when a house is no longer heated by coal; and what impact this has on entitlement to benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: British Coal is responsible for the arrangements for converting concessionary coal into a cash allowance.

All payments in kind, including the value of concessionary coal, are ignored in the income-related benefits. Payments of cash made in lieu of concessionary coal are available for normal living expenses in the same way as a retirement or occupational pension and are therefore taken fully into account. However, where a person's income is above the level of his or her applicable amount, the operation of "tapers" in housing benefit, community charge benefit and family credit enable the person to keep some of that extra income.

The tapers are applied to any income above the applicable amount and the answer offset against the maximum benefit payable. In housing benefit the taper is 65 per cent., in community charge benefit it is 15 per cent. and in family credit it is 70 per cent.

Heating Bills

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help is now available to people on low incomes for paying their heating bills; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The rates used in the assessment of the income-related benefits are to cover normal day to day living expenses, including heating.

In addition householders in receipt of income support, family credit, housing benefit or community charge benefit may be eligible for a grant towards the cost of loft, tank and pipe insulation and draughtproofing under the home energy efficiency scheme. The Government also have a number of programmes designed to help local authorities improve the condition of their housing stock, including the heating and insulation.

In the event of exceptionally cold weather, social fund cold weather payments are available to people who receive income support and either have a child under five or receive a pensioner or disability premium. Improvements in this scheme were set out by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 18 November at columns *4-5*.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 19 December 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Divorce

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Attorney-General what response he has made to the Law Society memorandum on maintenance and capital provision on divorce.

The Attorney-General: The Government have in hand a staged review of the family justice system, and will ensure that the Law Society's recommendations are taken into account as the review considers the areas of law concerned. The society's recommendations include proposals in relation to a formula for calculating child maintenance, which were considered during the passage of the Child Support Bill. Also included are proposals for a system of pension-splitting on divorce, which raise matters of pension law, which is a subject currently under review by the Department of Social Security.

Magistrates, Newcastle

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Attorney-General if he will name the members of the Newcastle magistrates advisory committee on appointments to the Newcastle upon Tyne bench.

The Attorney-General: The names of the members of the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee for Newcastle upon Tyne are—

Miss E. D. Barraclough
Mr. J. Burn
Mr. J. L. Curry
Miss A. F. Irwin
Mrs. L. M. Kennedy
Mrs. F. F. Southern
Miss J. R. Straker
Mr. D. I. Williams

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Attorney-General what priority he gives to ensuring an even representation of all geographic areas in Newcastle upon Tyne upon the magistrates bench.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor expects all his advisory committees to put forward candidates who are suitable for appointment. Subject to this, he requires them to seek to achieve a bench which is broadly representative of the community it serves. To this end, he expects them to take into account geographical and other factors.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Adult Education

Dame Elaine Kellet-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the names and locations of each adult education centre, other than colleges of further education, funded by local education authorities.

Mr. Eggar: It is not possible to give names and locations of adult education centres. Much further education for adults is not run within a specific centre. It may be provided as an adult education service run in a variety of locations and using a combination of premises, such as purpose-built centres, school premises, church halls and FE college premises.

Dame Elaine Kellet-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the local education authorities which are currently funding colleges of adult education.

Mr. Eggar: Local education authorities may provide further education for adults by way of separate centres or as integral provision within further education colleges. The most recently available expenditure information submitted by LEAs indicates that the following authorities provided further education for adults in separate adult centres or in adult education centres conducted separately on the premises of further education colleges:

ILEA
Barking
Bexley
Brent
Bromley
Croydon
Ealing
Enfield
Havering
Hillingdon
Kingston Upon Thames
Merton
Redbridge
Richmond Upon Thames
Sutton
Waltham Forest
Birmingham
Coventry
Dudley
Sandwell
Solihull
Walsall
Wolverhampton
Knowsley
Liverpool
Sefton
Bury
Oldham
Rochdale
Salford
Stockport
Wigan
Barnsley
Doncaster
Calderdale
Kirklees
Leeds
Newcastle Upon Tyne
South Tyneside
Sunderland
Isles of Scilly
Avon
Bedfordshire
Berkshire

Buckinghamshire
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cornwall
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon
Dorset
Durham
East Sussex
Essex
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Hereford and Worcester
Humberside
Isle of Wight
Kent
Lancashire
Lincolnshire
Norfolk
North Yorkshire
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Shropshire
Somerset
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Surrey
Warwickshire
West Sussex
Wiltshire

EC Directives

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all directives from the European Community issued since May 1979 which are *(a)* now active in the field of education and *(b)* under consideration.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There are two current EC directives of significance to the field of education agreed since May 1979: the Council directive of 21 December 1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher-education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years' duration; and the Council directive of 28 June 1990 on the right of residence for students which falls to be implemented by 30 June 1992. A proposal for a Council directive on a second general system for the recognition of professional education and training which would complement directive 89/48/EC is currently under negotiation.

Unemployed People

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance his Department gives to schools regarding offers of voluntary assistance from unemployed people with relevant skills, as a means of helping them to find employment.

Mr. Eggar: None. The use of voluntary help in schools is a matter for local management.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, *Official Report*, 13 December, column *560-61*, he will give the names of the 106 grammar schools which have ceased to exist since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The situation is much more complicated than suggested in the question. It is not true that 106 schools have closed. Some schools will have merged to form other schools; others will have become independent and moved out of the maintained sector; others will have changed their status and become comprehensives and some comprehensives will have become grammar schools. Without painstaking investigation we cannot know how many schools fall into each category. It is likely that we would need to list considerably more than 106 schools in order to provide a clear picture.

This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what dates he received applications by certain Ealing schools for grant-maintained status and by the borough of Ealing for its schools reorganisation programme; when he expects to announce his decisions on those applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Eight Ealing schools applied for grant-maintained status on dates ranging from 27 February to 3 July 1991. Ealing local education authority and the governors of the voluntary aided schools published proposals on 3 May 1991 to reorganise all primary and secondary schools in the borough.

Where there are conflicting proposals, my right hon. and learned Friend is obliged to consider one set of proposals against the other and then decide on the grant-maintained proposals first, followed by the proposals from the local education authority and the governors of the voluntary-aided schools. There are more than 100 schools involved and the issues are complex and require detailed examination. He expects to announce his decision in January.

Standard Assessment Tests

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now publish the aggregate results for the standard assessment tests for key stage one, by local education authority.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has today, published the national results of this summer's tests on seven-year-olds, together with the results of LEAs in England. Copies have been placed in the Library.

County Schools (Funding)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on capital allocations for county schools for 1992-93.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Local education authorities have today been informed of their annual capital guidelines—ACGs—and supplementary credit approvals—SCAs—for education for 1992-93. These figures again amount to a substantial increase in local education authorities' borrowing power for education capital expenditure. They build further on the increases in the last two years.

Allocations for education capital—in the form of ACGs and SCAs—will total £590 million compared with £538 million in 1991-92, a rise of over 9·5 per cent.

A total of £524 million is available for schools—an increase of 11 per cent.—and £66 million for further education.

Within the schools sector I have again given priority to:

Second and third-year expenditure on work covered by ACGs in earlier years.

Projects to provide new school places in areas of population growth.

New projects to implement approved proposals to remove surplus places.

Making a bigger contribution towards getting rid of deficiencies in existing school buildings and for work needed for the effective delivery of the national curriculum. A total of £148 million is available for such improvements in 1992-93, an increase of 36 per cent. on the equivalent figure for 1991-92.

A total of £15 million of this latter sum, as my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) announced on 4 December, is to be allocated in the form of SCAs to LEAs bidding for their schools to become technology schools as part of the technology schools initiative. The remainder has been distributed to LEAs by formula passed on numbers of pupils and substandard places in schools.

Because of the proposals in the Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament to transfer all sixth-form colleges to the new further education sector, I am also issuing SCAs to LEAs in respect of their capital expenditure at sixth form colleges. This will enable LEAs' expenditure to be separately identified so that they can be recompensed by the proposed funding council for any outstanding debt.

Within the further education sector, my programme includes allocations of £43 million to meet commitments arising from 54 major buildings projects with a total completion value of £150 million. In addition, I have awarded allocations of £14 million for minor works and equipment. This will help colleges to prepare for the reforms proposed in the Further and Higher Education Bill now in Parliament. A further £9 million will be allocated during 1992-93. All allocations for further education will be by SCAs, hypothecated for particular purposes.

My programme and the SCAs announced today do not represent the full total of funds available to LEAs for capital expenditure. Authorities are also able to spend additional sums from capital receipts and from their revenue budgets if they so choose.

The 9·5 per cent. increase in ACGs is well ahead of the rate of inflation and purchasing power is further boosted at a time of lower building tender prices. The figures for 1992-93 represent a 22 per cent. increase over two years and a 93 per cent. increase since 1987-88. For schools alone the figure has doubled since 1987-88. This underlines the Government's continuing commitment to secure improvements to our school buidings.

Lists of ACGs and SCAs allocated to individual local authorities are as follows:

Capital expenditure 1992-93: Annual capital guidelines and supplementary credit approvals

	Schools and sixth form colleges 1992-93	*Total ACGs and SCAs 1992-93 (£ 000's)*
Barking	844	844
Barnet	1,059	1,059
Bexley	1,436	1,477
Brent	1,336	1,472
Bromley	2,272	2,337
Croydon	2,220	2,351
Ealing	2,246	2,626
Enfield	1,994	2,137
Haringey	1,433	1,506
Harrow	2,953	3,057
Havering	908	970
Hillingdon	1,071	1,071
Hounslow	3,128	3,167
Kingston-upon-Thames	289	340
Merton	1,675	1,675
Newham	5,828	5,936
Redbridge	1,167	1,193
Richmond-upon-Thames	452	529
Sutton	2,056	2,108
Waltham Forest	3,694	3,751
City	0	0
Camden	965	1,006
Westminster	158	158
Greenwich	1,011	1,054
Hackney	1,830	1,910
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,882	2,934
Islington	964	1,078
Kensington and Chelsea	1,259	1,264
Lambeth	1,290	1,290
Lewisham	1,959	2,071
Southwark	1,877	2,276
Wandsworth	2,161	2,306
Tower Hamlets	10,135	10,576
Brimingham	10,931	11,456
Coventry	2,276	2,389
Dudley	4,831	9,324
Sandwell	1,444	1,558
Solihull	649	864
Walsall	834	898
Wolverhampton	2,482	2,544
Knowsley	2,077	2,124
Liverpool	5,576	5,831
St. Helens	1,049	1,151
Sefton	3,152	3,179
Wirral	2,213	2,300
Bolton	1,337	1,432
Bury	1,051	1,051
Manchester	8,333	8,810
Oldham	3,136	3,194
Rochdale	3,326	3,326
Salford	2,333	2,391
Stockport	1,396	1,503
Tameside	3,051	3,051
Trafford	1,224	1,490
Wigan	4,224	4,372
Barnsley	1,493	1,594
Doncaster	735	815
Rotherham	2,748	2,855
Sheffield	4,754	4,973
Bradford	8,435	10,208
Calderdale	1,541	1,580
Kirklees	4,071	4,858
Leeds	23,186	23,445
Wakefield	5,755	5,841
Gateshead	1,514	1,567
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	2,430	2,574
North Tyneside	1,686	1,726
South Tyneside	1,522	2,209
Sunderland	3,612	4,267
Isles of Scilly	116	116
Avon	4,269	4,576
Bedfordshrie	3,928	4,041
Berkshire	5,238	5,461
Buckinghamshire	5,289	7,639
Cambridgeshire	7,205	13,957
Cheshire	8,698	8,878
Cleveland	3,801	3,968
Cornwall	5,943	7,910
Cumbria	10,377	10,579
Derbyshire	16,065	16,818
Devon	9,959	11,023
Dorset	4,735	4,929

	Schools and sixth form colleges 1992-93	Total ACGs and SCAs 1992-93 (£ 000's)
Durham	7,017	7,364
East Sussex	17,724	17,919
Essex	18,394	20,771
Gloucestershire	6,980	7,294
Hampshire	13,018	14,462
Hereford and Worcester	3,488	4,437
Hertfordshire	5,677	7,016
Humberside	9,253	9,437
Isle of Wight	1,584	1,636
Kent	20,229	24,437
Lancashire	20,465	25,518
Leicestershire	8,376	8,930
Lincolnshire	12,263	12,421
Norfolk	2,811	3,163
North Yorkshire	6,222	6,400
Northamptonshire	4,107	4,319
Northumberland	2,516	2,568
Nottinghamshire	5,737	9,156
Oxfordshire	5,681	5,849
Shropshire	4,110	4,203
Somerset	5,134	5,638
Staffordshire	7,805	9,190
Suffolk	9,166	11,332
Surrey	6,031	6,296
Warwickshire	1,988	2,035
West Sussex	3,693	3,855
Wiltshire	4,137	5,402

Sport

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the Government's statement on sports policy and its response to the Education Science and Arts Committee's Fourth Report of Session 1990-91, "Sport in Schools"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Government's review of sports policy was initiated; and if he will make a statement on progress towards its completion.

Mr. Atkins: I am happy to announce today that we are publishing a statement which sets out clearly and comprehensively our policies and priorities for sport and active recreation. It focuses largely on England and Wales, although where appropriate it covers United Kingdom issues. We are also publishing today the Government's response to the Education, Science and Arts Committee's report, "Sport in Schools".

Very substantial sums are now available to sport from the private sector, including funds from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the Football Trust, assisted by recent reductions in the rate of pool betting duty. We now propose to establish a business sponsorship incentive scheme for sport similar to that run for the arts and targeted at the grassroots level. Its initial funding for 1992-93 will be in excess of £3 million and it will cover England, Scotland and Wales.

The statement reaffirms our belief that sport should be free from Government intervention, but that the principle of channelling assistance for sport through independent but accountable bodies remains sound. The present structure, however, is in need of reform and in the statement we announce proposals for replacing the present Great Britain Sports Council with a United Kingdom Sports Commission and a Sports Council for England. These proposals are broadly in line with those which the Great Britain Sports Council itself made in the course of the review which would require the surrender of its royal charter.

The statement, and our response to the Committee, set out a number of ways for improving opportunities for young people to take part in sport particularly by promoting partnerships between schools and other organisations in the local community. We intend to publish guidance on good practice in promoting such partnerships next year. Guidance is also to be issued to schools on the information they should make regularly available to parents on sports facilities and sporting achievements.

These proposals build on existing decisions:—

to make PE a compulsory subject in the national curriculum until the age of 16;

to require all school children to be taught to swim by the time they leave primary school;

to institute a champion coaching pilot scheme for the extra-curricular coaching of school children;

to support legislation which will allow school governors to enter into dual use agreements for the joint management of school premises out of school hours;

to provide financial resources to promote the greater integration of disabled sport and able-bodied sport;

to encourage the establishment of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts providing some £40 million per annum extra finance for sport;

to introduce proposals to create a new criminal offence of providing anabolic steroids to minors, and further research to ascertain the extent of the steroid problem;

to encourage sporting contact with South Africa on a sport by sport basis for racially integrated sports; and

to provide up to £2 million for feasibility studies which will assist Government in reaching a decision on whether to offer support for the Manchester Olympic bid.

This statement represents a comprehensive summary of the Government's initiatives and proposals to take sport and active recreation towards the next century.

LINC Project

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last had discussions with Nottingham university concerning the progress of the language in the national curriculum project.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no such discussions, but officials have maintained contact with the project's director.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with the National Association for the Teaching of English and with the National Association of Advisers in English with reference to the language in the national curriculum project.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no such discussions.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the university of Bath concerning its recent findings on the efficacy of the language in the national curriculum programme for teachers.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations from the university of Bath.

ILEA Art Collection

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science where the former Inner London education authority art collection is now kept; and what are the arrangements for the distribution or sale of the collection.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the London residuary body.

Under-fives

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the figures for 1991 for the percentage of under-fives in *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* nursery classes, *(c)* infant classes and *(d)* in total, by local education authority in England, in rank order.

Mr. Eggar: Provisional information on the percentage of under-fives, in each of the categories requested, within each local education authority in England in January 1991, and the rank order of each local education authority, is given in the table.

Number of pupils under 5 in Maintained schools shown as a percentage of the estimated 3 and 4 year old population within each LEA in England, as at January 1991[1,2,3]

	Nursery schools	*Primary nursery classes*	*Schools infant classes*	*Total of all pupils under 5 in school*	*Rank order*
City	0·0	30·8	16·9	47·7	69
Camden	3·7	22·2	13·2	39·1	80
Greenwich	10·4	36·4	15·3	62·1	33
Hackney	3·0	34·6	12·6	50·1	61
Hammersmith	14·7	22·6	12·3	49·7	62
Islington	6·0	33·9	14·3	54·2	54
Kensington and Chelsea	8·3	18·2	10·3	36·8	88
Lambeth	6·3	26·5	13·7	46·5	72
Lewisham	3·3	31·1	13·4	47·8	68
Southwark	7·7	35·0	15·2	57·9	42
Tower Hamlets	12·8	33·9	14·9	61·7	34
Wandsworth	2·8	28·0	11·6	42·4	76
Westminster	4·5	22·2	11·8	38·4	83
Barking	0·0	33·8	30·9	64·7	26
Barnet	6·3	23·5	26·0	55·8	51
Bexley	3·2	14·2	15·7	33·1	93
Brent	3·3	28·2	25·7	57·2	45
Bromley	0·0	2·1	15·5	17·7	107
Croydon	5·0	5·1	28·8	38·9	81
Ealing	6·6	29·6	25·0	61·2	37
Enfield	0·0	20·5	28·9	49·5	64
Haringey	4·3	37·6	30·0	71·9	13
Harrow	0·0	17·8	28·6	46·4	73
Havering	0·0	4·6	34·2	38·8	82
Hillingdon	1·9	48·4	1·9	52·3	55
Hounslow	0·0	73·7	0·2	73·9	11
Kingston upon Thames	6·6	27·1	28·9	62·6	32
Merton	0·0	52·4	23·2	75·6	10
Newham	12·9	33·5	10·0	56·4	49
Redbridge	0·0	14·8	14·0	28·7	97
Richmond upon Thames	1·6	16·8	27·2	45·6	74
Sutton	5·6	29·0	1·1	35·7	89
Waltham Forest	4·8	32·9	12·4	50·2	59
Birmingham	7·6	25·0	31·3	63·9	29
Coventry	4·3	21·6	32·3	58·1	41
Dudley	3·8	30·8	15·5	50·1	60
Sandwell	3·0	49·2	32·6	84·8	7
Solihull	0·0	34·5	36·3	70·8	17
Walsall	10·6	47·7	33·0	91·3	3
Wolverhampton	11·9	44·3	15·4	71·7	14
Knowsley	0·0	46·0	32·0	78·0	8
Liverpool	4·8	46·9	36·4	88·1	6
St. Helens	1·5	31·7	31·9	65·0	24
Sefton	4·3	28·4	32·3	65·0	25
Wirral	3·4	20·7	31·7	55·8	50
Bolton	6·5	32·3	30·6	69·4	20
Bury	3·0	27·3	32·4	62·7	31
Manchester	4·3	51·0	16·2	71·5	15
Oldham	0·0	34·9	33·5	68·4	21
Rochdale	14·5	17·2	29·8	61·5	36
Salford	15·1	39·4	33·7	88·2	5
Stockport	11·3	8·1	30·1	49·5	63
Tameside	5·6	34·9	32·8	73·3	12
Trafford	0·0	26·2	28·3	54·5	53
Wigan	2·2	21·9	33·2	57·3	44
Barnsley	3·1	47·3	17·2	67·5	23
Doncaster	0·0	41·7	34·5	76·1	9
Rotherham	5·5	35·6	15·5	56·6	47
Sheffield	6·3	38·4	19·5	64·1	28

	Nursery schools	Primary nursery classes	Schools infant classes	Total of all pupils under 5 in school	Rank order
Bradford	3·3	34·1	19·3	56·7	46
Calderdale	0·0	31·1	30·5	61·5	35
Kirklees	4·9	33·4	19·0	57·4	43
Leeds	1·6	39·2	20·1	60·9	38
Wakefield	5·4	42·9	21·2	69·5	19
Gateshead	1·3	31·2	32·2	64·6	27
Newcastle upon Tyne	9·9	30·7	30·8	71·4	16
North Tyneside	6·4	51·9	33·8	92·1	2
South Tyneside	20·2	38·3	39·8	98·4	1
Sunderland	11·6	25·0	31·1	67·7	22
Avon	6·5	11·8	30·7	49·0	65
Bedfordshire	8·4	22·8	11·0	42·1	78
Berkshire	9·8	15·8	1·7	27·3	100
Buckinghamshire	2·8	9·5	15·5	27·8	99
Cambridgeshire	3·7	7·5	31·2	42·4	75
Cheshire	3·2	17·7	31·3	52·2	56
Cleveland	0·9	53·4	34·1	88·4	4
Cornwall[1]	1·0	12·6	28·7	42·3	77
Cumbria	7·1	16·6	30·8	54·5	52
Derbyshire	6·2	30·2	22·0	58·4	40
Devon	1·3	10·2	16·6	28·1	98
Dorset	0·0	5·6	32·2	37·8	86
Durham	16·6	23·3	30·1	69·9	18
East Sussex	1·9	7·0	29·3	38·2	85
Essex	0·6	5·4	15·5	21·5	102
Gloucestershire	0·0	0·1	30·1	30·2	96
Hampshire	0·8	3·9	15·1	19·8	105
Hereford and Worcester	0·0	7·7	13·2	20·8	103
Hertfordshire	6·3	24·3	16·4	47·0	71
Humberside	5·0	32·5	22·8	60·3	39
Isle of Wight	0·0	6·9	35·1	42·0	79
Kent	0·2	4·6	27·1	31·9	94
Lancashire	8·6	9·0	30·7	48·3	67
Leicestershire	0·2	22·1	16·1	38·4	84
Lincolnshire	2·1	6·3	29·2	37·6	87
Norfolk	2·4	2·8	28·9	34·0	90
North Yorkshire	2·2	18·3	26·9	47·5	70
Northamptonshire	3·9	14·7	33·4	52·0	57
Northumberland	1·8	29·5	31·8	63·0	30
Nottinghamshire	2·1	46·7	7·7	56·5	48
Oxfordshire	6·8	9·1	4·5	20·5	104
Shropshire	1·6	11·8	20·1	33·5	91
Somerset	0·0	0·8	32·7	33·4	92
Staffordshire	7·1	15·1	28·8	51·1	58
Suffolk	0·6	16·1	14·5	31·2	95
Surrey	1·7	9·5	13·3	24·5	101
Warwickshire	6·2	10·6	31·6	48·4	66
West Sussex	3·3	0·8	12·4	16·5	108
Wiltshire	0·0	3·0	14·5	17·9	106
England	4·1	21·1	22·7	47·9	

[1] Isles of Scilly have been included with Cornwall.
[2] Excludes pupils who became 5 years of age by 1st January 1991.
[3] The percentage of pupils has been derived by comparing the number of pupils in school with the estimated population aged 3 and 4 years.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he intends to take to safeguard school playing fields from re-development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Local Education Authorities are responsible for taking decisions on whether or not to dispose of school playing fields. It is the Government's policy to encourage authorities to dispose of land and buildings which have become surplus to requirements through the rationalisation of school provision. However, in view of public concern over the continuing loss of school playing fields to redevelopment, I have to-day written to the local authority associations seeking their comments on a letter I propose to issue to all local education authorities. The letter will ask LEAs not to dispose of school playing fields unless they have first investigated and established that they will not be needed in the long term for school or community use. It will also say that in future when considering proposals involving school closures my right hon. and learned Friend will take account of authorities' plans for the retention of playing fields that may be needed to remedy any deficiencies in playing field provision at neighbouring schools.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many departmental officials, at what grade, and with what responsibilities, attended the round table briefing meeting on arms control and disarmament hosted by his Department for non-governmental organisations on 26 November; and what was the cost to his Department of the meeting.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The meeting was chaired by Mr. David Summerhayes, disarmament adviser and those attending included the heads of the arms control and disarmament, security policy and non-proliferation and defence departments of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the head of the disarmament and arms control unit of the Ministry of Defence. The cost of the meeting has not been calculated.

Visas

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what responsibility the European Community will have for visa lists following the Maastricht meeting of Heads of Government; and what effect this will have on Commonwealth citizens applying for visas to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Once the revised treaty of Rome has entered into force, the Council of Ministers will be responsible for drawing up the list of countries, which may include Commonwealth ones, whose nationals must have a visa when crossing member states' external frontiers.

Fiji

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to persuade Fiji to adopt a revised constitution.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None. Fiji's new constitution is essentially an internal matter which is for the peoples of Fiji to decide.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to send observers to the next Fijian elections.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No, but the British embassy in Suva will be reporting on the elections in the normal way.

Mr. Muhummad al Fasi

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Saudi Arabian Government regarding Mr. Muhummad al Fasi.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

Euratom

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what competence Euratom will have over United Kingdom military nuclear activities following the agreements made at the Maastricht meeting of the intergovernmental conference on European political and economic union.

Mr. Garel-Jones: None. The Maastricht European Council made no substantial amendments to the Euratom treaty, although some consequential amendments will be necessary to reflect EC institutional changes.

Geneva Convention

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will be in a position to ratify the additional protocols to the 1949 Geneva convention.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We hope to be in a position to make a decision on ratification of the additional protocols to the 1949 Geneva conventions very soon.

CSCE

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia respectively signed the charter of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe; and what discussions he or departmental officials have had with counterparts in the Baltic states over their accession to the treaty on conventional forces in Europe.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania signed the charter of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe on 6 December.

Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence officials visited Estonia on 13 and 15 October to discuss a range of issues, including the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe, the CFE treaty. We have had discussions at ambassadorial level with the Governments of the other Baltic states in their capitals and in Vienna. We expect to follow up these contacts with further visits in the new year. It is for the Baltic states themselves to decide whether to accede to the CFE treaty.

Maastricht

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish details of the redefinition or extension of Community competence in relation to *(a)* education, *(b)* training, *(c)* cohesion, *(d)* research and development, *(e)* environment, *(f)* trans-European networks, *(g)* industry, *(h)* health, *(i)* culture, *(j)* consumer protection and *(k)* development co-operation, resulting from the Maastricht agreement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The redefinition or extension of competence in all these areas is clearly set out in the relevant provisions of the treaty on union agreed at Maastricht, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Korea

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's response to the recent agreements between the Governments of North and South Korea on the de-nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula under international verification.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We warmly welcome the outcome of the recent north-south prime ministerial talks in Seoul, including the wish to replace the armistice by a peace agreement and to strengthen bilateral links and exchanges. There remains much to be done but we see these as positive steps forward.

We also welcome the south's offer of simultaneous inspection of sites to further help resolve the issue of nuclear safeguards. We hope the north will reciprocate.

THE ARTS

Northern Arts

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list the amount of grant given to Northern Arts for each year since 1980.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is as follows

ACGB grant to Northern Arts

Years	*£*
1980-81	1,306,630
1981-82	1,456,051
1982-83	1,733,236
1983-84	1,819,020
1984-85	1,938,659
1985-86	2,086,802
1986-87	3,424,500
1987-88	3,510,500
1988-89	3,526,910
1989-90	3,626,775
1990-91	3,951,000
1991-92	4,426,914

Following the excellent 13·9 per cent. increase for the Arts Council which I announced last November, I am delighted that the Arts Council has decided to pass on to every regional arts board at least the same level of increase for next year. For 1992-93 Northern Arts will receive £5,043,000.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Central Statistical Office

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the quality and output of the Central Statistical Office; and what steps he is taking to improve them;

(2) what recent changes have been made to the structure and functioning of the Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Maples: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies the Chancellor gave to my hon. Friends for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) on 19 November, at columns *139-41*.

Taxpayers

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for 1992-93 the number of taxpayers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, giving numbers separately for employees and self-employed.

Mr. Maude: The number of taxpaying individuals, classified by main source of income in 1992-93, is estimated to be as follows with the illustrative assumption of 4 per cent. indexation of allowances from the autumn statement 1991:

	Million
Employees	19·3
Self-employed	2·8
Other[1]	2·9

[1] Includes pensioners and those with no earned income.

Separate figures for Great Britain and Northern Ireland are not available.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 the number of taxpayers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland who have taxable income less than *(a)* £500, *(b)* £1,000, *(c)* £1,500 and *(d)* £2,000.

Mr. Maude: Information for the United Kingdom is given in the table. Estimates for 1992-93 are approximate and are based on the illustrative 4 per cent. indexation of allowances from the autumn statement 1991.

Estimated number of taxpayers (millions)

Taxable income[1] *£ per year*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Less than 500	1·1	1
Less than 1,000	2·3	2¼
Less than 1,500	3·4	3¼
Less than 2,000	4·3	4¼

[1] Income for income tax purposes less allowances and reliefs.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 the number of taxpayers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland who have gross income (i) less than £10,000, (ii) between £10,000 and £20,000, (iii) between £20,000 and £30,000 and (iv) between £30,000 and £40,000.

Mr. Maude: Information for the United Kingdom is given in the table. The estimates for 1992-93 are approximate and are based on the 4 per cent. illustrative indexation of allowances from the autumn statement 1991.

Estimated numbers of taxpayers (millions)

Gross income £ per year	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Less than 10,000	10·2	9½
10,000 to 20,000	10·5	10½
20,000 to 30,000	2·9	3¼
30,000 to 40,000	0·8	1
Over 40,000	0·7	¾
Total	25·1	25

I regret that it is not possible to provide separate estimates for Northern Ireland.

66. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the most recent estimates for 1991-92 of *(a)* how many taxpayers get additional personal allowance and widows' bereavement allowance, *(b)* how many of these also get one parent benefit and widowed mothers' allowance and *(c)* how many of these are also receiving means-tested benefits in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: The information is as follows:

(a) About 500,000 taxpayers benefit from the additional pesonal allowance, and 100,000 from the widows' bereavement allowance.

(b) The estimated average numbers in Great Britain receiving one parent benefit and widowed mothers' allowance in 1991-92 are 785,000 and 65,000 respectively. However, the benefits system cannot distinguish between taxpayers and non-taxpayers or identify those who benefit from a specific tax allowance.

(c) Estimates are not available of the numbers at *(b)* who are also receiving income-related benefits.

Medical Insurance

59. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his forecast for the cost to the Exchequer in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of tax relief for private medical insurance premiums for persons aged over 60 years.

Mr. Maude: The estimated cost of the relief in respect of 1991-92 is expected to be about £60 million. The cost in respect of 1992-93 will depend on the level of premiums paid.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000 and *(c)* £20,000 a year with (i) the current tax allowances and reliefs and (ii) limiting all income tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, giving the revenue from each relief separately, the total revenue and the numbers of people affected, for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the introduction of the upper limits specified would yield the following:

£ million

Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs	*Yield in a full year under the current tax regime*	*Yield following restriction of all reliefs and specified allowances to the basic rate*
£10,000	590	390
£15,000	240	150
£20,000	140	90

The estimated yield from restricting all allowances, except the basic personal allowance, to the basic rate is about £300 million. The estimated yield from restricting all reliefs to the basic rate is £600 million. Of this figure, about £250 million results from restricting relief on employee contributions to occupational pensions and about £150 million results from restricting relief on personal pension contributions.

National Insurance

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue yield in *(a)* the first year and *(b)* a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, of extending national insurance contributions to all employee taxable benefits in kind, for employees in Great Britain and Northern Ireland who earn over £8,500, distinguishing between employee and employer contributions, listing the revenue from each benefit and assuming the abolition of the national insurance upper earnings limit.

Mr. Maude: The additional revenue for the United Kingdom in a full year at 1991-92 levels is shown in the table which gives the available analysis by type of benefit. The estimates are based on an employee contribution rate of 9 per cent. and an employer contribution rate of 10·4 per cent. The estimates are calculated using the taxable value of the benefits. The yield in the first year would depend upon the administrative arrangements made to collect the new charge.

Revenue yield[1]

Type of benefit	*From employees*	*£ million from employers*
Car	400	[2]0
Car fuel	40	[2]0
Private medical insurance	40	40
Home telephone	10	10
Beneficial loans	20	20
Other benefits	200	230
Total	710	300

[1] For a full year at 1991-92 levels of income and benefit.
[2] These items are already subject to employer contributions.

ECOFIN

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Council of Economic and Finance Ministers.

Mr. Maples: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Community met in Brussels on 16 December. I represented the United Kingdom with the Minister for Corporate Affairs.

The Council discussed the Portuguese Government's programme for economic convergence, and welcomed their ambitious targets for reducing inflation to a ceiling of 4 per cent. by the end of 1995, the general Government deficit to no more than 3 per cent. of GDP by 1995 and lowering the debt ratio. But the Council stressed that the achievement of these targets is highly dependent on the budget for 1992, the growth rate that is realised and the appropriate mix of policy instruments. The Council invited the Commission and the monetary committee to monitor the implementation of the programme and to report back to the Council before the end of 1992.

The Council confirmed the agreement in principle reached at the Foreign Affairs Council that morning on a new package of emergency food aid to the value of 200 mecu for Moscow and St. Petersburg, and, if appropriate, other cities. Of this aid, 100 mecu can be released immediately and a further 100 mecu following consultation of the European Parliament in mid January. The earlier proposals for a loan totalling 1·25 becu for three years was also formally adopted and it was agreed that the first tranche, of 500 mecu should now be released as soon as possible.

The Council discussed the ideas for a carbon/energy tax contained in the Commission's communication and took note of reports from the fiscal aspects group and the conclusions of the joint Energy and Environment Council held on 13 December. It was agreed that the fiscal aspects working group should undertake work on the basis of additional analysis of the issues by the Commission and that the Council would re-examine the question before May in preparation for the UNCED Council in Rio.

The Council discussed several matters relating to the abolition of fiscal frontiers, and formally adopted the directive on the VAT transitional arrangements to apply after 1992.

Political agreement was reached on the draft directive on the arrangements for the holding, movement and control of goods subject to excise duty. This agreement includes satisfactory provision for minimum indicative levels to distinguish between commercial and private transactions in tobacco products and alcoholic drinks, since commercial transactions are taxed in the country of destination while private transactions are taxed in the country of origin. The minimum indicative levels agreed were as follows:

Item	*Amount*
Cigarettes	800
Cigarillos	400
Cigars	200
Smoking tobacco	1kg
Spirits	10 litres
Intermediate products	20 litres
Wine	[1]90 litres
Beer	110 litres

[1] Including a maximum of 60 litres of sparkling wines.

Above these levels, the transaction may be taken to be of a commercial character unless the person concerned can establish to the satisfation of the fiscal authorities that it is not.

For limited period, Ireland will be able to apply minimum indicative levels for wines and beer at 50 per cent. of the levels generally agreed. Special arrangements were also agreed to allow Denmark to continue to apply its current travellers' allowances on spirits and tobacco after 1992.

Subject to parliamentary scrutiny, agreement was also reached on extended and modified derogations for Ireland and Denmark from the directive on travellers' allowances, to apply during 1992.

Denmark will continue to apply its current levels of travellers' allowances, while for Ireland, the agreement provides for the following revised allowances:

	Current allowance	*Allowance to apply in 1992*
Cigarettes (number)	150	300
Smoking tobacco (grams)	400	400
Spirits (litres)	0·75	1·5
or		
Intermediate products and sparkling wine (litres)	1·5	3
Still wine (litres)	2·5	5
Beer (litres)	[1]12 and 25	[1]15 and 30
Other products (ecu)	[2]110	[3]175

[1] for travellers out of the Republic for less and more than 24 hours respectively
[2] subject to a single item limit of 95 ecu
[3] subject to a single item limit of 150 ecu for travellers out of the Republic for more than 24 hours, 110 ecu for less than 24 hours.

The Council also took note of a progress report by the Dutch presidency on the last six months and the work to be done before 1 January 1993.

The Community's acceptance of the "Helsinki package" of reforms to the OECD consensus on export credits was confirmed. This agreement incorporates a welcome reduction in trade distorting export credit subsidy to the benefit of taxpayers and a tightening of the rules on the provision of tied aid subsidies so that these are better targeted on aid-worthy projects in aid-worthy countries.

The Council took note of a report from the Commission on a proposal for a directive on withholding taxes on interest and royalty payments and remitted the proposal to a working group for further work.

The Council also took note of a joint report from the Commission and the European investment bank on lending by the European investment bank outside the Community.

The conclusions of that morning's meeting of the Transport Council on road transport taxation were remitted to an ad hoc working group for further discussion.

The investment services directive was also discussed in a group of personal representatives at which the Minister for Corporate Affairs represented the United Kingdom. No decisions were reached.

Uncollected Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, columns *37-38*, he will publish a table showing the levels of uncollected tax at the end of the financial year 1989-90 and 1990-91 for *(a)* value added tax, *(b)* income tax, including schedule D and *(c)* corporation tax, excise duties and capital gains tax, expressed both as a sum figure and as a percentage of total tax due for each category.

[redacted]an Shephard *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* Information on average daily arrears of value added tax, on the basis of financial years, and on income tax, corporation tax, and capital gains tax arrears at years ending 31 October can be found in "Volume 12: Classes XVIII to XIX" of the 1990-91 appropriation accounts, pages vii and xiii respectively. A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

Arrears of excise duty on drink, tobacco and road fuel are not collated centrally. However, these duties are either paid in cash on clearance to home consumption or by duty deferment backed up by a financial guarantee. In either case the possibility for arrears is minimal. Arrears of car tax, and betting and gaming duty can however arise and were as follows:

	Arrears £ million	*As percentage of receipts*
31 March 1990	48·9	2·0
31 March 1991	6·9	0·3

In general, the bulk of the sums of tax in arrears are collectable and remain outstanding only for short periods, possibly days. Sums outstanding for longer periods risk incurring penalties or interest charges. Ultimately the Revenue Departments write off only those sums indicated in the reply of 2 December 1991, *Official Report*, columns *37-38*. Write-offs occur mainly through insolvencies or from traders becoming untraceable.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage corporation tax would have to be increased to raise an amount equivalent to the amount raised by the uniform business rate in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* Assuming no changes in company behaviour, the corporation tax rate, applied to profits from 1 April 1988 onwards, would need to have been more than 20 percentage points higher to yield a sum over these two years equivalent to the amount raised from non-domestic property by way of rates.

In the absence of rates, the required increase would have been significantly less because rates are allowed as a deduction in computing profits for corporation tax. Information required to quantify the level is not available.

Rates raise revenue to pay for services provided by local authorities by taxing the occupation of non-domestic property. As such, they are levied on unincorporated businesses, partnerships and the self employed who are liable to income tax, as well as the corporate sector which is liable to corporation tax.

Self-employed and Partnerships

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on the Exchequer's revenue of applying corporation rather than income tax to the self-employed and partnerships.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 18 December 1991]:* There would be an effect on the timing of tax payments. Partnerships and the self-employed pay tax for income tax years in two instalments, three months before and three months after the end of the tax year. Corporation tax is paid in one instalment nine months after the end of the accounting period. There would also be an effect on the amount of tax paid, but the extent would depend on how the rules for taxing companies were adapted to tax the self-employed and partnerships.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the tax consequences of the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Maude: The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 provides for the transfer of the business assets and liabilities of Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) to a number of successor companies into private ownership. Under normal tax rules a number of tax consequences would arise solely as a result of the pre-privatisation reorganisation of NIE into the successor companies. We intend to introduce legislation in 1992 designed to treat the reorganisation on a tax-neutral basis in accordance with the Government's general policy on privatisation.

ENVIRONMENT

London Docklands Development Corporation

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public funding has been given since the establishment of the London Docklands development corporation to the London Arena development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The total public sector contribution to the capital cost of the London Arena is £3·425 million.

Caravan Site, Basingstoke

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of establishing under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 the site at Peak Copse, Dummer, Basingstoke, including all the preliminaries, the cost of the public inquiry and the cost of actual construction.

Mr. Yeo: The cost of the preliminary work on the planning application concerning the site and of the public local inquiry which was held in January 1989, fell principally on Hampshire county council. The costs of the inquiry inspector, which were borne by the Secretary of State, are not separately identifiable.

The actual cost of constructing the site will not be known before completion of the scheme in mid 1992, but the tender accepted by the Hampshire county council in the sum of £616,738 is within the approved estimate for gipsy site grant.

Cycling (Royal Parks)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the provision of cycling facilities will be considered by the independent review group on royal parks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The royal parks review group is considering the provision of cycling facilities in Hyde park and Kensington gardens and will report its conclusions on this and other matters early next year.

Private Tenancies

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received about the practice of certain private landlords of requiring a tenancy to be terminated when a baby is born to the tenant; what information he has as to how widespread this practice is; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he has any plans to prohibit private landlords from terminating tenancies when a child is born to the tenant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations. Landlords may obtain possession from an assured tenant to whom a child has been born only if a term of the tenancy agreement has thereby been breached, or if the landlord is otherwise entitled to possession. In either case a court order is necessary and the landlord must satisfy the court that it is reasonable to grant him possession for a breach of the terms of the tenancy. A tenant will therefore be aware of the likelihood that he will not be able to remain after a child is born at the point where he accepts the tenancy. We have no plans to change the law in this respect.

West Kent Housing Association

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much grant was given by his Department to West Kent housing association in respect of the proposed voluntary transfer of housing stock.

Sir George Young: My Department has not given any grant to the West Kent housing association in respect of

the proposed transfer of the new town housing stock at Basildon nor are there any powers so to do. However, in accordance with the provisions of the New Towns (Transfer of Housing Stock) Regulations 1990, as amended, the Commission for the New Towns will pay the reasonable costs incurred by both the West Kent housing association and Basildon district council in connection with a ballot of tenants.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Carmarthen by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 2 December at column 42, on energy efficiency investment, if he will break down the figure of £900 million into its component parts.

Mr. Yeo: A breakdown of the figure of £900 million for the financial year 1990-91 is not available. However, the 1986 English house condition survey indicated that of all major expenditure on the public sector stock, directed at the improvement of heating and insulation, some 73 per cent. was for installing or repairing central heating and nearly 9 per cent for other heating. Around 17 per cent was spent on wall insulation and some 1 per cent on loft and roof insulation.

Planning Zones

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take in order to encourage local planning authorities to make simplified planning zones on appropriate cases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Planning and Compensation Act 1991 provides for substantial simplification and streamlining of the procedure for making simplified planning zones—SPZs. Regulations for the detailed implementation of this will be laid before the House in due course.

I have today issued a consultation paper setting out our proposals for such regulations, and for the revision and inclusion in a single document of the Department's guidance to authorities on the making of SPZs.

Authorities have a duty under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to keep under review the desirability of making SPZs for parts of their area.

National Wildlife Parks (Military Use)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on whether military use is permitted of national and wildlife parks in each of the other European Community countries.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 18 December 1991]:* Military use is permitted in protected areas in other European Community countries, but information for each member country is not readily available.

Windscale Inquiry

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans there are to publish the study by Lyons (CB) Ltd. of press reporting of the Windscale public inquiry.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

This report was commissioned for the Health and Safety Executive's internal use and there are no plans to publish it.

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the design of the next phase of the new parliamentary building; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The consultant architect appointed by my Department, Michael Hopkins and Partners, completed their preliminary sketch plan stage proposals in October. These were presented to the New Building Sub Committee which endorsed the way the scheme is developing. A text of the letter I received from the Chairman, the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and of my reply along with copies of Hopkins' report are being placed in the Library.

Design work, and discussions with London Underground Ltd. on the integration of the scheme and the proposed new Westminster station are continuing. It is planned to publish the final sketch plan proposals early next year.

The letter from the hon. Member for Ogmore and my reply to him are as follows.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON HOUSE OF COMMONS (SERVICES): NEW BUILDING SUB-COMMITTEE

22nd October 1991

Dear Michael

Bridge Street Phase 2

At its meeting last Tuesday the New Building Sub-Committee received a presentation from Mr. Michael Hopkins on his Preliminary Sketch Plan Report for Phase 2 of the new parliamentary building project. As the Sub-Committee will shortly cease to exist, and as there may be a lengthy interval before the new Accommodation Committee is set up, I thought it would be helpful if I wrote to inform you of the Sub-Committee's present views in regard to Phase 2.

In general the Sub-Committee is very pleased with the way the designs are shaping up. Last week we were shown elevations of the proposed building for the first time, and I think I speak for all my colleagues who were present in saying that these were very encouraging. We appreciate, of course, that Mr. Hopkins is still actively developing his views about the appearance of the building, and that it will not be until next Spring that the plans are finalised.

We approved the proposals for Members' offices contained in the PSP Report. In particular we are content with the proposal that about 104 "sets" should contain *ensuite* accommodation for Members' staff, while in a further 92 "sets" space will be shared with other Members' staff.

Mr. Hopkins's proposals for the internal layout of the building, especially on the ground and first floors, are still being developed. We regard the proposals to roof in either the inner courtyard (at second floor level), or the outer space formed between Phase 2 and Norman Shaw South, as interesting, and we certainly think Mr. Hopkins should further investigate each possibility in order to establish its *pros* and *cons*. We are sure that he will bear in mind the importance of ensuring, if at all possible, that the minimum allocations of space for specific functions as set out in the Services Committee's *Initial Brief* are adhered to in whatever emerges as his favoured layout.

We approved Mr. Hopkin's new proposals to carry the load of the building on its perimeter walls and on six columns extending downward to the base of the station, rather than on a horizontal concrete "raft". We think it essential, however, that whatever means are chosen to separate the parliamentary building from the London underground station below it, the

highest priority must be given to ensuring that noise and vibration from the trains do not disturb Members and staff in their offices.

Mr. Hopkins reported to us on the difficulties which have arisen in relation to the siting of ventilation shafts. This is a matter which will clearly have to be looked at in detail by our successors, but we wish to put on record our concern at the proposed introduction of such shafts within the parliamentary estate. The aesthetic and other disadvantages that might arise from such a proposal will need to be carefully evaluated.

Finally, we note that a number of issues remain to be resolved in discussions with London Underground. Our successors will need to satisfy themselves that suitable arrangements have been made with regard to the location of the temporary ticket hall, achieving an early start to the construction of the parliamentary building, shared use of the site during the construction period, future ownership of the land, and provisions to insulate the parliamentary building from noise and vibration. It will also be important to receive confirmation from London Underground that the construction timetable they have previously outlined in evidence to the Service Committee is still operative.

We understand that London Underground propose shortly to introduce a further private bill dealing with the Jubilee Line. Our successors may well wish to enquire into any proposals in this bill which directly impinge on the parliamentary estate, and to report to the House on them before the bill is given a second reading. This would be a similar procedure to that which the Services Committee adopted with regard to the original Jubilee line bill in Session 1989-90.

Subject to progress in resolving these issues, and to the satisfactory passage of the London Underground Bill through Parliament, we see no reason why the target of Spring 1992 for the commencement of work on site should not be achieved. We wish to put on record our thanks to Mr. Hopkins, and to his junior colleague Mr. John Pringle, for all the work they have done and for the constructive and creative way in which they have sought to interpret their necessarily complex brief.

15 December 1991

Dear Ray,

NEW PARLIAMENTARY BUILDING

Thank you for your letter of 22 October recording the outcome of the New Building Sub Committee's consideration of Michael Hopkins and Partners proposals for the next phase of the New Parliamentary Building. Before dealing with the issues you raise may I congratulate you first on becoming Chairman of the new Accommodation and Works Committee. I am sure it is very important to the development of the proposals for the new building that there should be this continuity with the depth of knowledge it brings to the scheme.

I had the opportunity last week to visit Hopkins' office to see their proposals. He has done considerable work since the presentation to the Sub Committee and it is quite clear that there are the makings of a fine scheme. The massing, scale and silhouette of the building are now becoming much clearer and will, I think, contribute greatly to the important views across the River Thames as well as the more oblique views from Parliament Square. The choice of materials is of great importance. There is a very difficult balance to be struck between the red brick of the Norman Shaw buildings and the lighter brown stone used on the Palace. I know from our discussions that Michael Hopkins is very conscious of this point.

It is, I believe, essentially a matter for the House to determine the priorities for the use of the accommodation which can be provided in the building. I note that your Sub Committee was content with the proposals for Members' offices and I think you will find that the most recent work to develop the proposals for the ground and first floors will not only result in an exciting space but will assist considerably in increasing the amount of accommodation available without in any way overdeveloping the site.

It is quite clear, both from your letter and the reports I have received, that there is still a considerable amount of work to be done to integrate successfully the proposed extension to the Jubilee Line with the new building. I consider it very important therefore that the discussions involving my officials, London Underground and the House should be pursued rigorously to try to achieve the timetable you set out so that all the necessary information is made available to enable the House to take an early view on the impact of the proposed Extension and to reach agreement on the way ahead without delaying unnecessarily the new building.

I shall be keeping in touch as the design continues to develop and look forward to seeing a fully worked up scheme early in the New Year.

Yours faithfully,

MICHAEL HESELTINE

Bottled Water

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations exist to control bottled *(a)* mineral water and *(b)* spring water; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The Natural Mineral Water Regulations 1985 control the exploitation and marketing of natural mineral waters in Great Britain. Similar controls apply in Northern Ireland. Regulations laying down specific controls for other bottled waters are currently being drafted.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list (i) the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Lilley: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Export Licences

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will name the destinations for which export licence applications are subject to special consideration for strategic and proliferation reasons.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government have decided to publish a list of destinations for which export licence applications are subject to special consideration to serve as a guide to industry. The list, which is subject to regular review, is based on strategic and proliferation concerns and other criteria, including the risk of diversion and the lack of effective export controls. The destinations are as follows:

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burma
China
Cuba

Czechoslovakia
Egypt
Estonia
Hungary
India
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Latvia
Libya
Lithuania
Mongolia
North Korea
Pakistan
Poland
Romania
Somalia
South Africa
South Korea
Soviet Union
Syria
Taiwan
Vietnam

Export licence applications will continue to be considered on a case by case basis in accordance with stringent criteria. The inclusion of a destination on the list does not in itself preclude the granting of an export licence. Normal licensing procedures continue to apply in respect of exports to other destinations.

Executive Directors

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to amend company law so that a non-executive director who has been chairman of the remunerations sub-committee of the board of directors of a public company cannot himself or herself be subsequently appointed to executive director posts whose remunerations were determined by that sub-committee.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* Detailed internal arrangements of companies and their boards are a matter for companies, operating in the case of listed companies under stock exchange rules.

The Secretary of State has no plans to amend company law, which provides for proper disclosure of remuneration of directors and chairmen and gives shareholders an adequate measure of control over the appointment and remuneration of directors.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Vietnam

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on progress made in allocating the £1 million set-aside in May 1990 for a special joint funding scheme in Vietnam.

Mrs. Chalker: The £1 million set aside under this scheme has been fully committed to 18 projects in those areas of north Vietnam from which boat people have predominantly come. The British non-governmental organisations—NGOs—with whom we are co-operating are Action Aid, Safe the Children Fund, Care and Marie Stopes International. Projects cover a wide range of community development activities, including water supply and irrigation, income generation schemes in afforestation, aquaculture and smallholder farming, mother and child health and family planning.

In addition, under ODA's regular joint funding scheme, we have made further substantial commitments to NGO projects in other areas of Vietnam. These now total just over £850,000.

Renewable Natural Resources

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what activities have been funded by the ODA under the strategy for research on renewable natural resources.

Mrs. Chalker: I have today placed in the Library a copy of the annual report 1990-91 on the strategy for research on renewable natural resources. The report gives an overview of the objectives and achievements of work undertaken in 1990-91 and outlines the direction of future work.

Iraq

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to provide further humanitarian assistance to civilians in Iraq.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes. Since April we have spent over £44 million in aid for the people of Iraq. This figure continues to rise. We are supporting the work of British and British-based Iraqi relief organisations, and United Nations agencies, and are in constant touch with them about how we can help further.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will bring forward legislation to provide that Secretaries of State must be members of the Cabinet;

(2) if he will bring forward legislation to amend the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 to allow the Lord Chancellor to be a Member of the House of Commons;

(3) if he will bring forward legislation to abolish the post of Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chancellor's Department, and to establish in their place a Secretary of State for Law and a Department of Law;

(4) if he will bring forward legislation to replace the title of Secretary of State by the title of Cabinet Minister;

(5) if he will bring forward legislation to provide that the Attorney-General must be a member of either the Commons or the Lords.

The Prime Minister: No.

Soviet Republics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to make available to the Governments of the Republics of the former Soviet Union, United Kingdom expertise in *(a)* civil and military nuclear technology, *(b)* environmental pollution abatement and *(c)* food distribution.

The Prime Minister: United Kingdom expertise in civil uses of nuclear power and food distribution can be made available to the republics of the former Soviet Union under the auspices of our know-how fund. A separate fund

for tackling environmental problems will come into operation next year. We are studying how we might help the republics reduce the risks of the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Maastricht

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list in the *Official Report* those topics on which the institutions of the European Community will not possess a basis of views for any opinion, recommendations, legislation, expenditure or adjudication, consequent to the adoption of the draft treaties agreed at Maastricht.

The Prime Minister: The provisions of the treaty on European union agreed at Maastricht, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, make clear the conditions under which the institutions of the European Community may act.

Lord Chancellor

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the legal qualifications necessary for appointment as *(a)* Lord Chancellor and *(b)* Attorney-General.

The Prime Minister: The Lord Chancellor must be a person able to discharge duties as the president of the supreme court of judicature—that is, the Court of Appeal, the High Court and the Crown court—and also as the presiding chairman of the House of Lords in its judicial capacity. In order that he or she may represent the Crown in each of the Queen's courts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Attorney-General is a member of the Bar of England and Wales.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 19 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

TRANSPORT

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Aitken: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will announce the allocation of the transport supplementary grant and credit approvals for capital expenditure on local roads in England for 1992-93.

Mr. Rifkind: A total of £370 million transport supplementary grant—TSG—plus £510 million in annual capital guideline—ACG—and supplementary credit approval—SCA—are to be allocated to local highway authorities in England for capital expenditure on their roads in 1992-93. With the help of capital reserves and developer contributions, I therefore expect authorities to be able to spend well over £1,000 million in total.

Table 1 sets out the national totals for different types of expenditure. Table 2 shows the total amounts of TSG, credit approval and gross approved expenditure for each of the 108 local highway authorities. They are being notified today of their allocations by the Department's regional offices.

Leaving aside the grant newly allocated for structural maintenance in 1991-92 and 1992-93, there is to be about the same amount of TSG as for 1991-92, but it is 18 per cent. more than for 1990-91.

Authorities will be able to make a start on the 37 new major schemes listed in table 3, which are to be newly accepted for TSG. Authorities will also be able to make progress with certain other major schemes using only credit approvals.

These new major schemes will, like the 274 others which continue to receive TSG support, relieve communities of the noise and danger of heavy through traffic, aid inner city regeneration and help to open up new opportunities for development and growth.

There is to be a 17 per cent. increase in minor works expenditure and, within that, a 38 per cent. increase in expenditure ear-marked for local safety schemes.

I am pleased with the start that local authorities have made in using the money we allocated for local safety schemes for 1991-92. Even if they spend no more than the grant and credit approvals that we have given them, over 1991-92 and 1992-93 they will have had the potential to carry out around 7,700 local safety schemes which could save 170 lives and prevent 2,200 serious injuries and 9,000 other casualties in any 12-month period.

The £110 million accepted expenditure for bridge maintenance, which is 22 per cent. more than for 1991-92, will enable authorities to maintain the momentum of this important programme of work and the £95 million allocated for maintenance of the roads which form part of the primary route network will help ensure that these important transport links are properly maintained.

Table 1

	£ million
Existing commitments	493·791
New starts	60·028
Minor works	88·656
Bridges	110·965
PRN maintenance	95·280
Grant adjustments	−54·360
Non grant aided expenditure	88·199
Total	882·559

Table 2
Local authority capital expenditure on roads 1992-93
(£ million)

	Government grant (TSG)	*Total borrowing approval*	*Gross approved spending*
Counties			
Avon	6·295	14·385	27·130
Bedfordshire	2·233	2·517	4·750
Berkshire	4·617	7·470	12·087
Buckinghamshire	1·886	3·283	5·169
Cambridgeshire	2·792	3·571	6·363
Cheshire	11·099	12·513	23·612
Cleveland	3·623	5·611	10·684
Cornwall	4·848	6·160	11·583
Cumbria	2·283	2·775	5·058
Derbyshire	1·908	3·186	5·944
Devon	4·412	5·230	9·642
Dorset	3·466	4·321	7·787
Durham	4·307	5·359	10·191
East Sussex	3·151	5·182	9·633
Essex	6·275	7·500	13·775
Gloucestershire	4·377	4·850	9·227
Hampshire	10·512	18·004	30·316
Hereford and Worcester	2·494	4·480	8·299
Hertfordshire	5·823	7·261	13·659

	Government grant (TSG)	Total borrowing approval	Gross approved spending
Humberside	8·225	9·202	17·427
Isle of Wight	0·902	1·070	1·972
Kent	33·149	39·852	73·176
Lancashire	11·630	15·783	29·713
Leicestershire	5·728	8·799	16·577
Lincolnshire	3·402	4·317	7·894
Norfolk	6·541	8·452	15·743
Northamptonshire	4·464	6·189	11·728
Northumberland	2·757	3·604	6·811
North Yorkshire	6·452	8·607	16·384
Nottinghamshire	4·277	5·533	10·210
Oxfordshire	5·087	6·248	11·735
Shropshire	2·481	4·490	8·246
Somerset	2·975	4·544	8·619
Staffordshire	3·820	4·847	8·667
Suffolk	5·688	6·789	12·477
Surrey	8·139	14·437	24·076
Warwickshire	1·797	2·106	3·903
West Sussex	3·478	4·541	8·569
Wiltshire	1·493	3·196	5·989
Metropolitan Districts			
Bolton	1·711	1·935	3·646
Bury	0·565	0·699	1·264
Manchester	8·672	10·160	19·207
Oldham	5·544	6·794	12·813
Rochdale	0·760	0·863	1·623
Salford	1·686	2·491	4·177
Stockport	1·792	1·996	3·788
Tameside	1·232	1·650	2·882
Trafford	2·196	2·866	5·287
Wigan	0·835	2·334	4·344
Knowsley	6·496	7·362	14·083
Liverpool	0·000	1·387	2·582
St. Helens	6·973	7·574	14·547
Sefton	0·620	0·825	1·495
Wirral	1·677	2·095	3·872
Barnsley	4·024	4·447	8·471
Doncaster	3·533	4·035	7·568
Rotherham	1·942	2·258	4·200
Sheffield	7·475	11·367	20·992
Gateshead	2·888	3·261	6·149
Newcastle upon Tyne	1·078	2·510	4·488
North Tyneside	0·425	0·506	0·931
South Tyneside	0·176	0·724	1·300
Sunderland	1·956	3·361	6·317
Birmingham	12·263	14·859	27·822
Coventry	4·641	5·591	10·507
Dudley	3·564	4·052	7·616
Sandwell	2·398	3·031	5·429
Solihull	0·982	1·357	2·539
Walsall	8·635	10·390	19·900
Wolverhampton	3·033	5·360	9·668
Bradford	2·159	2·901	5·435
Calderdale	0·458	0·654	1·112
Kirklees	2·295	2·717	5·012
Leeds	4·083	6·176	10·259
Wakefield	1·414	1·871	3·285
London Boroughs			
City of London	1·621	1·831	3·452
Barking and Dagenham	0·592	0·899	1·491
Barnet	0·487	0·616	1·103
Bexley	1·694	1·915	3·634
Brent	0·758	2·597	3·405
Bromley	2·794	3·091	5·885
Camden	2·301	2·590	4·891
Croydon	0·535	1·084	1·969
Ealing	1·027	2·436	4·488
Enfield	5·851	6·407	12·258
Greenwich	0·000	0·580	1·065
Hackney	1·406	1·718	3·124
Hammersmith and Fulham	1·005	1·239	2·244
Haringey	1·813	2·081	3·894
Harrow	2·513	5·933	11·271
Havering	0·388	0·474	0·862
Hillingdon	8·636	9·784	18·595
Hounslow	0·401	0·753	1·154
Islington	0·984	1·516	2·500
Kensington and Chelsea	0·317	0·936	1·778
Kingston upon Thames	0·965	1·483	2·673
Lambeth	0·374	0·450	0·824
Lewisham	3·352	6·406	12·258
Merton	0·000	1·200	2·155
Newham	1·563	3·865	7·203
Redbridge	0·485	0·624	1·109
Richmond upon Thames	0·441	0·507	0·948
Southwark	1·416	2·123	4·014
Sutton	0·288	0·900	1·588
Tower Hamlets	1·252	1·708	2·960
Waltham Forest	0·865	1·121	2·111
Wandsworth	2·283	3·079	5·762
Westminster	2·526	3·451	6·377

Note: Gross approved expenditure exceeds the sum of grant and borrowing approval if an authority holds unused grant from previous years.

Table 3

Authority	*Scheme name*
East Sussex	A26 Malling Hill relief road, Lewes
Hampshire	A31 Bentley bypass
Kent	A257 Ash bypass
Kent	Medway tunnel
Oxfordshire	A4130 Wallingford bypass
West Sussex	A259 Chichester-Bognor Regis improvement, phase 1
Avon	A4 Avonmouth link
Cornwall	A389 Egloshayle bypass
Devon	A386 Tavistock Road dualling, Plymouth, Stage 1
Dorset	A37 Improvements (A356—Somerset boundary)
Gloucestershire	A48 Lydney bypass
Somerset	A39 Glastonbury western relief road
Wiltshire	Meads roundabout, Swindon—grade separation
Birmingham	Thimble Mill Lane, phase 2
Dudley	A491 High Street, Amblecote
Solihull	West Midlands renaissance area
Wirral	A41 New Chester Road improvement
Cheshire	Upton (Chester) Park and Ride
Lancashire	A6 Chorley Town Centre bypass, phase 3
Gateshead	A1114 Western Riverside Route stage 1, phase 2 and stage 2
Newcastle upon Tyne	A695 Scotswood Road improvement—west of Paradise
Sunderland	A690 Doxford Park access road, stage 2
Cleveland	A171 Guisborough bypass
Durham	A689 Newton Cap diversion
Barnsley	A6195 Dearne Towns link road
Sheffield	A57 Sheffield Parkway/Park Square junction improvement
Kirklees	A62 Huddersfield ring road improvement, Phase 2
Humberside	A164 Beverley North East bypass
North Yorkshire	A59 Bolton Bridge bypass
Leicestershire	A563 Soar Valley Way
Lincolnshire	A46 Swallow bypass and route improvement
Northamptonshire	A422 Deanshanger bypass
Buckinghamshire	A421 Bletchley Road diversion, Buckingham
Cambridgeshire	A141 Spittals link, Huntingdon
Essex	A414 Aukingford Gardens-Talbot roundabout, Stages 1 and 2
Norfolk	B1332 Kirstead bypass
Hackney	A104 Lea Bridge reconstruction
Waltham Forest	A104 Lea Bridge reconstruction

Marchioness

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans any further inquiry following the report by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch on the Bowbelle and Marchioness disaster.

Mr. Rifkind: The marine accident investigation branch carried out a thorough inspector's inquiry into this accident; the report included 27 safety recommendations. Action on 20 of them is complete and the remainder are being implemented. In addition, the MAIB report included criticism of some aspects of my Department's and the maritime industry's approach to river safety in earlier years. Although the MAIB considered that there have been recent improvements in this respect, I have concluded that it would be desirable to set up an independent investigation into these matters.

I am pleased to be able to announce that Mr. John Hayes, Secretary General of the Law Society has agreed to carry out an investigation with the following terms of reference:

"In the light of the BOWBELLE/MARCHIONESS disaster, to examine the handling since 1980 by the Department of Transport of its responsibility for the safety of vessels on rivers and inland waters and to report on the effectiveness of the present approach. The investigation should take account of developments in the field of marine safety at the international level."

Mr. Hayes will be assisted by an expert adviser. He will start work as soon as possible in the new year. Mr. Hayes will be inviting all those who may wish to do so to put their views to him. His report will be published.

Plymouth City Airport

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what attempts were made by his Department to consult about levels of public safety with the Civil Aviation Authority and Plymouth city council before the approval in 1987 of the extension and reorientation of Plymouth city airport main runway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Aerodrome licensing and aircraft safety are the statutory responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. The extension and realignment of Plymouth airport's main runway required planning permission and had to meet the authority's licensing criteria. I understand that there were extensive consultations between the authority and Plymouth city council prior to the extension and realignment of the runway.

Airline Baggage

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether international passenger airline operators using United Kingdom airports are required to prevent unaccompanied baggage being carried unless indentified and subject to security control before it is carried; what are the International Civil Aviation Organisation requirements on this matter; whether they are enforced in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what interpretation has been given to the British Government by the Joint International Air Transport Association—Air Transport Association baggage security group on ICAO standard 5.1.4.; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what directives or regulations were in force to ensure that no unaccompanied baggage was carried on international flights at the time of the Lockerbie bombing; and what new requirements have been enforced since in regard to unaccompanied baggage;

(4) what steps have been taken since the Lockerbie bombing to ensure that there is a positive reconciliation of passenger with baggage; and how he ensures that the airlines carry out his policy.

Mr. McLoughlin: The ICAO standard, both as it stood at the time of the Lockerbie disaster and as revised subsequently, requires that baggage belonging to passengers who are booked to joint a flight but fail to do so should be identified, and the baggage should not be carried unless it is first subject to security controls. The United Kingdom was one of the first countries to make this a mandatory requirement. It did so in 1985, by means of a direction to aircraft operators under the Aviation Security Act 1982.

Both the ICAO standard and the United Kingdom requirement apply only to bags belonging to "no show" passengers. At present it is not possible to identify other unaccompanied bags, such as ones which have been misrouted, mishandled or misconnected and which are being returned to their owners, except by what are essentially manual methods. These are slow and cumbersome, and all leading aviation countries accept that it is not practicable to require their use at major airports because it would seriously reduce the capacity of the international air transport system.

It is recognised internationally that this problem can be overcome only by the development of sophisticated systems capable of identifying unaccompanied bags automatically. With this in mind, and building on proposal put forward by the joint IATA/ATA baggage security group, the European civil aviation conference has drawn up and published guidelines setting out the criteria that such systems will need to meet.

Several manufacturers are currently developing systems designed to meet these criteria. The results of initial trials are encouraging, although at present there are still a number of problems which need to be overcome. We in the United Kingdom have brought the manufacturers of the systems and the airlines together in an attempt to ensure that the problems are resolved as quickly as possible; and we have made it clear that, once they are resolved, we shall announce a date by which airlines will be required to identify all unaccompanied baggage loaded or transferred at our airports. No other country has yet made such a firm declaration of intent.

Tees and Hartlepool Trust Port

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will undertake a full investigation of the circumstances of the sale of the Tees and Hartlepool trust port; if he will make public his discussions with those representing the Tees and Hartlepool trust port management buy-out at the meeting planned for 17 December 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My. right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that the board of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority has conducted the sale of its undertaking with all due propriety, and in accordance with the provisions of the Ports Act 1991. There is no need for any investigation.

I met the Earl of Stockton and representatives of the senior management of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority on 18 December at their request. I regard our discussions as having been conducted in confidence.

Sealink Stenna

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of any discussions he or his Department have had with Sealink Stenna concerning the future of its ferry operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: We are keeping ourselves informed about developments within the Sealink Stenna cross-channel ferry operation. Decisions relating to the future of the services concerned are however a commercial matter for the company's management alone.

British Rail (Compensation)

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the financial compensation for commuters who suffer from BR services which do not reach the Government's performance standards announced in respect of Kent coastal services will be extended to users of the Greatly, Andover, Whitchurch and Overton services of British Rail.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his setting of new performance standards for the Kent coastal services from 1 January 1992 will apply to *(a)* London to Dover services via Tonbridge, *(b)* London to Hastings services via Tonbridge and *(c)* London to East Kent services via Maidstone East.

Mr. Freeman: The BR passengers charter will set individual objectives for all fifteen of the Network SouthEast route groups. BR will compensate season ticket holders if the service delivered falls significantly short of the published standards.

Trust Ports

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each trust port those parties which have expressed an interest in purchasing the respective trust port.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. That is a matter of commercial confidence between the trust port authority, as vendor of the port undertaking, and the parties concerned.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give an update of those trust ports which have lodged a scheme with his Department as required by the Ports Act 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: The situation remains as stated in the answer which I gave the hon. Member on 12 November 1991, at column *431*.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give full details of those bids which the trust port authority is recommending the Secretary of State to accept.

Mr. McLoughlin: The only trust port authority which has as yet recommended a bid for my right hon. Friend's consent is the Tees and Hartlepool port authority, in respect of a bid from Teeside Holdings Limited. Details of that bid were set out by my right hon. and learned Friend in his answer of 18 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin).

Citizens Charter (Airlines)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to include British airlines within the provisions of the citizens charter; and if he will make a statement on passenger compensation for delayed or cancelled flights.

Mr. McLoughlin: The citizens charter is a programme to improve public services. I have no plans to extend its scope to cover British airlines, which all operate in the private sector.

Passenger compensation for delayed or cancelled flights is a matter for the commercial judgment of the airlines concerned.

Bus Companies

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what encouragement he is giving to bus companies to purchase environmentally friendly new vehicles to help ease current congestion and pollution.

Mr. Freeman: We are taking a number of steps to ease congestion and pollution by encouraging both greater use of the bus and more environmentally friendly buses. I announced a package of measures on 16 December, including the provision of at least £10 million over the next two years to fund demonstration projects to promote bus use; publication of the Department's "Keeping Buses Moving"—a guide for local authorities on the provision of bus priority measures; much tighter controls of the amount of pollutants which can be emitted from new heavy diesel vehicles from 1993 onwards; and the introduction in 1992 of an instrumented smoke emissions test for in-service vehicles, together with tough roadside enforcement.

Ashford Station

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department first gave consideration to an alternative cheaper international station at Ashford.

Mr. Freeman: I visited Ashford station in the company of British Rail officials on 30 May to see for myself what potential there might be for an alternative cheaper option for the international passenger station, and asked British Rail to examine the feasibility of my own ideas. This study proved abortive, but a proposal subsequently advanced by Eurotunnel has been a catalyst for plans for a cheaper station to be examined further.

Inland Waterways

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the successful bids for section 8 freight facilities grant schemes in respect of inland waterways.

Mr. Freeman: There have been seven successful applications for Inland Waterway freight facilities grant under section 36 of the Transport Act 1981. The awards have been as follows:

	£
Millgate Investments Ltd., Gainsborough, Lincolnshire	369,340
Varma Services Ltd., Deptford, London SE	859,200
Sheffield Haulage and Storage Ltd., Rotherham	61,375
West Country Fuels Ltd., Gloucester	26,950
Colwick Petroleum Ltd., Nottingham	63,494
Sand and Gravel (Leeds) Ltd.	20,640
Wimpey Hobbs Ltd., Greenwich, London, SE	402,832

East Coast Line

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to combat the recent episodes of vandalism to equipment on the east coast line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that BR has been suffering very serious problems of vandalism on the east coast main line in recent weeks, particularly involving cutting and removal of signal cables at various points over a 100-mile stretch of the route in north-east England. The British Transport police, in co-operation with British Rail, have been undertaking a large-scale operation to contain and reduce the vandalism, and I understand that there have been some 50 arrests. British Rail is also speeding up the removal of redundant cabling and is taking measures to improve the security of key installations.

EMPLOYMENT

EC Earnings

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will set out the information he has of the level of national average earnings in each EC country at the present time, or the latest period for which information is available, both in that country's currency and in the sterling equivalent.

Mr. Forth: The information sought is set out in "Rapid Reports—Population and Social Condition, 1991/5; Earnings in Industry and Services", published by Eurostat, a copy of which is currently available in the Library. Data are given in national currencies, ecu, and purchasing power standards. At present there are 0·7 ecu to the pound.

Mr. Lewis Drake

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the actions taken by the Health and Safety Executive in connection with the fatal accident to Mr. Lewis Drake on 7 November at A. H. Markes Ltd., Low Moor, Bradford.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive investigation into the fatal accident to Mr. Lewis Drake at A. H. Marks and Co. Ltd., Bradford, began on 8 November 1991 and is continuing. The circumstances leading to the accident and the working procedures being followed, are under investigation by the HSE which has also examined the plant involved and given advice about its reinstatement.

Travel-to-Interview Scheme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whether he has any plans to review the travel-to-interview scheme;

(2) if he will make it his policy to relate the money offered to interviewees under the travel-to-interview scheme to the benefits the interviewee is receiving rather than the salary of the job offered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The effectiveness of all the Departments programmes are continually monitored. As a result it was recognised that the salary limit applied to the travel-to-interview scheme was out of date. The limit will therefore be increased from £16,500 to £25,000 a year from 2 January 1992. We expect this will have significantly, increased the number of people helped.

The new salary covers 90 per cent. of all wage earners and will avoid the administrative complexities of a benefits based scheme. A link with benefits could in fact lead to more restricted eligibility than currently exists.

EC Social Action

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements he proposes for his presence and participation in the European Community Social Affairs Council of Ministers meetings, when the other member states' Ministers are discussing matters arising under the social protocol agreed at the Maastricht summit meeting.

Mr. Forth: The treaty on European union agreed at the Maastricht European Council confirms that the social chapter within the present treaty—articles 117-122—will be retained without change and the United Kingdom will continue to participate fully in all relevant discussions about the development of the Community's social dimension.

A protocol to the treaty on European union notes that the 11 other member states wish to continue along the path laid down in the social charter, which they signed in 1989, and have adopted among themselves an agreement to that end. The conduct of business under that agreement is a matter for the 11 Governments concerned. The United Kingdom shall not take part in their deliberations, and any decisions taken by them shall not be applicable to the United Kingdom.

HM Dockyard, Portsmouth

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what he plans to open for inspection to the public, all or in part, the file on the approval of ventilation arrangements at HM dockyard, Portsmouth, October 1933 to October 1968, ref. LAB 14 478, file no. SHW 4207 1960.

Mr. Forth: In accordance with the terms of the Public Records Acts, this file will be opened to the public after 30 years in January 1999.

ENERGY

European Energy Charter

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a report on his participation in the European energy charter signing ceremony on 16 and 17 December; what are the United Kingdom's primary objectives in signing the charter; if he will place a copy of the charter and the text of supporting in documents in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I attended the international conference on the European energy charter in the Hague on 16 and 17 December 1991. In addition to signing the charter on behalf of the United Kingdom, I made a short statement welcoming agreement of the charter as a political declaration and looking forward to negotiation of legally binding agreements and protocols to implement the principles and objectives of the charter.

I am pleased that the charter was signed on behalf of 31 European countries, the European Community, nine Soviet republics and the inter-state economic committee of the Soviet Union, and four non-European countries.

The United Kingdom's primary objective throughout the charter process has been to promote more open, non-discriminatory energy markets across Europe and throughout the world, and to assist in the achievement of economic efficiency and environmental benefits, particularly in the countries of eastern Europe and in the Soviet republics.

I will place a copy of the charter and the concluding document of the conference in the Library of the House.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of fossil-fuelled power stations have been fitted with flue gas desulphurisation equipment in each EC member state in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department does not have this information.

Research and Development

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has to strengthen his Department's research and development programme in the energy efficiency field after the current financial year.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We will continue to develop the best practice programme which started in 1989. Expenditure on research, development, demonstration and dissemination of energy efficiency technology is planned to increase by some 14 per cent. in the coming financial year, and by further amounts in each of the succeeding two years.

The continuation of the development of best practice is in line with our commitments under the Environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" and with the recent recommendations by the Advisory Council on Research and Development and the Advisory Council on Science and Technology.

Gas Purification

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what evaluation he has made of the Haldor Topsoe SNOX flue gas purification plant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department is aware of a large number of flue gas purification processes. It is the responsibility of plant operators to choose the most cost-effective means of meeting statutory limits on gaseous and other emissions.

Kozlodny Power Station

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the forms of assistance being provided by the British nuclear electricity industry via the World Association of Nuclear Operators for safety improvements, repairs and training at the Kozlodny nuclear power station in Bulgaria; how this aid is co-ordinated with the technical and financial assistance being arranged for Bulgaria by the G-24 group of nations; and when and under what conditions he expects Kozlodny to meet WANO safety standards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In response to recommendations from the G7 London summit in July 1991, the G24 group of countries has recently agreed procedures for co-ordinating the programmes of nuclear safety assistance which are being provided to central and eastern Europe by individual member countries and international organisations. The overall objective of the G24 assistance is to help the countries of central and eastern Europe to exercise their responsibilities in nuclear safety in an informed and effective manner in conformity with best international practice. The EC emergency assistance programme for Bulgaria will now fit within this co-ordination framework.

The World Association of Nuclear Operators is managing two aspects of the emergency programme of nuclear safety assistance to Bulgaria financed under the European Community's regional PHARE programme for 1991. These comprise urgent "housekeeping" measures to improve the physical condition of the older VVER 230 units at Kozloduy nuclear power plant and ensure the effective operation of safety systems, and a twinning programme under which western operators are providing guidance on operational safety improvements. In addition WANO is overseeing a six-month programme of generic design safety studies on the VVER 230.

An engineer from Scottish Nuclear is a member of the "housekeeping" team. Nuclear Electric has provided a quality assurance expert to assist in the implementation of the six-month programme and expects to send two more experts to Kozloduy in the new year. The United Kingdom nuclear industry is bidding for contracts under the six-month programme. The United Kingdom Government have also provided two experts to assist the European Commission with overall supervision of its programme of assistance.

Under the same emergency programme a consortium of EC safety authorities is undertaking safety analysis of the Kozloduy reactors and providing assistance to the Bulgarian regulatory authority. The UKAEA and the nuclear installations inspectorate are members of this consortium.

Decisions on further action to be taken to improve the safety of the reactors are the responsibility of the Bulgarian Government.

Wood Fuel

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, what progress has been made since the "Wood: Fuel for Thought" conference in Bristol in October to exploit short-term arable coppice as a wood fuel.

Mr. Moynihan: I can today announce the setting up of the farm wood fuel and energy project in which five farms will grow short-rotation arable coppice as a commercial enterprise to produce wood fuel. The farmers who have agreed to participate are:

John Willmer Esq. of Clanfield, Oxford
Brian Maggs Esq. of Compton Dando, Bristol

Robert Goodwin Esq. of Kelvedon, Colchester
Christopher Barnes Esq. of Morebath, Tiverton and
Lord Falmouth of Tregothnan, Truro

R. H. and R. W. Clutton, chartered surveyors and land agents, will be assisting these farmers to establish this energy crop and in due course will identify energy markets for the wood fuel.

The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service will independently monitor the commercial viability of these enterprises in order to inform other farmers interested in arable coppice. Environmental Research Limited will be carrying out an assessment of the environmental impact of the crop. I expect this project to be the first step in the realisation of the very significant potential for energy crops in the United Kingdom.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Security Service

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the newly appointed head of the Security Service will meet hon. Members of Parliament formally to discuss her job.

Mr. Kenneth Ba[illegible]: The Security Service Act 1989 placed on a statutory footing the previous convention, under which the Director General of the Security Service was regarded as responsible to Ministers for the work of the service, and Ministers were in turn accountable to Parliament. There are no plans for any change in this framework.

Safer Cities Campaign

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration was given by his Department to *(a)* Swansea and *(b)* Cardiff in regard to involving those cities in his safer cities campaign.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office safer cities programme does not extend to Wales and consequently Cardiff and Swansea were not eligible for consideration. Separate arrangements for providing support for local crime prevention activity apply in Wales.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the cities in the United Kingdom which were eligible under the criteria for the safer cities campaign and the figure granted to date to each of these cities.

Mr. John Patten: The following is a list of the 20 local authority areas in England selected for inclusion in the Home Office safer cities programme showing the amount of grant approved up to 17 December 1991 in support of local crime prevention activity:

Area	*Grant approved*
Birmingham	916,000
Bradford	966,000
Bristol	984,000
Coventry	939,000
Derby	[1]nil
Hartlepool	696,000
Hull	602,000
Leicester	[2]nil
Middlesbrough	[1]nil
Nottingham	793,000
Rochdale	655,000
Salford	697,000
Sunderland	586,000
Wirral	762,000
Wolverhampton	792,000
London Boroughs	
Hammersmith and Fulham	[3]nil
Islington	853,000
Lewisham	1,031,000
Tower Hamlets	539,000
Wandsworth	531,000

[1] Project established October 1991.
[2] Project established September 1991.
[3] Project established December 1991.

The safer cities programme in Scotland and the safer towns initiative in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Scottish Office and Northern Ireland Office respectively.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any towns which were not formally in possession of city status were *(a)* considered and *(b)* offered involvement in the safer cities campaign.

Mr. John Patten: The term "safer cities" is a working title intended to denote the programme's concentration on inner-city and similar urban areas. All 57 district, metropolitan district and London borough council areas in England covered by the urban programme were considered for possible inclusion in the safer cities programme: a number of those invited to join, and in which safer cities projects have subsequently been established, do not have city status.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been *(a)* budgeted, *(b)* allocated and *(c)* paid out in respect of the safer cities campaign in the present financial year.

Mr. John Patten: In 1991-92 the estimate of the costs of the 20 local projects in the Home Office safer cities programme is £7·1 million. Of this £5·1 million is for grants to support local crime prevention activity all of which has been allocated to project areas. As at 9 December, £3·8 million of this grant money had been paid out or firmly committed to local crime prevention schemes.

City Centre Monitoring

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to the use of closed-circuit television as a means of monitoring city centre activity with a view to targeting the deployment of police resources.

Mr. John Patten: The use of surveillance systems is an operational matter for chief officers. The Home Office crime prevention centre conducted a survey last year of more than 100 CCTV schemes in England, Wales and Scotland, and the results have been circulated to police forces.

Young Offenders

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders were transferred from Hewell Grange to the young offender institution at Hatfield during September 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: Twenty one.

Closed-circuit Television

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been undertaken by or for his Department on the use of closed-circuit television in regard to criminal activity.

Mr. John Patten: Research is being undertaken by the Home Office on the effect of closed-circuit television on public order and the level of crime committed on the streets in Birmingham city centre.

Refugees

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for the issue of a travel document to a refugee residing in the United Kingdom who has the status of exceptional leave to remain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office certificates of identity are issued at the discretion of the Secretary of State and on payment of a fee of £15 to overseas nationals who have exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom where it can be shown that normal passport facilities have been refused by the authorities of their country of nationality or where it would be unreasonable to expect them to apply for national passports. A certificate of identity can be used as a travel document if recognised by the country of destination. People recognised as refugees under the terms of the United Nations refugees convention would normally be issued on request with a United Nations travel document.

Private Security Industry

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are being made for the regulation of the private security industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government believe that access to criminal records would be an essential ingredient of any statutory scheme for the regulation of the private security industry. They have, however, accepted the recommendation of the recent report on the scrutiny of criminal records that there should be no further extension of the arrangements for access to these records in advance of their computerisation. This is not expected to be completed until the mid-1990s. It is the Government's intention to publish a consultation paper towards the end of next year outlining our proposals for new disclosure arrangements.

For this reason alone, therefore, it is not appropriate at this time to consider statutory regulation of the private security industry. Other factors, however, also support the case against statutory regulation. The present level of offending by private security personnel does not justify the introduction of an inevitably expensive and bureaucratic licensing system. And although the Government recognise concerns about the quality of service provided by some private security firms, it believes that issues such as quality, training and wages are fundamentally matters for the industry and its customers. The Government therefore believe that the most appropriate position is for the industry to strengthen the existing self-regulation mechanisms.

The industry has already made considerable progress in self-regulation. Recent important developments include: the merging of the National Supervisory Council for Intruder Alarms and the security systems inspectorate of the British Security Industry Association to form the National Approved Council for Security Systems; the formation by the International Professional Security Association of the British Security Registration Board; and the involvement of the International Professional Security Association in plans to reconstitute the manned services inspectorate of the British Security Industry Association to make it independent of its parent body, thereby allowing it to offer its inspection services to non-members of the British Security Industry Association, as well as to members.

The adoption of standards, and the invocation of sanctions against those who fail to meet them, are an important part of the the industry's work in this area.

The Government commend the industry's efforts to develop self-regulation, and in particular the projected enhancement of the manned services inspectorate. The extent to which the new arrangements achieve their objectives will, however, be monitored and the position will be reviewed when computerisation of the criminal records has been achieved.

The Government reserve the option of requiring the industry to pay for any statutory regulation from its own resources should self-regulation prove ineffective.

The Government's position is set out more fully in a background paper which has been placed in the Library and which is being sent to all interested parties in the industry and to the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Terrorist Firebomb Attacks

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing the number of terrorist firebomb attacks there have been in each year since 1973 in *(a)* London and *(b)* Great Britain; what was the amount of damage caused, the number of persons arrested, charged and convicted, in respect of the attacks; and if he will give the rate of conviction in each year.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The number of terrorist incendiary attacks in each year since 1973 is given in the tables.

	London	*Great Britain*
1973	14	14
1974	18	31
1975	1	—
1976	1	—
1977	6	4
1978	—	—
1979	—	—
1980	1	—
1981	—	—
1982	—	—
1983	—	—
1984	1	1
1985	—	1
1986	—	—
1987	—	—
1988	—	—
1989	—	—
1990	—	—
[1]1991	13	35

[1] To 18 December 1991.

This information relates to Irish and international terrorism; it does not include domestic extremist attacks. The figures given are for the number of locations attacked and not the number of incendiary devices used.

The information requested regarding the amount of damage caused and the convictions of those responsible for carrying out the attacks could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. M. Khan

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the refusal of an extension visa for Dr. M. Khan, Ref. No. TH/23660/91; and whether he will now allow a visa until the Royal College of Surgeons examinations in February.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Dr. Khan came to the United Kingdom on 11 May 1990 as a visitor and was admitted for six months, which is the maximum period under the immigration rules allowed to visitors. He then applied to remain here to resit examinations for the Royal College of Surgeons of England which he had previously failed. That request was granted exceptionally outside the immigration rules. He subsequently asked for further leave to remain to sit examinations—to take place in September 1991—for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow. That application was refused. His subsequent appeal to the independent adjudicator was dismissed and leave to appeal to the immigration appeal tribunal refused. I do not believe I would be justified in affording further exceptional treatment to Dr. Khan, and he should now make arrangements to leave the United Kingdom.

Animals (Scientific Experiments)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an inquiry into the scientific validity of animal experiments in assessing the effects of pesticides upon human health.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is not one of the Ministers responsible for the national and international regulations under which the safety testing of pesticides is required. His responsibility is for controlling the conduct of scientific procedures on living animals. Where validated alternatives to the use of living animals in scientific research for whatever purpose are available, authority under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to use living animals in research will not be granted.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his proposals for the future organisation of the magistrates courts in the light of the Le Vay review.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government have now completed their review of the organisation of the magistrates courts service in England and Wales. In addition, because that review made it timely to do so, they have also considered how responsibility for the service should be allocated within government.

As to organisation, the Government have concluded that, in the light of extensive consultations following the scrutiny of the magistrates courts service and of a study of costs undertaken by independent consultants, it would not be right to bring forward legislative proposals to reconstitute the service as an executive agency. However, there has been a widespread acceptance of the need to modernise the management structure of the service with a view to improving its performance and strengthening lines of accountability while at the same time maintaining the independence of the judicial process and the valuable contribution of local magistrates in the local management of the service.

Some useful first steps have already been taken since the scrutiny. But in order to achieve these aims and to take forward the application to this service of the principles of the citizens charter we propose to work with the service to introduce a range of improvements, upon some of which an early start can be made while others will require legislation. They include progress towards the establishment of an inspectorate, to provide an effective management audit and to promote the spread of best practice; a strengthening and clarification of the management role of magistrates courts committees; the introduction of systematic performance review and planning throughout the service; and a more coherent geographical structure, taking account as necessary of the review of the structure of local government as a whole which has now begun. On the other hand, no immediate change is envisaged in the balance between central and local financing of the service.

It will be important to ensure that the new arrangements are strong and flexible, enabling the service to adapt to changing circumstances while at the same time guaranteeing a satisfactory career structure for court staff, high standards of performance, and effective working relations with other parts of the criminal justice system throughout England and Wales.

As to responsibility, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has concluded that, in the light of the proposals outlined in this answer, it will be appropriate for the responsibilities in relation to the finance, organisation and management of the magistrates courts which are now assigned to the Home Secretary under the Justices of the Peace Act 1979 and related legislation to be exercised from 1 April 1992 by the Lord Chancellor in the same way as he holds those responsibilities for the Crown court. This brings to an end the divided responsibility for the magistracy. My right hon. Friend has also decided that, in these circumstances, it would be appropriate for him to appoint a junior Minister in the Commons in the Lord Chancellor's Department. The appointment will be announced in due course.

The necessary instruments will be brought before Parliament as soon as possible. I shall continue to answer to Parliament for the criminal and procedural law of the magistrates courts in the same way as for the Crown courts. The Government intend to set out these proposals in more detail in a White Paper and to continue to consult interested bodies as necessary.

Metropolitan Police (Early Retirement)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police officers, and of what rank, have taken early retirement, for medical or for other reasons, while under investigation into possible disciplinary offences within the last two years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This is a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. However, information is given in his annual reports about the number of officers who resigned before disciplinary charges could be preferred against them, the number of these officers who were medically discharged and the number of officers who resigned while under investigation for disciplinary matters.

Stop and Search (Ethnic Origins)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in respect of the provisions of section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, whether he intends to make public information on the ethnic origin of those stopped and searched by police officers in the Metropolitan district.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Details of the information that will be published in respect of the provisions of section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 are under consideration.

Irish Citizens

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what record is kept of the citizens of the Irish Republic who come to live in the United Kingdom, but have little or no means of support.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We are not aware of any such record.

Terrorism and Crime Guide

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to ban the sale in the United Kingdom of the guide to terrorism and crime computer disk version three and the soon to be released updated version four; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the police, in the first instance, and the Crown prosecution service to consider whether to bring proceedings against a particular publication contravening the criminal law.

Royal Pardons

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many royal pardons have been granted in each of the past five years.

Mr. John Patten: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number of free pardons granted*
1986	28
1987	41
1988	39
1989	50
1990	47
[1]1991	37

[1] To 18 December.

These figures are in respect of summary convictions. No free pardons have been granted in the past five years to persons convicted after a trial on indictment.

HEALTH

Dental Treatment

Mr. Terry Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he will publish the latest information in the possession of his Department as to the coverage of dental treatment on the national health service; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) how many dentists, since the inception of the new dental contract, in each regional health authority have ceased to offer treatment on the national health services, are still offering normal treatment on the national health service and have reduced the range of treatment they offer on the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not available to make a direct comparison between the NHS services dentists were offering before the introduction of the new dental contract and those they are offering now. However, the table shows the numbers of dentists practising now.

The number of dentists at 30 September 1990 compared with the number of dentists at 30 September 1991 for each Regional Health Authority is as follows:

Regional health authority	*Number of dentists at 30 September*		*Difference*
	1990	*1991*	
Northern	869	881	12
Yorkshire	1,094	1,092	−2
Trent	1,218	1,257	39
East Anglia	605	604	−1
North West Thames	1,512	1,436	−76
North East Thames	1,226	1,222	−4
South East Thames	1,341	1,334	−7
South West Thames	1,240	1,242	2
Wessex	949	939	−10
Oxford	826	828	2
South Western	1,209	1,217	8
West Midlands	1,395	1,396	1
Mersey	764	765	1
North Western	1,232	1,238	6
Total	15,480	15,451	−29

Hospitals (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if NHS trust hospitals are covered by Crown immunity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Crown immunity, with the exception of a small number of limited immunities, has been removed from health service bodies, including NHS trusts. Details are contained in a health notice, HN(90)27, "The NHS and Community Care Act 1990 Removal of Crown Immunities", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Children's Homes

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to ensure that local authorities employ mature women who have brought up a family, or have direct experience thereof, to supervise children's homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are sure that many mature women could play a more substantial role in the management of children's homes.

It is for authorities to decide the qualifications and experience that are appropriate for posts carrying different responsibilities within a home's staff establishment and to organise recruitment and/or training accordingly.

Training opportunities have been enhanced by a number of initiatives taken by the Department, including acceptance of the recommendations in Sir William Utting's report "Children in the public care" that all heads of residential children's homes should be professionally qualified.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was spent on the NHS in absolute and in real terms in 1979; spent on the NHS in 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1978-79 gross NHS expenditure in England was £6·5 billion—£17·7 billion in today's prices, 1991-92. This year gross expenditure on the NHS is expected to be £26·6 billion, a real-terms increase over the period of over 50 per cent.

National Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected capital spending in the national health service in the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 5 November 1991, c. 313-14]:* The amounts in column 1 of the table will be allocated to the English regional health authorities for capital spending in 1992-93. Their residents will also benefit from the capital investment which first wave national health service trusts are authorised to undertake —column 2. The regional provision for capital spending taking the main allocations for regional health authorities and national health service trusts together is shown in column 3.

Region	*(1) Regional health authority main allocation £ million*	*(2) First wave trust capital £ million*	*(3) Capital investment in region £ million*
Northern	92·5	4·2	96·8
Yorkshire	85·7	35·0	120·7
Trent	131·6	17·0	148·5
East Anglian	53·6	7·1	60·7
North West Thames	89·4	12·3	101·7
North East Thames	93·4	21·0	114·4
South East Thames	96·0	14·3	110·3
South West Thames	76·4	20·2	96·7
Wessex	82·4	6·7	89·1
Oxford	68·2	0·4	68·6
South Western	68·3	39·1	107·4
West Midlands	145·1	16·6	161·6
Mersey	45·4	31·4	76·8
North Western	106·7	17·9	124·6
ALL REGIONS	1,234·8	243·2	1,478·0

The external financing limits for individual national health service trusts are being announced separately.

St. Stephen's Hospitals

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current position with the building and equipping programme of St. Stephen's hospital, London, and the expected changes in the scale of operation of other London hospitals whose patients will be treated at the new hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: The construction of the new Westminster and Chelsea hospital on the site of the former St. Stephen's hospital is proceeding on schedule. The building should be completed in November 1992 and be fully operational by April 1993. It will replace facilities currently provided by the Westminster hospital and the Westminster children's hospital. Sir Bernard Tomlinson is currently heading a study group, commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, which is looking into the future provision of health care across London.

Census Information

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prosecutions have been brought under the provisions of the Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991 or any other enactment for the unlawful disclosure of census information.

Mr. Dorrell: No prosecutions have so far been brought with respect to unlawful disclosure of 1991 census information. One enumerator was prosecuted following the 1971 census.

Sellafield (Childhood Cancer)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment to report on its review of the incidence of childhood cancer in the vicinity of Sellafield.

Mr. Dorrell: As my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) announced on 10 January 1990 at column *662*, and 3 May 1991 at column *369*, since 1989 the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment—COMARE—has been reviewing epidemiological and dosimetric data which have become available since the publication of the Black advisory

group's report to Government in 1984[1], and of COMARE's first report in 1986[2]. Copies of both reports are in the Library. Much of this information has become available as a result of studies commissioned by the Government. In addition, some documents relating to radioactive discharges from Sellafield in the early 1950s have been drawn to the attention of COMARE. A preliminary review of all this information has caused COMARE to ask the National Radiological Protection Board to produce a comprehensive reassessment of dose and risk estimates in respect of the local population. I am advised that this reassessment will substantially delay COMARE's review and the completion of a final report to Government.

[1]Investigation of the Possible Increased Incidence of Cancer in West Cumbria. Report of the Independent Advisory Group. Chairman: Sir Douglas Black. HMSO (1984).

[2]Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) First Report. The implications of the new data on the releases from Sellafield in the 1950s for the conclusions of the Report on the Investigation of the possible Increased Incidence of Cancer in West Cumbria. Chairman: Professor M. Bobrow. HMSO (1986).

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the amount of money in pounds sterling repaid to his Department under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme and the number of companies which have made these payments.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The current pharmaceutical price regulation scheme was introduced from 1 October 1986. Since that date, there has been a total of 102 repayments, from 38 companies. The total amount repaid is £61,379,286.

Prescriptions

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the gross profit, expressed in pence per prescription, paid to pharmacist contractors in England and Wales for each of the last 10 years at actual and constant prices.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The amounts due for profit which include interest on capital employed are shown in the table. The Pharmacists' Review Panel report on profit recommended that the pure profit percentage should be reduced from 2 to 1 per cent. This was implemented in 1988-89. Details are as follows:

Year	*Interest*		*Pure Profit*	
	Actual Prices	*Constant Prices*[2]	*Actual Prices*	*Constant Prices*[2]
1981	8·61	15·43	6·81	12·20
1982	8·64	14·45	7·49	12·53
1983	8·00	12·79	8·33	13·32
1984	8·50	12·94	8·63	13·14
1985[1]	11·00	16·75	8·91	13·57
1985-86	11·19	16·14	9·60	13·85
1986-87	10·62	14·84	10·12	14·37
1987-88	10·37	13·74	11·02	14·60
1988-89	13·18	16·29	6·01	7·43

[1] 1 January 1985 to 31 March 1985

[2] Constant Prices calculated using 1991-92 prices as the base.

Following the new arrangements for remuneration of pharmacists from April 1989 onwards, estimates of the amounts due for profit are no longer calculated as separate items of remuneration.

Insulin Injections

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the comparative cost over two years of an insulin injection pen with appropriate needle and a disposable insulin syringe based upon two injections per day.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is not possible to make a detailed cost comparison in the way requested because of variations in patients' dosages and injecting habits and the types and pack sizes of insulin and their costs. On the basis of information submitted by the manufacturers to the Department, assuming no reuse of needles and a pen system that lasts for less than two years, the cost of an injection pen system would exceed the current cost of disposable syringes.

Community Care

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which consideration by a health authority of the establishment of a village community for mentally handicapped patients is consistent with his policy on community care.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has recently reviewed its policy on residential and other services for people with learning disabilities—mental handicap—in the light of the community care reforms and issued draft guidance for consultation. This envisages village communities as being an acceptable but not essential part of a range of community based residential settings. We are currently considering comments received as a result of this consultation.

St. Charles Youth Treatment Centre

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proposals he has to change the security status of the St. Charles youth treatment centre, Brentwood;

(2) what is the purpose of his proposal to erect a 17 ft wire fence outside the 40 ft perimeter wall of St. Charles youth treatment centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Local management is considering the need for an open facility to support secure units on the Brentwood site, but the Department has yet to receive recommendations. We are having exploratory discussions with local managers about whether or not to build a fence and if so how extensive that should be. The local planning authority has been approached about an option to enclose the site entirely. Its views are awaited.

North East Thames Regional Health Authority

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of funding of the North East Thames regional health authority broken down by region between 1978-79 and 1991-92; and the projected funding for 1992-93.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* Information derived from the annual accounts of the health authorities comprising the North East Thames region is shown in table 1.

Over a period expenditure figures will exceed fundings allocated because in meeting their expenditure health authorities have the use of additional resources such as local receipts. Basic revenue allocations for the region for 1991-92 and 1992-93 are currently £1,332·5 million and £1,448·2 million respectively. Allocations to district health authorities within the region are a matter for the North East Thames regional health authority.

Table II shows analysis of the region's total expenditure figures to authority levels for the years since the establishment of district health authorities—1 April 1982.

Table I
North East Thames region total revenue expenditure on Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS)

	£ thousands (cash)	£ thousands (at 1991-92 prices)
1978-79	413,284	1,114,783
1979-80	488,198	1,128,601
1980-81	636,251	1,243,024
1981-82	700,172	1,247,517
1982-83	800,677	1,332,015
1983-84	841,130	1,337,524
1984-85	881,326	1,333,686
1985-86	914,188	1,311,915
1986-87	976,100	1,354,445
1987-88	1,048,946	1,380,297
1988-89	1,178,457	1,445,224
1989-90	1,276,820	1,472,084
1990-91[1]	1,373,232	1,469,359

[1] Latest available year. Provisional figure (as yet subject to audit).

Table II
North East Thames region
Total revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services (HCHS)

	1982-83		1983-84		1984-85	
	Cash £'000s	At 1990-91 prices £'000s	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s
North East Thames RHA	22,442	37,335	23,393	37,198	26,531	40,149
Basildon and Thurrock DHA	42,407	70,549	44,495	70,754	47,215	71,449
Mid Essex DHA	35,555	59,150	38,426	61,103	40,099	60,681
North East Essex DHA	48,242	80,256	51,301	81,576	56,123	84,929
West Essex DHA	29,864	49,682	30,831	49,026	32,568	49,284
Southend DHA	35,085	58,368	38,422	61,097	40,589	61,422
Barking, Havering and Brentwood DHA	62,219	103,508	65,669	104,424	68,424	103,544
Hampstead DHA	58,525	97,363	61,308	97,489	65,016	98,387
Bloomsbury DHA	107,685	179,146	112,417	178,760	116,946	176,971
Islington DHA	42,185	70,179	42,928	68,262	44,185	66,864
City and Hackney DHA	70,791	117,769	75,294	119,729	78,683	119,069
Newham DHA	30,613	50,928	32,282	51,333	34,180	51,724
Tower Hamlets DHA	60,464	100,589	64,197	102,083	64,748	97,981
Enfield DHA	30,392	50,560	32,088	51,025	33,473	50,654
Haringey DHA	36,483	60,693	37,498	59,627	38,127	57,696
Redbridge DHA	32,058	53,332	33,491	53,256	35,347	53,490
Waltham Forest DHA	55,667	92,608	57,090	90,782	59,072	89,392
TOTAL	800,677	1,332,015	841,130	1,337,524	881,326	1,333,686

	1985-86		1986-87		1987-88	
	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s
North East Thames RHA	28,508	40,911	30,859	42,820	17,678	23,262
Basildon and Thurrock DHA	43,163	61,941	47,975	66,571	52,061	68,507
Mid Essex DHA	42,665	61,227	53,145	73,745	57,589	75,781
North East Essex DHA	55,571	79,748	54,641	75,820	61,447	80,857
West Essex DHA	36,868	52,908	40,300	55,921	44,206	58,170
Southend DHA	42,657	61,215	46,608	64,674	52,045	68,485
Barking, Havering and Brentwood DHA	72,033	103,372	76,018	105,483	85,557	112,584
Hampstead DHA	55,633	79,837	59,334	82,332	64,957	85,476
Bloomsbury DHA	122,450	175,723	128,901	178,864	138,578	182,353
Islington DHA	49,194	70,596	51,459	71,405	56,266	74,040
City and Hackney DHA	81,517	116,982	87,558	121,496	92,785	122,095
Newham DHA	41,765	59,935	42,995	59,660	46,803	61,588
Tower Hamlets DHA	67,183	96,412	71,231	98,841	77,089	101,441
Enfield DHA	38,144	54,739	39,918	55,391	43,485	57,221
Haringey DHA	46,312	66,460	49,277	68,377	52,246	68,750
Redbridge DHA	37,799	54,244	40,890	56,739	44,391	58,414
Waltham Forest DHA	52,726	75,665	54,991	76,306	61,763	81,273
TOTAL	914,188	1,311,915	976,100	1,354,445	1,048,946	1,380,297

	1988-89		1989-90		1990-91	
	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s	Cash £'000s	At 1991-92 prices £'000s
North East Thames RHA	20,723	25,414	22,791	26,276	26,710	28,580
Basildon and Thurrock DHA	59,287	72,708	65,015	74,958	69,265	74,114
Mid Essex DHA	63,732	78,159	68,785	79,304	73,806	78,972
North East Essex DHA	68,573	84,096	74,673	86,093	79,182	84,725
West Essex DHA	50,079	61,415	55,172	63,609	59,231	63,377
Southend DHA	58,464	71,698	64,492	74,355	71,078	76,053
Barking, Havering and Brentwood DHA	93,995	115,273	98,707	113,802	106,172	113,604
Hampstead DHA	74,566	91,445	80,152	92,410	89,477	95,740
Bloomsbury DHA[1]	155,397	190,574	164,928	190,150	—	—
Islington DHA[1]	62,884	77,119	69,701	80,360	246,389	263,636
City and Hackney DHA	104,893	128,638	112,469	129,669	119,894	128,287
Newham DHA	52,457	64,332	56,489	65,128	62,356	66,721
Tower Hamlets DHA	87,743	107,605	96,389	111,130	102,350	109,515
Enfield DHA	48,861	59,922	52,316	60,317	56,467	60,420
Haringey DHA	56,426	69,199	64,093	73,895	70,016	74,917
Redbridge DHA	50,488	61,917	54,559	62,903	57,580	61,611
Waltham Forest DHA	69,889	85,710	76,089	87,725	83,259	89,087
TOTAL	1,178,457	1,445,224	1,276,820	1,472,084	1,373,232	1,469,359

[1] Bloomsbury and Islington DHA from 1990-91.

Source:

Annual accounts of the regional Health Authority and the district health authorities comprising the North East Thames region.

Notes to the table:

1. 1990-91 figures are provisional (as yet subject to audit).
2. Figures have been expressed at 1991-92 prices by the use of Gross Domestic Product deflators.
3. Expenditure on HCHS covers all services directly managed by the health authorities including hospital, patient transport (i.e. ambulance), blood transfusion and other services.
4. The pattern of expenditure at district levels varies between 1984-85 and 1985-86 reflecting a change in the methodology for determining the fundings and the accounting arrangements for long-stay patients in the region.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on national health trust hospitals.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 3 December 1991, c. 111]:* The external financing limits for 1992-93 for the 57 NHS trusts which have been operational since 1 April 1991 and 98 NHS trusts which are to become operational on 1 April 1992 are set out in the tables. The limits do not include provision for 1991-92 outturn adjustments, resource management funding, or supra-regional developments which will be added subsequently.

Capital expenditure by NHS trusts forms part of the public expenditure provision in the health programme. The NHS and Community Care Act 1990 provides no power for the NHS management executive to fund NHS trusts directly or to give them cash limits. NHS trusts can obtain funding only from the income they receive from purchasers or from borrowing. An annual external financing limit—EFL—controls access by NHS trusts to external finance. The EFL is a net financing concept measured by the new loans taken out by the NHS trust less loans repaid plus or minus changes in deposits.

First wave external financing limits 1992-93

NHS Trust	External financing limit £000
Anglian Harbours	5,235
Norfolk Ambulances	1,082
Broadgreen Hospital	−763
Chester and Halton Community	−54
Crew Mid Cheshire Hospitals	−68
Cardio/Thor. Cen. Liverpool	118
Royal Liverpool Childrens	−900
Royal Liverpool University Hospital	437
St. Helens and Knowsley	5,771
Wirral Hospital	2,961
Royal London Hospital	5,198
North Middlesex Hospital	−1,396
Royal Free Hampstead	−780
Royal National Orthopaedic	381
Royal National Nose, Throat and Ear	964
Southend Hospital	1,504
Freeman Hospital	−1,516
Newcastle Mental Health	−422
Northumbria Ambulance	809
Central Manchester Hospital	5,235
Christie Hospital	768
Hillingdon Hospital	495
Mount Vernon Hospital	4,270
Central Middlesex Hospital	−1,994
North Herts Acute and Community	60
Nuffield Orthopaedic	−600
Guys and Lewisham	35,937
United Bristol Healthcare	2,622
Cornwall Community	−333
Cornwall Mental Health	100
East Gloucestershire	3,166
East Somerset	−920
South Devon Health Care	4,563
West Somerset Acute and Comm.	6,259
Weston Area	2,087
Northern Devon	1,418
Croydon Community	873
Croydon Mental Handicap	362
Kingston Hospital	1,455
Epsom Health Care	−411
Royal Surrey	1,019

NHS Trust	External financing limit £000
Homewood	1,042
St. Helier	2,268
Doncaster Royal and Montagu	1,129
Lincolnshire Ambulance	855
Northern General Sheffield	6,584
Royal National Rheumatic	479
West Dorset Community	895
West Dorset General	1,553
West Dorset Mental Health	1,831
Mid Staffs (1st) Community	1,557
Mid Staffs Mental Health	−4,116
Rugby District	9,655
Walsall Hospital	1,709
Bradford Hospitals	10,812
Leeds General Infirmary	−4,384
St. James's University	8,963
Hinchingbrooke Hospital	381
Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospitals	−2,553
East Suffolk Community (Allington)	92
Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology	−758
Liverpool Community and Priority	414
Mersey Ambulance	−218
Southport And Formby Hospital	−1,168
Aintree Hospitals (Walton and Fazakerly)	243
Liverpool Obstetrics and Gynaecology	3,946
St. Helens and Knowsley Community	635
The Walton Centre for Neurosciences	−700
Basildon and Thurrock Acute	−3,347
Forest Healthcare	−1,954
North Essex (Rivers) Healthcare	−3,982
Essex Ambulance	−89
Mid Essex Hospital	−3,908
Southend Community	−705
North East Essex Services for Learning Difficulties	−264
North East Essex Mental Health Severalls Hospital	−1,341
Cleveland Ambulance	62
North Tees Health	−1,626
Northgate Unit Morpeth	209
Royal Victoria Hospital, Newcastle	1,597
Gateshead Community	−163
South Tees Acute Hospitals	−1,477
Burnley Health Care	−175
Lancaster Priority	−360
Wrightington Health	−351
Lancaster Acute	164
Royal Oldham Hospital/Community	−1,891
Bedford Hospital	−915
Ealing Hospital	−1,255
Parkside Community	−1,836
Wellhouse Edgware and Barnet	−1,796
Ashford Hospital	−998
East Hertfordshire	−1,793
Harrow Community	272
Hillingdon Community	−269
Luton and Dunstable	−1,773
Barnet Community	−3,946
North West Herts Mental Health (Horizon)	−2,987
South Bedfordshire Comm and Mental Health	−511
North West Herts Priority Unit (Dacorum and St. Albans)	−1,696
Harefield Hospital	−900
Aylesbury Vale Priority	127
Heatherwood and Wexham Park	528
Milton Keynes General	−819
Milton Keynes Community	−80
East Berkshire Mental Health	−297
Eastbourne Acute	−2,345
Brighton Community and Mental Health	−855
Maidstone Priority	−69
Thameslink Dartford Priority	−358
West Lambeth Priority	4,010
Hastings and Rother Healthcare	3,080
Optimum Community Lewisham and Southwark	−278
Ravensbourne Priority	247
Avon Ambulance	−52
Exeter Community	449
Southmead Health	8,271
Frenchay Healthcare	1,872
Plymouth Community	646
Devon Ambulance	316
Royal Cornwall Hospital	4,203
Phoenix Trust	204
Gloucestershire Ambulance	−111
Frimley Park Hospital	10,484
St. Peters Hospital, Chertsey	−691
(Weybourne) North West Surrey Community	2,809
Mulberry Trust (South Lincolnshire Mental Health)	−407
Weston Park Hospital	−442
City Nottingham Hospital	7,981
Nottingham Community	−361
Children's Hospital, Sheffield	−860
Doncaster Priority	−730
Central Sheffield University Hospitals	−1,254
Bassetlaw Hospital and Community	2,968
Barnsley Community and Priority	−833
South Yorkshire Ambulance	−332
Wiltshire Healthcare	956
Poole Hospital	649
Royal United Hospital, Bath	1,434
Bath Mental Health	3,145
Bath and Wells Healthcare (Avon and Somerset)	−301
Bournemouth and Christchurch Acute	−1,392
East Dorset Community	2,272
Walsgrave Hospital, Coventry	−2,273
Staffordshire Ambulance	−368
East Birmingham Hospital	4,207
Herefordshire Community	−917
Premier South East Staffordshire Community and Mental Health	−723
South Warwickshire Community	−679
Harrogate Health	2,542
Airedale Health Services	−898
Northallerton Health	−1,317
Bradford Community	89
York Hospitals and Community	−577
Scarborough Healthcare	−1,036

Regional Health Authorities (Revenue Allocation)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce regional health authorities' revenue allocations for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 5 December 1991, c. 199-200]:* The cash-limited general medical services provision for 1992-93 will be £659 million. This covers direct reimbursement to GPs of their expenses on practice staff and premises improvements, the development of computerisation in general practice, and the management of practice funds. I am making today allocations to regional health authorities covering £628 million of that total. The allocations to regions are:

GMS cash-limited allocations 1992-93

	Allocation 1991-92 £ million	Allocation 1992-93 £ million	Real growth per cent.
Northern	33·314	36·414	4·60
Yorkshire	44·458	47·237	1·68
Trent	55·520	59·193	2·02
East Anglian	32·366	34·427	1·79
North West Thames	44·999	48·657	3·47
North East Thames	44·549	48·688	4·58
South East Thames	47·454	51·144	3·14

	Allocation 1991-92 £ million	1992-93 £ million	Real growth per cent.
South West Thames	36·902	39·865	3·38
Wessex	38·773	41·552	2·55
Oxford	34·305	36·627	2·17
South Western	49·454	52·886	2·33
West Midlands	54·318	59·060	4·05
Mersey	28·246	30·208	2·34
North Western	39·381	42·717	3·80
Total	584·039	628·675	3·01

WALES

GPs (Prescribing)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to what variations are to be found in the prescribing patterns of general practitioners in Wales; what is the average inpatient and cash terms; what are the highest and lowest variations of any individual practice; and what variations can be found between similar practices with similar demographic compositions.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on GP prescribing is provided by the prescription pricing division of the Welsh Health Common Services Agency to family health services authorities, which, as part of their responsibilities, examine the cost of GP prescribing, including reasons for variations between GP practices with similar characteristics. However, the information is not collated in such a way as to provide the information my hon. Friend requires, except at disproportionate cost.

I have put work in hand to refine the information system so that it will supplement the standard reports with a faster, more efficient and more detailed service for those who require information to be analysed according to their individual needs.

Vacant Council Properties

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the latest available numbers of vacant council-owned properties for each district council in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information my hon. Friend requires is given in the table:

Local authority vacant dwellings, by district, 1991[1]

	Total vacant dwellings
Clwyd	
Alyn and Deeside	31
Colwyn	34
Delyn	20
Glyndwr	47
Rhuddlan	17
Wrexham Maelor	204
Dyfed	
Carmarthen	14
Ceredigion	41
Dinefwr	14
Llanelli	104
Preseli Pembrokeshire	63
South Pembrokeshire	15
Gwent	
Blaenau Gwent	56
Islwyn	150
Monmouth	92
Newport	81
Torfaen	147
Gwynedd	
Aberconwy	16
Arfon	60
Dwyfor	11
Meirionnydd	15
Ynys Mon	60
Mid Glamorgan	
Cynon Valley	122
Merthyr Tydfil	71
Ogwr	68
Rhondda	26
Rhymney Valley	85
Taff Ely	99
Powys	
Brecknock	—
Montgomeryshire[2]	42
Radnorshire	9
South Glamorgan	
Cardiff	190
Vale of Glamorgan	37
West Glamorgan	
Lliw Valley	42
Neath	72
Port Talbot	171
Swansea	104
Wales	2,430

[1] At 1 April.
[2] Excludes Newtown which is designated as a New Town.

Homelessness

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the latest available numbers for those registered as homeless for each district council in Wales; and what information he has to show separately those who are sleeping rough.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No information is available centrally as to the cause and location of any persons who may be sleeping rough. The number of cases accepted as homeless, within the terms of the Housing Act 1985 and the number of persons associated with these cases, is given in the table:

Incidence of homelessness—quarter ending 30 September 1991

Welsh districts	Cases accepted	Persons involved in cases accepted
Aberconwy	8	21
Alyn and Deeside	42	114
Arfon	9	20
Blaenau Gwent	73	176
Brecknock	37	114
Cardiff	518	1,180
Carmarthen	23	56
Ceredigion	45	106
Colwyn	18	67
Cynon Valley	96	261

Welsh districts	Cases accepted	Persons involved in cases accepted
Delyn	71	169
Dinefwr	48	107
Dwyfor	18	48
Glyndwr	11	19
Islwyn	51	115
Llanelli	52	149
Lliw Valley	27	77
Meirionnydd	26	72
Merthyr Tydfil	32	84
Monmouth	32	88
Montgomeryshire	32	74
Neath	79	140
Newport	237	628
Ogwr	158	428
Port Talbot	24	69
Preseli Pembrokeshire	29	70
Radnorshire	6	17
Rhondda	51	134
Rhuddlan	14	48
Rhymney Valley	28	71
South Pembrokeshire	21	45
Swansea	191	429
Taff-Ely	57	161
Torfaen	135	276
Vale of Glamorgan	113	323
Wrexham Maelor	94	179
Ynys Mon	8	21
Wales total	2,514	6,156

Plas Newydd (Grants)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the grants awarded by the Historic Buildings Council of Wales to *(a)* the Marquess of Anglesey and *(b)* the National Trust in respect of Plas Newydd during the last 10 years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Department grant aids the costs of restoring eligible historic buildings on the advice of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales. The council itself does not make grants. In the last 10 years the following grants have been awarded:

(a) Marquess of Anglesey—1987—£892 (repair of Nelson Monument).

(b) National Trust (for Plas Newydd—1985—£102,100 (repair of roof, rainwater goods and chimney heads).

Sunday Trading

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received from Wales about Sunday trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Seven letters have been received by the Welsh Office on this subject.

Chernobyl (Lambs)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what area of Gwynedd remains restricted as regards lamb sales to market as a consequence of the Chernobyl nuclear power station explosion in 1985; what the total cost in compensation has been since in each year since 1985; and what is the scientific prognosis for 1992 grass growth and saleable lamb meat production in Gwynedd.

Mr. David Hunt: As the question refers to the post-Chernobyl situation in Wales, I am responding to the hon. Gentleman.

The area of Gwynedd currently under restriction comprises approximately 75,483 hectares—about 186,519 acres. This compares to about 300,890 hectares—about 743,500 acres—when restrictions were first introduced in June 1986. A copy of a map illustrating the current restricted area which accompanied a recent press release was placed in the Library of the House on 16 December 1991.

The total cost in compensation paid to farmers in the restricted area of North Wales, in each of the years since the introduction of restrictions is as follows:

	£
1986-87	2,638,691
1987-88	679,228
1988-89	578,868
1989-90	620,069
1990-91	613,548
[1]1991-92	460,452
Total	5,590,856

[1] (to 29 November).

Grass growth within the restricted area has not been affected to any significant degree by the Chernobyl deposition. However, the amount of radiocaesium in the root matt and surrounding soil which is taken up by vegetation can vary from year to year. This is due to the complex interactions of several factors such as weather, soil type, drainage and sheep grazing habits which are still the subject of research. It is not possible therefore to forecast the radiocaesium levels for 1992.

The arrangements operated from the movement and marketing of sheep from the restricted area have proved to be a satisfactory way of enabling farmers to continue with normal husbandry and marketing practices whilst ensuring the safety of the food chain. This year fewer than 2 per cent. of sheep leaving the Gwynedd restricted area for movement and marketing have recorded above the safety level of 1,000 Bq/Kg.

My Department will continue to study the results from the monitoring of sheep under the movement and marketing arrangements, and from regular monitoring of sheep at selected sites throughout the area. Assessment of these results has enabled suitable areas to be identified for intensive monitoring, which has made it possible to lift restrictions in two small areas this year. Work will continue to be carried out to achieve further derestriction as soon as it is safe to do so.

Schools Inspectors

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the date of commissioning and terms of reference of the Adams report on the future of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools service in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The report was commissioned on 24 May with the following terms of reference:

To review the role and organisation of HM Inspectorate in Wales in the light of the Government's policies for Education, and the particular character and needs of educational provision in Wales to secure that;

(i) the public at large can be informed about the quality of the education provided by Schools and Colleges;

(ii) funding agencies (including the Funding Councils and Local Education Authorities) can have access to

independent quality assurance advice on which they can rely, drawn from inspection of and reporting upon those institutions and forms of provision to which HMI statutorily have access;

(iii) the management of Schools and, for the foreseeable future, Colleges in the Further Education sector, are supported by a system of quality assurance derived from inspecting and reporting on which they can draw in the exercise of their responsibilities;

(iv) officials, both in the Welsh Office Education Department (WOED) and in other parts of the Welsh Office as necessary and Ministers continue to receive independent advice on education policy issues derived from the evidence of objective inspection.

The review should take into account the existence and future development of other quality audit or assurance arrangements at departmental, local authority funding council—as envisaged in the White Papers—and institutional level and report on how HMI might relate to and interact with them. The review should also consider a widening of the role of HMI to include managerial and value-for-money issues in addition to educational and professional ones.

To examine the feasibility and desirability of different organisational models which could deliver these objectives, assessing and comparing their advantages and disadvantages, considering in particular HMI:

(i) being established wholly independent of Government;

(ii) becoming a Next Steps Agency accountable to the Secretary of State;

(iii) remaining part of the Welsh Office in the way it is now.

As part of that examination to identify for each model:

(i) the implications for staffing (including numbers and grading), for support services and for accommodation;

(ii) its costs;

(iii) the earliest date when it could be implemented and the steps and timetable which would need to be followed (including any changes in legislation which would be required) in order to achieve it.

And in undertaking this review:

(i) to take account of the separate review being undertaken in England;

(ii) to consult WOED and HMI within the Welsh Office;

(iii) to seek guidance as need arises from Ministers, the Permanent Secretary and Deputy Secretaries;

(iv) to submit a preliminary report of progress to the Permanent Secretary within two months, for discussion with him and Deputy Secretaries;

(v) to report to the Permanent Secretary with recommendations within three months.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will extend the period for consultation on groundwater in relation to the Cardiff Bay barrage for a period equivalent to that during which the advertising campaign by the development corporation adjudicated to be misleading by the Advertising Standards Authority was on display.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assurances he has given the Wales region of the National Rivers Authority regarding control of the Blackweir diversion and feeder canal during periods of drought; what discussions he has had with the Cardiff Bay development corporation and Associated British Ports regarding the necessary legal and financial arrangements flowing therefrom; when he anticipates the completion of these agreements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill requires the development corporation, before it commences construction of the barrage, to submit for the approval of the rivers authority details of the steps which it proposes to take to enable it to comply with the authority's water flow requirements. As I explained to the hon. Gentleman on 4 December detailed negotiations between Cardiff Bay development corporation and Associated British Ports are a commercial matter for the two parties.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what date he expects Cardiff Bay development corporation to have complied with the ruling of 6 December 1991 by the Advertising Standards Authority.

Mr. David Hunt: The ASA reported to CBDC's advertising agents on 6 December on complaints about a CBDC poster. The authority considered that using the word "creating" in the phrase "Cardiff Bay—creating a superb waterfront environment", had given the impression that construction of the Cardiff Bay barrage was assured when this was not the case. At the time the poster appeared the barrage had yet to be put forward to Parliament in the form of a Bill. The advertisers were requested to ensure that no implication that the barrage would certainly be built should be given until it had achieved the necessary parliamentary approval. The authority also criticised the breach of confidentiality by which some complainants made public the conclusion of the case before it had been ratified by the ASA council.

The corporation has already complied with the ruling. Its advertising agency have proposed to the ASA an amendment to the copy of the magazine advertisement to read

"The proposed construction of a barrage . . . would create a 500 acre freshwater lake".

The advertising agency has reported to the corporation that the ASA are content for it to continue to use the words

"Creating a superb waterfront environment".

Safer Cities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to the need for the safer cities campaign to be applied to cities in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The safer cities programme was launched by the Home Secretary in 1988 and reached its target of 20 projects this month. It is part of the "Action for Cities" initiative which is concerned with the regeneration of the inner cities in England. Wales did not participate in these programmes, preferring to pursue its own distinct regeneration strategies, such as the valleys programme, and to provide substantial assistance to Welsh communities for crime prevention measures under the urban programme.

A key feature of the safer cities programme is the establishment of multi-agency steering committees in each approved project area to promote and consider crime prevenion measures. In Wales a similar partnership approach has been achieved by providing funds under the urban programme, which has enabled county crime prevention co-ordinators to be appointed in six of the eight counties of Wales. The Welsh Office has also made funds available to the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders to assist with the development of crime prevention initiatives at a local level in south-east

Wales. Crime prevention projects developed under these initiatives may themselves be eligible for funding under the urban programme.

Factory and Office Closures

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give figures for regional development grants and regional selective assistance grants repaid because of factory or office closures within four years of the payment of the grant, separately for each of the past five years.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested would be available only at a disproportionate cost. However, the table gives details of regional selective assistance and regional development grant repayments over the last five years.

	£ thousands
1986-87	2,335
1987-88	2,410
1988-89	1,982
1989-90	1,146
1990-91	370

Usk Barrage Bill

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what account he is taking of the planned Cardiff bay barrage in determining his policy towards the Usk Barrage Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government's policy towards the Usk Barrage Bill will be determined according to its view of the merits of that Bill.

Wentloog Lagoon

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what undertakings were given to the Countryside Council for Wales on 6 December regarding the relative timing for construction of the Wentloog lagoon and the Cardiff bay barrage; what trials regarding the use of the lagoon by wading birds are proposed; what policy considerations relating to the lagoon will govern the decision to effect final closure of the barrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The undertakings given to the Countryside Council for Wales were that the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill will be amended in the course of its passage to reinstate the requirement of the private Bill that if the barrage is built the lagoon must also be built; the lagoon will be constructed before impoundment behind the barrage.

The Cardiff Bay development corporation will be discussing with the Countryside Council for Wales measures for ensuring the maximum effectiveness of the lagoon. The Countryside Council for Wales did not seek undertakings in respect of trials.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the cash granted by his Department this year and in each of the last five years to assist crime prevention initiatives *(a)* in respect of each district and *(b)* in respect of each county council in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The table sets out details of allocations to district and county councils under the urban programme for crime prevention initiatives and a grant to the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders under section 64 of the Health Service and Public Health Act 1968.

I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to see the steady increase in support for crime prevention programmes which includes a nearly sixfold rise in funding in four years.

	1986-87 £	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £	*Total* £
District council							
Cynon Valley BC	—	—	—	—	30,230	32,057	62,287
Taff Ely BC	—	—	—	—	27,500	29,150	56,650
Vale of Glamorgan BC	—	32,500	15,910	17,540	18,412	17,787	102,149
Total	—	32,500	15,910	17,540	76,142	78,994	221,086
County council							
Dyfed	—	—	26,400	30,220	36,062	—	92,682
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	30,000	30,000
Gwynedd	—	—	—	—	—	20,000	20,000
Mid-Glamorgan	—	22,200	31,592	32,233	34,361	22,050	142,436
Powys	—	—	15,829	16,620	25,925	70,390	128,764
West Glamorgan	—	—	26,600	27,930	31,615	31,615	117,760
Total	—	22,200	100,421	107,003	127,963	174,055	531,642
South East Wales (Grant to NACRO)	—	—	9,000	62,629	73,242	50,000	194,871
All Wales total	—	54,700	125,331	187,172	277,347	303,049	947,599

Nebulisers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the South Glamorgan health authority concerning the provisions of additional funding for the supply on loan of nebulisers as standard national health service items on prescription by NHS consultants; what discussions he has had with other health authority chairmen; and what proposals he has for dissemination of information to those requiring nebulisers.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State discussed this matter with health authority chairmen at his meeting with them on 20 November. At our request, all district health authorities are reviewing their policies and practices on the provision of equipment, including nebulisers and investigating individual cases where patients have claimed that they were advised to purchase such equipment. When this exercise has been completed we will consider whether further action is needed.

South Glamorgan TEC

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will be making a grant towards the costs of the new office for the South Glamorgan training and enterprise college's new headquarters.

Mr. David Hunt: No. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment gave on Tuesday 17 December, at columns *125-26*.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will respond to the third report of the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 1990-91, "Arrangements for Handling Serious Outbreaks of Food Poisoning in the light of the Salmonella Outbreak in July and August 1989 in North Wales" (HC Paper 328).

Mr. David Hunt: I am pleased to announce that the response has been published today as Command Paper 1789.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which units in Wales have been invited to prepare applications to become national health service trusts in April 1993.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received proposals from almost half the units in Wales to establish national health service trusts. The "expressions of interest" cover ambulance, community and mental health services as well as acute care. I am inviting the following to prepare formal applications to become NHS trusts in April 1993.

Clwyd Acute North Unit
Clwyd Acute South Unit
Clwyd Community and Mental Health Unit
Gwent Community and Mental Health Unit
South Gwent Health Unit
Ogwr Health Unit
Llanelli-Dinefwr Health Unit
Ceredigion Health Unit
Carmarthen-Dinefwr Health Unit
Powys Health Unit
Llandough Hospital Unit
West Unit, West Glamorgan
East Unit, West Glamorgan
Gwent, Powys and South Glamorgan
Ambulance Service

Taken together, these units involve a total of 82 hospitals, 11,000 beds, and contractual income for 1991-92 of £592 million and point the way forward for the delivery of effective and patient responsive services in Wales.

Applications are due to be submitted in the summer of 1992, but the decision to prepare application rests entirely with the units concerned. My decisions on the submissions will be taken following statutory consultation process.

I was not able to invite an application at this time from Llandudno general hospital. However, I have confidence that the hospital has the potential to become a successful trust and will benefit from having more time to further develop its proposls. I have also deferred decisions on the expressions received from the Cardiff royal group of hospitals and to establish a mental health NHS trust in South Glamorgan to take account of the conclusions which will emerge from the recently announced joint strategic review by South Glamorgan and Mid Glamorgan health authorities.

Including the Pembrokeshire NHS trust with the units now invited to apply for NHS trust status some 65 per cent. of acute services in Wales could be trust based by April 1993.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Gwylim Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress his Advisory Committee for Wales on National Rivers Authority functions has made since its establishment in 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The committee's first annual report has been published today and I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Appointments

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will update his answer of 12 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns *448-58*, to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside listing the full-time and part-time public appointments for which he is responsible, together with the salary and the date when each appointment is due for renewal, including those posts which are not salaried.

Mr. David Hunt *[pursuant to his reply, 12 December 1991, c. 534-39]:* I am now in a position to provide details of non-salaried appointments. These are shown in the table, together with a further list of salaried appointments.

Salaried Appointments

	Salary £	
Regional Flood Defence Committee		
Mr. M. Mclaggan (Chairman)	10,500	31 March 1994
Mr. J. Ap. Simon Jones	3,480	31 March 1994
Mr. W. N. Waters	3,480	31 March 1994
Mr. L. T. Chase	3,480	31 March 1994
Mr. P. J. Perkins	3,480	31 March 1994
Mr. J. W. Hughes	3,480	31 March 1994
Mr. J. Llewellyn	Nil	31 March 1994
National Rivers Authority		
Member		
Professor R. W. Edwards	17,645	30 June 1992
Food From Britain		
Member		
Mr. A. Evans, OBE	1,895	22 September 1992
British Wool Marketing Board		
Member		
Mr. C. Jones	5,675	25 September 1992
Committees of Investigation for Great Britain and for England and Wales		
Member		
Mr. H. Humphreys Jones	73 per day	5 December 1994
Home Grown Cereals Authority		

	Salary £	
Member		
Mr. D. F. R. George	2,660	2 June 1992
Meat and Livestock Commission		
Member		
Mr. R. E. M. Rees, CBE	5,385	1 April 1992
Milk Marketing Board		
Member		
Mr. J. M. Williams	13,600	31 August 1993
Potato Marketing Board		
Member		
Mr. G. Hawkins	3,453	4 November 1994

Non-salaried appointments and date current appointment ends:

Committee on Agricultural Valuation (Wales)

Chairperson:
Mr. J. R. Mathias, BSC—28 February 1993

Members:
Mr. C. H. Arkell, ARICS—28 February 1993
Mr. F. G. Grounds, DL, FSVA, FAAV—28 February 1993
Mr. T. Hammett—28 February 1993
Mr. J. G. Harris, MA, FRICS, CAAV—28 February 1993
Mr. H. B. Knight—28 February 1993
Mr. K. R. McDiormid, FRICS—28 February 1993
Mr. J. A. Pallister, FRICS—28 February 1993
Mr. T. W. Sale, FRICS—28 February 1993
Mr. T. G. Shearman, FRICS, FAAV—28 February 1993
Mr. R. V. Stone, FRICS, FAAV—28 February 1993
Mr. R. Thomas, MA, FRICS, CAAV—28 February 1993
Mr. G. A. Wadsworth—28 February 1993

Agricultural Wages Committee and Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees

Clwyd

Chairperson:
Mr. T. Jones

Members
Mr. J. E. Ambrose, BA, M.Ed—31 December 1992
Mr. I. G. Richards BSc, Eng.MICE—31 December 1991

Dyfed

Chairperson:
Mr. C. F. Hosking—Retiring 31 December 1991

Members:
Mrs. E. D. Williams—31 December 1991
Mrs. E. Jenkins—31 December 1991

Glamorgan

Chairperson:
Mr. D. R. I. Williams

Members:
Mr. P. T. Hart—31 December 1992
Mrs. S. E. L. Reeve—31 December 1992

Gwent

Chairperson:
Vacant

Members:
Mr. J. L. Evans—31 December 1992
Mrs. A. L. Heynes, BA—31 December 1992
Mrs. J. M. Williams—31 December 1991

Gwynedd

Chairperson:
Mr. T. H. Morgan

Members:
Mr. R. R. Harris—31 December 1991
Dr. E. Lloyd Evans—31 December 1992

Powys

Chairperson:
Mr. W. G. Davies

Members:
Ms. G. L. Thomas—31 December 1991
Canon E. C. John, BA—31 December 1992

Note: Chairpersons of AWC's are not appointed by the Secretary of State but by members of the Committee to itself, from one of the two independent members who are Secretary of State appointments.

Forestry Commission Reference/Committee Panel (Wales)

Members:
Mr. P. L. Marriott—29 February 1992
Mr. R. A. Smart, BSc, FICFOR—29 February 1992
Lt. Col. J. D. Stephenson, OBE—29 February 1992
Mr. W. B. Walker, FICFOR—29 February 1992

Urban Investment Grant Appraisal Panel

Chairman:
Sir Melvyn Rosser—31 May 1993

Members:
Mr. P. Laing—31 May 1993
Mr. R. Lacey—31 May 1993
Mr. S. Lindsay—31 May 1993
Mr. D. Schwarz—31 May 1993
Mr. R. James—31 May 1992
Mr. K. Doolan—31 May 1992

Community Health Councils

Clwyd South

Mr. J. Wainright—30 June 1992
Mrs. S. C. Cope—30 June 1992
Mr. D. Northwood—30 June 1994
Mrs. P. M. Wood—30 June 1994

Clwyd North

Mrs. B. A. Thompson—30 June 1992
Mrs. J. B. Thomas—30 June 1992
Mr. D. Elliott—30 June 1994
Mr. H. S. Martin—30 June 1994

Camarthen/Dinefwr

Mr. D. G. Williams—30 June 1992
Mrs. P. M. Carpenter—30 June 1992
Mrs. Z. Jenkins—30 June 1994
Mrs. M. Davies—30 June 1994

Llanelli/Dinefwr

Mr. D. T. James—30 June 1992
Mrs. M. W. Hopkin-Thomas—30 June 1992
Mrs. M. James—30 June 1994
Mr. L. C. Murphy—30 June 1994

Ceredigion

Mr. R. Gardner—30 June 1992
Mr. T. H. Lewis—30 June 1992
Mrs. M. E. Jenkins—30 June 1994
Mrs. I. M. Toney—30 June 1994

Pembrokeshire

Mr. W. R. Stocker—30 June 1992
Miss M. J. Thomas—30 June 1992
Miss N. I. Lewis—30 June 1994
Mrs. C. A Howells—30 June 1994

South Gwent

Mrs. J. C. Phillips—30 June 1992
Mrs. G. Thomas—30 June 1992
Mrs. E. Dixon—30 June 1994
Mr. R. O. Thomas—30 June 1994

North Gwent

Miss E. Tuckwell—30 June 1992
Mr. B. R. Hood—30 June 1992
Mrs. M. J. Smart—30 June 1994
Mrs. J. E. Davies—30 June 1994

Aberconwy
Mrs. J. A. D. Doll—30 June 1992
Mr. J. Cockburn—30 June 1992
Mr. L. M. Wyn-Roberts—30 June 1994

Arfon/Dwyfor
Mr. E. T. Jones—30 June 1992
Mr. E. Wright—30 June 1992
Mrs. W. F. T. Watkin—30 June 1994
Mrs. V. E. Roberts—30 June 1994

Meirionydd
Mrs. A. J. Noble—30 June 1992
Mr. E. M. Davies—30 June 1994

Ynys Mon
Mr. M. J. Bonnie—30 June 1992
Mr. R. A. Johnsosn—30 June 1994
Mrs. E. E. Hughes—30 June 1994

East Glamorgan
Mrs. J. E. Evans—30 June 1992
Mrs. O. J. Leebrook—30 June 1992
Mr. M. W. Davies—30 June 1994
Councillor F. L. Thomas—30 June 1994

Merthyr/Cynon Valley
Mr. C. T. Jones—30 June 1992
Mr. P. E. Linton—30 June 1992
Mrs. D. M. Griffiths—30 June 1994
Mrs. B. Brown—30 June 1994

Ogwr
Captain M. Wilcox—30 June 1992
Mrs. M. C. Evans—30 June 1994
Mrs. Y. M. Griffiths—30 June 1994

Rhymney Valley
Mr. C. Fenton—30 June 1992
Mrs. N. Rowlands—30 June 1992
Mr. K. Perryman—30 June 1992
Mrs. M. Roberts—30 June 1994

Brecon/Radnor
Mrs. D. M. James—30 June 1992
Mr. W. G. Phillips—30 June 1992
Mr. J. Davies—30 June 1994
Mrs. M. V. Morgan—30 June 1994

Montgomery
Vacant—30 June 1992
Mr. K. M. Roberts-Jones—30 June 1992

Cardiff
Mr. E. G. Owen—30 June 1992
Mrs. A. Butlin—30 June 1992
Mr. G. H. Miles—30 June 1994
Mr. C. M. Williams—30 June 1994

Vale of Glamorgan
Mrs. S. L. Greensmith—30 June 1992
Mr. W. Sweeney—30 June 1992
Mrs. M. A. Campbell—30 June 1994
Vacant—30 June 1994

Neath/Port Talbot
Mrs. J. H. Thomas—30 June 1992
Mrs. B. I. Tyler—30 June 1992
Mr. J. Warman—30 June 1994
Mrs. B. E. Wheadon—30 June 1994

Swansea/Lliw Valley
Mrs. M. J. Thomas—30June 1992
Miss J. E. Bassett—30 June 1992
Mrs. P. R. Moore—30 June 1994

Dr. B. Shepperdson—30 June 1994

Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances
Professor H. A. Lee—31 December 1992

Advisory Council on Misuse of Drugs
Dr. M. R. Keen—31 December 1992

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work
Dr. T. Jones—31 August 1992
Mr. A. Hazell—31 August 1994

Committee on Dental and Surgical Materials
Dr. J. R. Larke—31 December 1992
Mr. T. D. Turner—31 December 1992

Committee on Safety of Medicines
Dr. W. A. Jerrett—31 December 1992

Dental Auxilliaries Committee
Mrs. J. M. Prior—31 August 1992

Intermediate Treatment Fund Trust
Mr. C. Weston-Evans—Indefinite period

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation
Dr. D. G. Crompton—31 March 1993

Medical Practices Committee
Dr. S. McHugh—31 March 1994

Medicines Commission
Professor J. Rhodes—31 December 1993
Professor P. Spencer—31 December 1995

National Radiological Protection Board
Professor G. M. Roberts—30 September 1993

Public Health Laboratory Service Board
Dr. G. Crompton—31 July 1994

Rural Dispensing Committee
Mrs. M. Tudor—31 March 1992

Standing Dental Advisory Committee
Professor N. E. Robertson—31 March 1992

Standing Medical Advisory Committee
Professor B. McKibbin—31 March 1992
Professor A. Richens—31 March 1994

Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee
Mr. M. J. Vince—31 March 1992
Mr. D. M. Thomas—31 March 1994

Standing Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee for England and Wales
Professor P. Spencer—31 March 1994

Welsh Committee for Postgraduate Pharmaceutical Education
Dr. D. N. A. Armstrong—31 March 1992
Mr. P. Hollyman—31 March 1992
Miss C. Howells—31 March 1992
Mr. H. A. O. Hughes—31 March 1992
Professor I. W. Kellaway—31 March 1992
Mr. M. Pollard—31 March 1992
Miss G. E. Price—31 March 1992
Mr. K. C. Rew—31 March 1992
Mr. T. D. Turner—31 March 1992

Curriculum Council for Wales
Members:
Mr. Alwyn Evans—31 July 1992
Mr. John Love—31 July 1993
Mrs. Gillian Jeffreys—31 December 1992
Mr. Eddie Roberts—31 July 1992
Mr. Ieuan Roberts—31 July 1993
Dr. Peter Winterburn—31 July 1992
Mr. John Walne—31 July 1992

Mrs. Kay Edwards—31 July 1994
Mr. Dafydd Whittal—31 July 1994
Mr. Stuart Hockey—31 July 1994
Mrs. Penny Ryan—31 July 1994
Mr. Ivor Evenden—31 July 1994

National Museum of Wales
Court and Council
Rt. Hon. Lord Rees, QC—8 February 1994
Mr. Roger Geraint Thomas—8 February 1994
Mr. M. J. M. Clarke—8 February 1994
Mr. A. Creunant Davies—8 February 1994

Court Only
Mr. J. M. Hugh Rees—8 February 1994
Professor Eric Sunderland—8 February 1994

National Library of Wales
Court
Mr. Jeffrey W. Morgan—19 April 1996
Mr. Roy Luff—19 April 1996
Mr. Ifan Moelwyn Hughes—19 April 1996
Mr. John Watkin—19 April 1996

Council
Mr. Ifan Moelwyn Hughes—17 May 1994
Mr. John Watkin—17 May 1994
Mr. Jeffrey W. Morgan—18 July 1994
Library and Information Services Council Wales
Chairman:
Mr. W. Gwyn Williams—30 September 1994

Members:
M. S. Tudfil—30 September 1993
L. Adams—30 September 1993
Mr. Keith Bray—30 September 1993
Miss Mary Cooper—30 September 1992
Mr. R. Ieuan Edwards—30 September 1993
Dr. Ian Lovecy—31 December 1993
Mr. Brynley F. Roberts—28 February 1994
Mr. Hwyel E. Roberts—30 September 1992
Mr. John Lancaster—30 September 1994

Welsh Language Board
Chairman:
Mr. John Elfed Jones—31 July 1994

Members:
Mr. Rob Jones—31 July 1994
Councillor Peter Law—31 July 1994
Mr. Edward Rea OBE FBIM—31 July 1994
Mr. Winston Roddick QC—31 July 1994
Mrs. E. Closs Stephens—31 July 1994
Professor Eric Sunderland—31 July 1994
Mr. Ewyn Ogwen Williams—31 July 1994

Place Names Advisory Committee
Chairman:
Professor Gwynedd Pierce—Remuneration £350 (Honorarium)

Member:
Mr. Tomas Roberts—Remuneration £250 (Honorarium)

Wales Youth Work Partnership
Chairman:
Dr. Howard Wiliamson—31 March 1992

Wales Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education Standing Working Group
Chairman
Professor John A. Andrews—31 March 1992
Members:
Mrs. Gillian Armitage—31 March 1992
Mr. Alan C. Aylesbury—31 March 1992
Mr. Randall T. D. Davies—31 March 1992
Mr. Richard W. Lewis—31 March 1992
Mr. Eric Meats—31 March 1992
Mr. Derek Morgan—31 March 1992
Professor Michael Newby—31 March 1992
Professor George H. Thompson—31 March 1992

Higher Education Corporations (initial appointments)
Polytechnic of Wales
Members:
Mr. Roy Cull—31 March 1995
Dr. Gareth Jones—31 March 1995
Mr. Peter Kelly—31 March 1995
Mr. Ruid Plaut—31 March 1995
Mr. R. P. V. Rees—31 March 1995
Professor Sir Williams Taylor CBE—31 March 1995
Dr. Don B. Thomas—31 March 1995
Mrs. Jane Evelyn Thomas—31 March 1995
Dr. John Thynne—31 March 1995
Mr. Roberts Watts—31 March 1995

Swansea Institute of Higher Education
Members:
Mr. Colin Adlam—31 March 1995
Professor Brian L. Clarkson—31 March 1995
Mr. R. E. T. Davies—31 March 1995
Mr. R. Davies-Evans—31 March 1995
Mr. W. E. Edwards—31 March 1995
Mr. Cyril Goldstone—31 March 1995
Mr. Carl E. Hadley—31 March 1995
Mr. Illtyd R. Lloyd—31 March 1995
Ms. Val Veld—31 March 1995

Cardiff Institute of Higher Education
Members:
Dr. Rita Austin—31 March 1995
Mr. J. K. Brown MBE—31 March 1995
Mr. A.B. Connolly—31 March 1995
Mr. Gordon L. Harrhy—31 March 1995
Mr. Robert Knight—31 March 1995
Professor M. W. Roberts—31 March 1995
Mr. Paul Sheldon—31 March 1995

Welsh College of Music and Drama
Members:
Mr. Michael Boyce—31 March 1995
Mr. Huw Davies—31 March 1995
Mr. Geraint Stanley Jones—31 March 1995
Mr. Frank Lincoln—31 March 1995
Mr. Tom Owen—31 March 1995
Ms. Sian Phillips—31 March 1995
Mr. Chris Ryde—31 March 1995
Mr. Adrian Trickey—31 March 1995

Gwent College of Higher Education
Members:
Mr. Alan Burton—31 March 1995
Mr. G. T. Canning—31 March 1995
Mr. Elwyn Tudno Jones—31 March 1995
Miss Susan Kent—31 March 1995
Ms. Sally Medlyn—31 March 1995
Mr. Roger Peachey—31 March 1995
Professor P. S. J. Spencer—31 March 1995
Mr. Nigel Williams—31 March 1995

College Normal Bangor
Members:
Mr. T. Burman—31 March 1995
Mr. R. Hefin Davies, MBE—31 March 1995
Mr. R. Alun Evans—31 March 1995
Mr. Gwilym E. Humphreys—31 March 1995
Mr. Tom Jones—31 March 1995
Mr. H. I. G. Roberts—31 March 1995
Professor G. R. Sagar, CBE—31 March 1995
Mrs. Eurwen Thomas—31 March 1995

Court of the Governors of University College of Swansea
Mr. P. H. J. Meyer—31 August 1994
Dr. Gwyn Jones—31 August 1992
Mr. Peter Scott—31 August 1993

Court of the Governors of University College of North Wales
Mr. Roy Bichain—31 July 1993

Court of the Governors of University College of Aberystwyth
Mr. J. M. James—31 August 1994

Dr. D. E. Evans—31 August 1994
Mr. Meurig Rees—31 August 1994
Mr. Geraint Stanley Jones—31 December 1992

Court of the Governors of St. Davids University College Lampeter
Mr. Robert Gee—30 April 1994

Sports Council for Wales
Members:
Mr. G. C. Crimp—31 March 1993
Mr. H. Davies—31 March 1993
Mr. T. G. R. Davies—31 March 1993
Mrs. J. Edwards—31 March 1993
Mr. P. Gunn—31 March 1993
Professor D. Herbert—31 March 1993
Councillor Mrs. D. M. J. James—31 March 1993
Councillor Mr. K. F. Powell—31 March 1993
Mr. H. M. Thomas—31 March 1993
Mrs. W. Williams—31 March 1993
Councillor W. J. Williams—31 March 1993

Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales
Chairman:
Lady Crawshay—Not known
Vice Chairman:
Mr. R. H. Williams—Not known
Member:
Mr. R. Lacey—Not known

Training Enterprise and Education Advisory Group for Wales
Members:
Mr. Eric Crawford—31 March 1992
Mr. Clifford Davies—31 March 1992
Mr. David Davies—31 March 1992
Mr. Jeremy Hallet—31 March 1992
Councillor Fred Kingdom—31 March 1992
Mr. Edwin Merrette—31 March 1992
Mr. George Wright—31 March 1992
Mrs. Gillian Armitage—31 March 1992
Mr. Roy Luff—31 March 1992
Mr. J. Kevein Lynden—31 March 1992

Saundersfoot Harbour Commission

Mr. E. A. Phillips—31 May 1994
Mr. B. Waters—31 May 1994

South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Mr. D. J. O. Chant—30 June 1993
Mr. P. G. Davies—30 June 1993
Mr. H. G. Evans—30 June 1993
Mr. W. R. Garner—30 June 1993
Mr. G. M. Hughes—30 June 1993
Mr. R. J. Packman—30 June 1993
Dr. S. E. Shackley—30 June 1993
Mr. R. S. Shaw—30 June 1993
Mr. J. I. Stock—30 June 1993

National Rivers Authority: Advisory Committee for Wales

Chairman:
Professor R. W. Edwards—appointed for as long as he is a member of the National Rivers Authority

Members:
Professor M. J. Briton—appointed for as long as they are Chairmen of various National Rivers Authority regional committees
Lord Morgan KCMG—appointed for as long as they are Chairmen of various National Rivers Authority regional committees
Mr. M. A. McLaggan JP—appointed for as long as they are Chairmen of various National Rivers Authority regional committees
Dr. T. H. Y. Tebbutt—appointed for as long as they are Chairmen of various National Rivers Authority regional committees
Councillor J. D. A. Thompson JP—28 February 1993
Mr. B. Riddleston—28 February 1993
Dr. S. Tyler—28 February 1993

Brecon Beacons National Park Committee
Members:
The Hon. Mrs. E. S. J. Legge-Bourke—31 March 1992
Dr. C. S. Briggs—31 March 1992
Dr. D. Jones—31 March 1992
Mr. D. Harvey—31 March 1993
Mrs. R. Harris—31 March 1993
Mrs. J. Hosie—31 March 1993
Dr. J. C. Venus—31 March 1994
Ms. S. Price—31 March 1994
Mr. A. Michael—31 March 1994

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Committee
Members
Mr. C. Parry—31 March 1992
Mr. W. Evans—31 March 1992
Mr. R. Pratt—31 March 1992
Mr. P. Mould—31 March 1993
Mrs. C. Burton—31 March 1994
Mr. A. Rhys Davies—31 March 1994

Snowdonia National Park Committee
Members
Mr. D. H. Roberts—31 March 1992
Mr. J. Dale—31 March 1992
Mr. E. C. Roberts—31 March 1993
Dr. M. B. Alcock—31 March 1993
Mrs. R. Callister—31 March 1993
Mr. J. Lloyd-Jones—31 March 1994
Mr. D. Tomos—31 March 1994
Mrs. F. Lynch—31 March 1994
Mr. A. Jones—31 March 1994

Consumers Committees for Great Britain and for England and Wales
Members
Mrs. M. J. Roberts—7 September 1994
Miss B. Brookes—14 September 1994

Intervention Board Executive Agency
Member
Mr. O. Rees, CB—22 February 1992. No remuneration.

Meat and Livestock Commission—Consumers Committee
Member
Mrs. S. Roberts—1 October 1992

Milk and Dairies Tribunal for Wales
Member
Mr. L. N. H. George—1 February 1993. Remuneration £66 per day.

Hill Farming Advisory Committee for England, Wales and Northern Ireland
Chairperson:
The Baroness Trumpington—14 February 1992
Deputy Chairman:
Mr. Alun Evans OBE—14 February 1992
Members:
Mr. John Allen OBE—14 February 1992
Mr. Charles Armstrong—14 February 1992
Mr. Henry Bainbridge—14 February 1992
Mr. John Dowson—14 February 1992
Mr. Roberts Edwards—14 February 1992
Mr. George Hodgon—14 February 1992
Mr. Thomas Jones BA—14 February 1992
Mr. Edmund Morphet—14 February 1992
Mr. Thomas Roskilly BSc PhD—14 February 1992
Mr. John Sayer—14 February 1992
Mr. John Tamplin—14 February 1992
Mr. Christopher Thomas-Everard FRICS—14 February 1992
Mr. Campbell Tweed—14 February 1992

Sub Committee for Wales of the Hill Farming Advisory Committee for England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Chairman:
Mr. Alun Evans OBE—14 February 1992

Members:
Mr. Hywel Bound—14 February 1992
Mr. David Davies—14 February 1992
Mr. Robert Edwards—14 February 1992
Mr. Richard Howells—14 February 1992
Mr. Thomas Jones BA—14 February 1992
Mr. William Lloyd—14 February 1992
Mr. John Price—14 February 1992
Mr. John Tamplin OBE—14 February 1992
Mr. Christopher Thomas-Everard FRICS—14 February 1992

Agricultural Advisory Council for Wales

Chairman:
Mr. R. E. M. Rees—31 October 1992

Members:
Mr. J. A. Parry—31 October 1992
Mr. D. F. R. George—31 October 1992
Mr. T. H. Jones—31 October 1994
Mr. D. Williams—31 October 1992
Mr. E. H. Perkins—31 October 1993
Mr. R. C. Pratt—31 October 1993
Mrs. T. Adams—31 October 1994
Mrs. A. M. Rees—31 October 1992
Mr. J. R. Gill—31 October 1993
Mr. M. S. Pickering—31 October 1993
Mrs. R. Rowlands—31 October 1994
Mr. F. J. Morgan—31 October 1994

Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board

Chairman:
Sir Peter Phillips, OBE—31 December 1991

Members:
Dr. A. J. S. Folwell—31 December 1993
Mr. K. Hodge—31 December 1994
Mr. D. Jenkins—31 December 1993
Mr. H. G. Jones—31 December 1992
Mr. T. J. Jones, OBE—31 December 1992
Mr. M. Wallace, OBE—31 December 1993

There is one vacancy on the Board at present.

Ancient Monuments Board for Wales

Chairman:
Prof. Glanmor Williams—31 March 1992

Rent Assessment Panel for Wales

	Salary	
Professional		
D. R. Davies, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
L. J. Edwards	£158 per day	31 December 1992
J. H. Firman, FRICS, FCLA	£158 per day	31 December 1992
R. B. Griffiths, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
W. H. Griffiths, MA, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
G. H. Joy, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
W. R. G. Jones, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
V. A. Kenneally, BSc, FSVA, FRVA	£158 per day	31 December 1992
J. Lewis, FRICS, FRVA	£158 per day	31 December 1992
J. Lingard, ARICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
J. G. Lloyd, FRICS, FLAS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
P. K. Lucas, ARICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
V. E. A. Morris	£158 per day	31 December 1992
D. B. Phillips, FRICS, FRVA	£158 per day	31 December 1992
Mrs. R. Pomfret, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
J. A. W. Protheroe, BSc, FRICS, FCIA	£158 per day	31 December 1992
R. L. Thompson, FRICS, FRVA	£158 per day	31 December 1992
G. B. Travis, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
H. M. Tudor	£158 per day	31 December 1992
N. O. Tyler, FRICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
D. S. Williams, ARICS	£158 per day	31 December 1992
Lay Member		
Mrs. J. Aitken	£101 per day	31 December 1992
C. W. Bickley	£101 per day	31 December 1992
D. J. I. Davies	£101 per day	31 December 1992
Mrs. E. Elias	£101 per day	31 December 1992
Miss M. Evans	£101 per day	31 December 1991
County Councillor E. K. Griffiths	£101 per day	31 December 1992
D. A. Jones	£101 per day	31 December 1992
W. Jones	£101 per day	31 December 1992
County Councillor C. Lewis, JP	£101 per day	31 December 1991
Mrs. M. A. Mason, JP	£101 per day	31 December 1992
C. J. Noott	£101 per day	31 December 1992
J. R. Pritchard, JP	£101 per day	31 December 1992
Mrs. K. M. Provis, JP, BSc	£101 per day	31 December 1992
Mr. E. M. Richards	£101 per day	31 December 1992
Mrs. D. E. H. Roberts	£101 per day	31 December 1991
Mrs. I. C. Williams	£101 per day	31 December 1992
H. H. Roberts	£101 per day	31 December 1992

DEFENCE

Atomic Weapons Establishment (Contract Labour)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the possession of a criminal record automatically bars an applicant for contract labour at Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Atomic Tests (Christmas Island)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new medical evidence he has received regarding the connection between the atomic tests on Christmas Island and subsequent cancer and cancer-related disease.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence will pay appropriate compensation whenever the Crown's legal liability is established. There is, however, no firm evidence to show that any ill-health suffered by those who attended the tests was caused by their participation. This is supported by the last report on the subject by the National Radiological Protection Board—which continues to accumulate data and will produce a further report.

Pensions

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the difference in pension payments for the ranks of *(a)* major, *(b)* commander and *(c)* group captain between those who retired (i) just before the Prices and Incomes Act affected the calculations, (ii) those whose pension calculations were affected and (iii) those who retired after it had been repealed; and what would be the total cost of ending the anomaly.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Maximum rates of retired pay which can currently be received by officers who retired in particular months immediately before, during, and immediately after the period of pay restraint policy operative from 1976 to 1978 are as follows:

Month of retirement	Retired pay (£) Major Original award	Major Current rate	Commander Original award	Commander Current rate	Group Captain Original award	Group Captain Current rate
March 1976	2,957	13,358	3,617	16,339	4,380	19,786
April 1976	3,108	11,156	3,768	13,525	4,380	15,721
April 1977	3,210	10,039	3,870	12,104	4,481	14,015
April 1978	4,220	11,545	5,091	13,927	6,062	16,584

Original awards were calculated, and have subsequently been increased, in accordance with the normal regulations of the scheme. There are no alternative rates of award from which the cost requested could be calculated.

Trident

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the maximum number of nuclear warheads the United Kingdom's Trident missiles will be capable of carrying;

(2) what potential exists for the number of warheads on the United Kingdom's Trident missiles to be increased during their operational lifespan.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The actual number of warheads which will be carried by the D5 missile in United Kingdom service, and the maximum number that could be, is classified information. The Government have, however, made it clear that each United Kingdom Trident submarine will carry no more than 128 warheads.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the maximum number of nuclear warheads that the United States Trident D5 missiles are capable of carrying.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Warhead numbers on the United States' Trident missiles are a matter for the United States Government. In their joint summit statement of December 1987, however, the United States and Soviet Governments confirmed the assumption that the United States Trident II (DS) missile would be deployed with eight warheads.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what payments have already been made by Her Majesty's Government to the United States Government towards the research and development costs of the warhead for the United Kingdom's Trident missiles; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how much the United Kingdom is paying the United States Government towards the research and development costs of the warhead for the United Kingdom's Trident missiles; if this is a fixed amount; and how the payments are made.

Mr. Alan Clark: The United Kingdom has developed its own warhead for use with the Trident missile system. It is not in the national interest to reveal research and development costs of such projects.

Polaris

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's assessment as to the effectiveness of the Polaris nuclear deterrent for the remainder of its operational life.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We remain satisfied with the continuing credibility and effectiveness of the Polaris strategic deterrent.

Tactical Air-to-Surface Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer, *Official Report*, 13 November, column *615*, what are the implications for the United Kingdom's decision on procuring a TASM of President Bush's decision to cancel the SRAM-T programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are continuing to consider a number of possible options for the replacement of our WE177 free-fall bombs. No decision has yet been taken.

Short-range Attack Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations took place between his Department and the United States Government concerning President Bush's decision to cancel the SRAM-T programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: This issue was covered in the consultation between our two Governments which preceded President Bush's nuclear initiative of 27 September.

Anti-ballistic Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer, *Official Report*, 13 November, column *614*, what is his policy towards the negotiated deployment of strategic defences within the terms of the ABM treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Gentleman on 13 November.

Soviet Nuclear Weapons

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to providing assistance to the International Atomic Energy Agency to assist in monitoring the destruction of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are considering with our NATO allies a range of nuclear issues arising from political developments in the Soviet Union. There has been no initiative to provide assistance to the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose activities are, in any case, restricted to the field of civil nuclear energy.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to match the offer made by the United States Government to the leadership of the former states of the Soviet Union to purchase redundant nuclear warheads for safekeeping.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are considering with our NATO allies a range of nuclear issues arising from political developments in the Soviet Union. No decisions have been reached.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information and material assistance he has provided to his Soviet counterpart *(a)* to ensure the physical security of Soviet nuclear weapons and *(b)* to help them destroy nuclear weapons;

(2) what discussions he has had with his Soviet counterpart regarding the physical security and command and control arrangements for Soviet tactical nuclear weapons;

(3) what information he has received from the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Kazakhstan regarding the physical security and command and control arrangements for nuclear weapons in these areas.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We and our allies have made clear on many occasions to the authorities in the Soviet Union and republics both our concern about these matters, and our willingness to provide assistance and advice where necessary and practicable.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his assessment of the current physical security and command and control arrangements for *(a)* Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles, *(b)* Soviet strategic bomber forces, and *(c)* Soviet sea-launched ballistic missiles;

(2) what is his assessment of the security and control arrangements for Soviet nuclear weapons manufacturing technology.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We believe that effective procedures exist for central control of all strategic nuclear forces and nuclear weapons manufacturing facilities, and for their protection. Nevertheless we are conscious of potential problems which may be caused by the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Transport Helicopters

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number and type of transport helicopters deployed with the RAF for each year since 1980.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information is not readily available in the form requested. The number and types of transport helicopter deployed by the RAF has not, however, changed significantly since the introduction of the Chinook into RAF service in the early 1980s and thus the numbers are broadly in line with those I gave in my answer on 12 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *546*.

Parachute Regiments

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral statement of 10 December, *Official Report*, columns 743-744, on the recruiting level of 15 Parachute Regiment, what are the recruiting levels of the other two parachute regiments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

Housing

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *546*, on housing, whether he will place in the Library a copy of the letter which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces sent to Lady Anson; and if he will place in the Library copies of all the letters he has received from the Association of District Councils, the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on the subject of housing for ex-service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have arranged for a copy of my noble Friend's letter to be placed in the Library of the House, together with a copy of Lady Anson's letter of 16 August. No other correspondence has been received from the Association of District Councils, the Association of County Councils or the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

Vehicles (Review)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors have been considered as part of his review of armoured personnel carrier and heavy armoured combat vehicle numbers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All relevant factors are being considered as part of the review of armoured personnel carrier and heavy armoured combat vehicle numbers.

Regiments (Recruitment)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will change his policy on the release of information on the recruiting levels of individual regiments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information on the recruiting levels of individual regiments is not available centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capability the Atomic Weapons Establishment has to dismantle nuclear warheads and nuclear delivery systems.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), on 21 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *453*.

Science and Peace Conference

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department was represented at the international congress of scientists and engineers on challenges of science and peace in a rapidly changing environment held in Berlin on 29 November to 1 December; and what is his policy towards the attendance at conferences of officials in his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministers and officials attend conferences when they are relevant, and the timings and dates are convenient. No Defence Minister attended the conference in question; nor did any official attend on their behalf.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pension Age

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women go on working one year, two years, three years, four years and five years after reaching pension age.

Miss Widdecombe: Activity rates for women in the five years after pension age are set out in the table. These figures are based on sample estimates from the labour force survey and are subject to greater sampling variability than are estimates for broader age groupings.

Great Britain—1990

Age	*Per cent.*
60	29
61	27
62	22
63	20
64	15

Note: The figures represent numbers of women in employment or unemployed, on the internationally agreed ILO definition, expressed as percentage of the population of women of each age.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of *(a)* reducing the pension age by one year to 64, (i) as gross cost, (ii) what the savings would be in terms of income support and community charge and housing benefit and (iii) net cost, *(b)* what the same figures would be for a reduction of two years to 63, *(c)* three years to 62, *(d)* four years to 61 and *(e)* five years to 60; and by what amount national insurance contribution would have to go up to meet in full such changes.

Miss Widdecombe: The discussion paper published yesterday includes the costs of a range of options for equalisation of state pension age.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will initiate a survey into whether skill shortages would be likely to occur if pension age for men was lowered by one year, two years, three years, four years or five years.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to initiate such a survey.

Pension Funds

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what action he proposes to take to prevent employers diverting their employees' pension fund moneys either to parent companies or to other corporate interests;

(2) what plans he has to ensure that occupational fund assets are retained for the exclusive benefit of its members and pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: Safeguards already exist in trust law to protect the interests of members of occupational pension schemes. Trustees have a duty to act, at all times, in the interests of all the beneficiaries of the scheme in accordance with the trust deed. Additional safeguards are in place for schemes that are used for contracting out of SERPS.

This Government have already brought into force a provision which restricts an employer's ability to receive funds from a related pension scheme unless the scheme already increases pensions in payment at least in line with prices up to a maximum of 5 per cent.

In addition we will bring forward, early next year, regulations to restrict to 5 per cent. the level of a schemes self investment in a sponsoring, associated or connected company.

Pensions

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will increase the level of retirement pension to 33 per cent. of national average earnings for a single person and 50 per cent. of average earnings for married couples; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so. If the basic state pension had been increased this April in the way suggested by the hon. Member, the extra cost to the national insurance fund would be £25 billion this financial year which would imply an increase of £33 per week in the total contribution for a person on average male earnings and the employer.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards increases in the state retirement pension.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government are committed to ensuring that state pensions are increased in line with prices thus ensuring a secure foundation in retirement. Further, we have created an economic environment in which pensioners' overall net incomes have increased by 34 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1988.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to bring into force regulations requiring employers to make good deficiencies upon the winding up of occupational pension schemes.

Miss Widdecombe: This provision in the Social Security Act 1990 was closely linked to the provision for limited price indexation on which we have delayed implementation in the light of the uncertainties arising from the Barber judgment. In the light of the Maastricht protocol on Barber, we are considering whether and when the necessary regulations should now be introduced.

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to ascertain whether the Occupational Pension Board has fulfilled its duty to ensure that the resources in the pension funds of the companies of which the late Robert Maxwell was a director were and are sufficient to provide guaranteed minimum pensions for beneficiaries who had contracted out of SERPS.

Miss Widdecombe: The Occupational Pension Board relies on certificates signed by actuaries to satisfy itself that the resources of an occupational pension scheme used for contracting out of SERPS are sufficient to meet the guaranteed minimum pension liability to its members. Certificates are submitted to the board every three and a half years.

Additionally, in the case of self-administered schemes, an annual statement—signed by the scheme administrator, auditor or trustee—is required concerning the audit of scheme accounts, the receipt of contributions, and any self-investment or concentration of investment.

I understand from the board that the documentation required in respect of the eleven pension schemes in the "Maxwell Group" was received and is in order. I also understand from the board that none of the certificates and statements gives any indication that there was anything wrong with the schemes at the relevant time.

Damages for Injuries

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the 1990-91 income arising from the provisions of the Social Security Act 1989 for full recovery of state benefits from tort damages for injuries and the administrative costs involved; how many recipients were required to repay in full the state benefits they received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The administration of benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Appeal Tribunals (Remuneration)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what remuneration will be paid to chairpersons and other members of social security and disability appeal tribunals from April 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: The fee payable to social security tribunal chairmen from April 1992 will be £115 per half-day session. Social security tribunal members are not paid a fee.

The fee payable to disability appeal tribunal chairmen from April 1992 will be £115 per half-day session. There will be two rates payable to disability tribunal members: the lay members will be paid £53 per half-day session; the fee for the medical member—in practice a GP—will be in excess of this, but has not yet been fixed.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether, and in what circumstances, a person entitled to family credit will be allowed to claim disability working allowance instead; what benefits to which family credit is a passport will not be similarly available to persons receiving disability working allowance; and what will be the highest marginal tax rate, including loss of benefits, to which persons receiving disability working allowance will be exposed *(a)* in April 1992 and *(b)* after the introduction of council tax benefit.

Mr. Scott: A person is disqualified from claiming disability working allowance—DWA—if he, or any member of his household, has a current award of family credit. If he wishes to claim disability working allowance instead he will be able to make an advance claim during the period when he would normally be able to renew his family credit award so that there will be no break in payment.

Family credit is a passport to free national health service prescriptions and to help with other NHS charges. People who get DWA will be able to apply for help with NHS charges through the NHS low income scheme.

DWA, like family credit, will be assessed on the basis of net income so that people will gain something from each extra pound they earn. However, some people will be subject to marginal deduction rates of 96 per cent. from April 1992 and 97 per cent. after the introduction of council tax benefit.

Vibration White Finger

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the rates of gratuity awards, in terms of gratuity per percentage disablement from 1 per cent. to 15 per cent. for those awarded, in each of the past three years, in respect of a disablement allowance for vibration white finger.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those areas where the cold weather payments have been authorised currently, the number of areas where no such payments have been authorised; and the estimated percentage of pensioners in all who will be receiving the payments arising from the above.

Mr. Scott: By 18 December cold weather payments had been triggered by 26 of the 63 weather stations. Areas covered by 18 of the weather stations have already been authorised for payment. The remaining eight areas will be authorised for payment this weekend, 21 December 1991. The relevant weather stations are in the table. Information relating to the percentage of pensioners who will be receiving a payment in the areas which have triggered is not available.

Cold weather payments

Weather stations	*Period*
Bedford RAE	5 December 1991 to 11 December 1991
Birmingham AP	5 December 1991 to 11 December 1991
Boscombe Down	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Brise Norton	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Cilynydd	8 December 1991 to 14 December 1991[1]
Coltishall	7 December 1991 to 13 December 1991[1]
Coningsby	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Cwmbargoed	7 December 1991 to 13 December 1991[1]
Dumfries/Drungans	5 December 1991 to 11 December 1991
Easthampstead	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Eskdalemuir	3 December 1991 to 9 December 1991
Finningley	5 December 1991 to 11 December 1991
Gatwick AP	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Heathrow AP	8 December 1991 to 14 December 1991[1]
Honington	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Leeds WC	7 December 1991 to 13 December 1991[1]
Leeming	5 December 1991 to 11 December 1991
Lyneham	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Marham	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Shawbury	5 December 1991 to 11 December 1991
Stansted	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Waddington	7 December 1991 to 13 December 1991[1]
Watnall	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Wattisham	8 December 1991 to 14 December 1991[1]
Wyton	6 December 1991 to 12 December 1991
Yeovilton	8 December 1991 to 14 December 1991[1]

[1] To be authorised weekend of 21 December 1991.

Kidney Dialysis Patients

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to introduce a dietary allowance for social security claimants who are kidney dialysis patients and have to have a special diet.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so. I am advised that the dietary regime which kidney dialysis patients may be advised to follow need not result in any additional costs.

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to introduce an

additional heating allowance for social security claimants who undergo kidney dialysis at home and have to keep their houses at a constant temperature.

Miss Widdecombe: People who undergo kidney dialysis at home are able to qualify for attendance allowance under special rules. This is currently worth at least £27·80 a week. In addition, attendance allowance attracts the disability, or higher pensioner, premium in income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit and is normally disregarded in the calculation of those benefits. We have no plans to introduce any further allowances for this group.

Concessionary Coal

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the circumstances under which payment in lieu of concessionary coal can be disregarded when claiming community charge benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 18 December.

Income Support (Mortgage Interest)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to make payments of income support in respect of mortgage interest payable direct to the lender.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made to the House earlier today.

Mr. R. Long

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he is able to inform Mr. R. Long of Buochli, 6373 Ennetburgen, Switzerland of his decision as to Mr. Long's national insurance liability during the period April 1986 to December 1987.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 November 1991]:* We have concluded discussions on the interpretation of the regulations governing Mr. Long's case and have written to both Mr. Long and his former employer to inform them of the outcome. We are now awaiting their response. Provided that both Mr. Long and his former employer accept the interpretation and that agreement by the Swiss authorities is obtained, the Secretary of State will then be able to give his decision.

SCOTLAND

Council Tax

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary fo State for Scotland what council tax rates would be in 1991-92 for each band in each district and island council area for *(a)* households of average size and *(b)* two-person households.

Mr. Lang: The average bills for households of a given size will depend on the number of adults in the households. Illustrative figures on bills for households of one, or two or more adults, under the proposed council tax were issued by the Government on 23 April.

Police Numbers

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the latest establishment figures for uniformed police in each police authority; and if he will give actual staffing figures.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table:

Authorised police establishment and number of officers in post as at 30 September 1991

	Establishment	[1] *Number in post*
Central Scotland Police	643	624
Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary	384	357
Fife Constabulary	780	758
Grampian Police	1,178	1,140
Lothian and Borders Police	2,487	2,418
Northern Constabulary	654	635
Strathclyde Police	6,954	6,712
Tayside Police	1,057	1,016

[1] The above figures exclude officers on secondment to other forces, central service, and so on.

Crime

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a table on a comparable basis to his answer in the *Official Report*, 9 December, columns *344-46*, with information on crime rates in Scotland since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of crimes and offences recorded by the police and percentage change 1979-90, Scotland

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Total crimes and offences	673,955	724,671	744,725	762,483	799,568	809,451
Total crimes	346,680	364,587	408,204	435,081	448,260	474,914
Group 1 Non-sexual crimes of violence	10,025	11,090	12,161	12,085	13,023	13,700
Group 2 Crimes of indecency	4,673	5,244	4,794	4,996	5,474	5,710
Group 3 Crimes of dishonesty	269,193	279,793	320,003	340,070	342,452	359,196
Group 4 Fireraising, vandalism etc	56,138	60,121	61,725	66,013	73,060	79,054
Group 5 Other crimes	6,651	8,339	9,521	11,917	14,251	17,254
Total offences	327,275	360,084	336,521	327,402	351,308	334,537
Group 6 Miscellaneous offences	123,319	123,171	118,214	115,384	114,807	114,911
Group 7 Motor vehicle offences	203,956	236,913	218,307	212,018	236,501	219,626

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Total crimes and offences	800,380	822,370	858,228	855,601	902,031	959,063
Total crimes	461,970	463,837	481,230	469,986	493,385	535,864
Group 1 Non-sexual crimes of violence	15,090	15,705	18,350	17,871	18,374	18,234
Group 2 Crimes of indecency	5,741	5,354	5,266	5,057	5,742	6,034
Group 3 Crimes of dishonesty	342,349	342,522	356,527	344,509	355,525	385,152
Group 4 Fireraising, vandalism etc	79,545	78,891	76,444	73,518	79,062	86,457
Group 5 Other crimes	19,245	21,365	24,643	29,031	34,682	39,987
Total offences	338,410	358,533	376,998	385,615	408,646	423,199
Group 6 Miscellaneous offences	118,098	120,446	127,306	124,878	124,892	126,960
Group 7 Motor vehicle offences	220,312	238,087	249,692	260,737	283,754	296,239

	Percentage change 1979-90
Total crimes and offences	42
Total crimes	55
Group 1 Non-sexual crimes of violence	82
Group 2 Crimes of indecency	29
Group 3 Crimes of dishonesty	43
Group 4 Fireraising, vandalism etc.	54
Group 5 Other crimes	501
Total offences	29
Group 6 Miscellaneous offences	3
Group 7 Motor vehicle offences	45

Notes:

1. Data for 1979 have been regrouped on the basis of the current Scottish Office Home and Health Department classification of crimes and offences which was revised in 1980.
2. Prior to 1980, the return included crimes and offences reported to the Procurator Fiscal by agencies other than the police in which a prosecution was taken. Since 1980, these cases have been excluded. In 1982, there were about 6,400 such cases in Scotland, of a total of 762,483 crimes and offences.
3. Most of the increase in crimes in Group 5 is in recorded cases of re-offending while on bail which may in part be explained by changes in recording practice.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of *(a)* total crimes and *(b)* violent crimes in (i) each police force area and (ii) across all of Scotland in 1979 and 1990, and the percentage increase in each authority area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table. Figures for numbers of violent crimes recorded in 1979 provided on 27 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns *440-41*, have been found to be in error, underestimating the amount of violent crime recorded in 1979. The following table contains revised figures for the number of violent crimes recorded in 1979.

Number of crimes[1], crimes and offences[2] and violent crimes[3] recorded in Scotland by police force area in 1979 and 1990 and the percentage change

Police Force Area	1979	1990	Percentage change 1979-90
Central			
Crimes	13,844	22,957	66
Crimes and offences	28,398	46,078	62
Violent crimes	1,538[4]	3,277	113
Dumfries and Galloway			
Crimes	4,835	8,096	67
Crimes and offences	17,934	21,308	19
Violent crimes	474[4]	1,179	149
Fife			
Crimes	14,257	30,706	115
Crimes and offences	31,779	55,142	74
Violent crimes	1,801[4]	3,063	70
Grampian			
Crimes	22,821	37,070	62
Crimes and offences	50,604	82,071	62
Violent crimes	3,572[4]	5,537	55
Lothian and Borders			
Crimes	62,502	87,548	40
Crimes and offences	116,828	152,445	30
Violent crimes	5,805[4]	8,765	51
Northern			
Crimes	8,711	13,132	51
Crimes and offences	27,104	35,467	31
Violent crimes	1,465[4]	2,042	39
Strathclyde			
Crimes	195,485	293,655	50
Crimes and offences	351,269	487,575	39
Violent crimes	23,633[4]	31,536	33
Tayside			
Crimes	24,225	42,700	76
Crimes and offences	50,039	78,977	58
Violent crimes	2,460[4]	3,923	59
Scotland			
Crimes	346,680	535,864	55
Crimes and offences	673,955	959,063	42
Violent crimes	40,748	59,322	46

Notes

[1] Comprises groups 1-5 of the Scottish Office Home and Health Department (SOHHD) classification of crimes and offences.

[2] Comprises groups 1-7 of the SOHHD classification of crimes and offences, ie all crimes and offences.

[3] Comprises group 1 (non-sexual crimes of violence), the sexual assault category from group 2 (crimes of indecency) and the petty assault category from group 6 (miscellaneous offences) of the SOHHD classification of crimes and offences.

[4] Revised.

Details of the SOHHD classification are given in the SOHHD statistical bulletin "Recorded crime in Scotland 1990", a copy of which is in the library.

Degrees

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria he will apply in granting degree awarding powers to Scottish higher education institutions beyond the present universities and polytechnics.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend hopes to make an announcement shortly.

Rents-to-Mortgages Scheme

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the way in which rents to mortgages was marketed to the initial group of eligible tenants and then to local authority tenants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The pilot rents-to-mortgages scheme became available to eligible tenants of Scottish Homes and the new town development corporations in Scotland on 30 October 1989. Scottish Homes produced an explanatory leaflet which was distributed to each of its eligible tenants. Supplies of the leaflet were also made available to new town development corporations.

The pilot scheme was extended to local authority tenants in Scotland on 1 April 1991 and was publicised by a campaign on television, in the national and local press and on radio. This was necessary because of the difficulty of contacting local authority tenants directly. An explanatory leaflet was also produced, and around 20,000 inquiries were received. The television advertising campaign was repeated in October. All eligible tenants interested in the scheme are offered detailed counselling and advice about the scheme and about the consequences of becoming a home owner.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to publish the results of research into consumer satisfaction with services following the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has today published the report on market research, conducted in nine Scottish local authorities by the MVA Consultancy, into consumer satisfaction with refuse collection and street cleaning services both before and after the introduction of competitive tendering for those services. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The report shows little change in consumer satisfaction. Where change has occurred it has generally been for the better. The results of the research support the Government's view that competitive tendering can bring benefits without an unacceptable reduction in service standards. They provide no comfort to those who have claimed that saving from competitive tendering have been secured at the expense of quality of service.

Farm Woodland Premium

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to prevent the postponement of planned tree planting on farms pending the introduction of the farm woodland premium scheme on 1 April 1992.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on 19 November 1991 in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) (*Official Report*, columns *135-36*) that a successor to the farm woodland scheme—to be called the farm woodland premium scheme—will be introduced on 1 April 1992. In the meantime, applications to enter the existing scheme may be lodged for an extended period up to and including 31 March 1992.

We are conscious that the proposals for the new scheme, which have recently been circulated for consultation, may encourage farmers to consider postponing their planting plans for the present season. In order to avoid a hiatus of this kind pending parliamentary agreement to a revised statutory instrument for the farm woodland premium scheme, we have decided that any planting approved under the current farm woodland scheme which is undertaken on or after 1 October 1991 will be eligible for the full planting grants under the Forestry Commission's woodland grant scheme, including payment of the better land supplement where appropriate. In all other respects the existing rules of the farm woodland scheme, including the rates of annual payments, will continue to apply.

Any higher grants to be paid under these interim arrangements will be met by the Forestry Commission from existing resources.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The framework documents for my three agencies set out the following key performance measures:

Registers of Scotland

turn round times in respect of the Land and Sasine Registers

unit costs for the primary products of the Land and Sasine Registers

backlog arrears comparisons in the Land and Sasine Registers

evidence of customer satisfaction, eg error rates attributable to the Agency and indemnity claims

progress on extending the Land Register to the whole of Scotland

income/expenditure comparisons.

Historic Scotland

number of ancient monuments newly scheduled

number of completed units of the resurvey of listed buildings

number of general Historic Building Repair grant cases in payment

conservation backlog on monuments in care

value for money savings in maintenance of monuments in care

number of visitors to monuments in care where an admission charge is made

total income

surplus on commercial activities

exchequer contribution to Historic Scotland's work.

Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency

aerial surveillance—per cent. of hours flown on task[1]

cost per aircraft sighting

marine surveillance—number of boardings at sea

marine surveillance—cost per boarding

Sea Fisheries Inspectorate—cost per £1 million of fish landed

prosecutions—proportion of cases reported for prosecution within required timescales

number of cases where court proceedings are taken as percentage of offences report for prosecution.

Performance measures operative prior to agency status were: for the Registers of Scotland, turn round times, backlog arrears and indemnity claims; for Historic Scotland, increases in visitor numbers, income targets and numbers of historic buildings repair grants; and for the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, numbers of boardings at sea.

[1] "Time on task" is the time that the aircraft spends looking for fishing vessels. It excludes transit time between airports and fishing grounds and flights for crew training, aircraft testing, and so on.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those new facilities for staff, including nurseries and health care schemes, which have been introduced in each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment.

Mr. Lang: *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* None.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his Department's executive agencies; and whether the cost was born by the parent Department or the new agency.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The information is as follows:

	Costs borne by	
	Agency	*Parent Department*
	£	£
Registers of Scotland	8,000	—
Historic Scotland	2,700	300
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	300	340

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The holding of a degree is not mandatory for the post of chief executive of any of the three agencies for which I am responsible. As the information requested is personal to the individual concerned, it is not appropriate to divulge it.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether a group bonus scheme is in operation in each of his Department's executive agencies.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* No.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were in post on the date that each of his Department's executive agencies were established; and how many staff are in post now in each case.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Staff in post	*At Launch*[1]	*1 December 1991*
Registers of Scotland	997	1,302
Historic Scotland	610·5	627
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	196·5	218·5

[1]The Registers of Scotland was launched as an agency on 1 April 1990. The two other agencies were launched on 1 April 1991.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the last annual report for each of his Department's executive agencies was published; and when the next one is due.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The first annual report for the Registers of Scotland was published on 23 July 1991 and placed in the Library. Historic Scotland and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency became agencies on 1 April 1991 and have not therefore published annual reports as yet. In the case of each of the agencies, the next annual report will be published as soon as possible after the end of the 1991-92 financial year.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including preformance-related elements, in each case where appointments from the private sector have been made to his Department's executive agencies at grade 7 or above, since their establishment.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* One such appointment has been made, at grade 7. The remuneration is within the relevant civil service pay scale for the grade. It would not be appropriate to identify the specific post.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Registers of Scotland: as for a Grade 4 civil servant; 5 year contract from 6 June 1990;

Historic Scotland: as for a Grade 3 civil servant; open contract; it is intended that the post will be filled by open competition in due course;

Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency: as for a Grade 5 civil servant; appointment for 3 years from 1 April 1991.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and provide a break down by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each new agency.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* None.

Foresterhill Hospital

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) whether the Foresterhill hospital trust will purchase or lease land and property which is to be part of the trust but is currently owned by Aberdeen university;

(2) whether compensation will be paid to Aberdeen university for land and property allocated to, or to be used by, the Foresterhill trust, but owned by the university.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The greater part of the property to be transferred to the Foresterhill national health service trust is currently held in joint title in the names of the Secretary of State and the university of Aberdeen. It is intended that the Secretary of State's interest in such property would transfer to the trust. I see no reason why the present arrangements between the Foresterhill group of hospitals and Aberdeen university

over use of facilities on the site should change. It is not envisaged that a Foresterhill national health service trust would require property, the title to which was solely in the name of the university of Aberdeen. Consequently no issue of compensation appears to arise in relation to such property.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

9. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet his EC colleagues to discuss reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: At the next meeting of the Agriculture Council on 27-28 January.

21. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much the common agricultural policy has cost the British Exchequer during the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows. In addition, however, the Exchequer supports CAP spending elsewhere in the Community through our net contribution to the EC budget.

United Kingdom Public Expenditure under the CAP[1]

	£ million
1987-88	1,611
1988-89	1,363
1989-90	1,230
1990-91	1,848
1991-92	2,000

[1] United Kingdom expenditure under the CAP covers market support and structural aid schemes.

Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance

16. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet the president of the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance to discuss problems concerning this sector of the food industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I am always ready to meet the alliance on any current point of concern.

MacSharry Proposals

17. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the National Farmers Union to discuss the MacSharry proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay).

28. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report on progress with the MacSharry common agricultural policy reform plans.

Mr. Gummer: I refer to the reply I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmoreland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on 13 December 1991, at column *595*.

Animal Welfare

18. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received this year about animal welfare; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Department continues to receive a very large number of representations on animal welfare.

The Government attach great importance to this issue and will continue to press for the high standards in this country to be adopted throughout the European Community.

19. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to improve animal welfare throughout the EC.

Mr. Maclean: The Government will continue to press for the Community to set the highest welfare standards, in line with the declaration which has been agreed at Maastricht, following a United Kingdom initiative, on the need for Community legislation to take full account of animal welfare.

Food Labelling

20. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on food labelling.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Advisory Committee's report of its review of food labelling legislation and practices recommends a number of further improvements in important areas of food labelling to which the Government have already responded positively.

I shall shortly be considering the results of extensive consultation with all interested parties on the Committee's recommendations, along with any further recommendations which the Committee may wish to make as a result of that consultation, before taking any further action.

25. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times he has met consumer representatives during 1991 to discuss food labelling.

Mr. Maclean: I meet the consumer panel and representatives of consumer organisations on a very regular basis to discuss matters of interest, including food labelling.

I have taken the opportunity at these meetings to keep consumer organisations informed of progress on the Food Advisory Committee's review of food labelling, the report of which was published in April this year.

27. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what fresh steps he is taking to make the information on the labels of food and food products *(a)* clearer, *(b)* simpler and *(c)* more relevant.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Advisory Committee's report of its review of food labelling legislation and practices, published in April this year, recommends a number of improvements in important areas of existing food labelling requirements, including the presentation of statutory labelling information, to which the Government has already responded positively.

I shall shortly be considering the results of extensive consultation with all interested parties on the Committee's

recommendations, along with any further recommendations which the Committee may wish to make as a result of that consultation, before making any final decisions and taking further action.

Agriculture Expenditure

22. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current level of public expenditure on agriculture; and what the comparable figure was for 1990.

Mr. Curry: Public expenditure under the common agricultural policy and on national grants and subsidies for the 1991-92 financial year is forecast at £2,086 million. The comparable figure for 1990-91 was £1,910 million.

Farm Subsidies

23. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress towards reaching agreement on farm subsidies over the next five years.

Mr. Gummer: The Government aim to secure, through reform of the common agricultural policy and through agreement in the GATT Uruguay round negotiations, lower levels of agricultural support both within the European Community and worldwide.

Set-aside Scheme

24. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations on set-aside arrangements he has received over the last month.

Mr. Gummer: I have received a number of representations on various aspects of set-aside over the last month.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers have received payment under the set-aside scheme, for each year since 1988, in each county in England for *(a)* horse based activities, *(b)* golf courses, *(c)* game cover for commercial shoots, *(d)* sports grounds, *(e)* other recreational facilities and *(f)* other; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* The following tables list all agreements under the non-agricultural use option of the set-aside scheme for 1988, 1989 and 1990, the three years for which payments have been made under the scheme.

1988

	Horse based activities[1]		*Golf Courses*		*Game cover for commercial shoots*		*Sports Ground*		*Other recreational facilities*		*Other uses under non agricultural use option*	
	Number of agree-ments	*Land area hectares*	*Number of agree-ments*	*Land area hectares*	*Number of agree-ments*	*Land area hectares*	*Number of agree-ments*	*Land area hectares*	*Number of agree-ments*	*Land area hectares*	*Number of agree-ments*	*Land area hectares*
Avon	8	73	—	—	—	—	1	6	1	1	—	—
Bedfordshire	5	22	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Berkshire	6	146	—	—	1	4	—	—	—	—	1	2
Buckinghamshire	14	157	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	112
Cambridgeshire	8	117	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	16
Cheshire	7	64	1	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	29
Cleveland	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	5	53	1	9	1	11	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	2	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	1	10	2	56	—	—	1	16	—	—	—	—
Devonshire	4	37	—	—	1	6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset	1	12	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	13	1	23
Durham	6	99	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	16	93	2	95	—	—	1	2	—	—	2	2
Gloucestershire	8	51	2	15	1	10	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greater London	2	39	—	—	—	—	1	6	—	—	1	10
Greater Manchester	3	25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	6	62	—	—	1	22	1	13	—	—	1	17
Hereford/Worcestershire	5	23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	4	24	1	53	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Humberside	2	19	3	49	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	45
Kent	14	137	1	7	2	6	1	20	—	—	1	41
Leicestershire	6	32	—	—	1	1	1	2	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	2	71	1	147	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	3	19	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	1	25
Norfolk	6	30	1	53	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	4	30	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—
Northumberland	3	12	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	2	12	1	40	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	8
Oxfordshire	12	80	1	44	—	—	2	4	1	1	—	—
Shropshire	3	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	41
Somerset	7	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
Staffordshire	4	35	—	—	—	—	1	20	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	13	125	—	—	—	—	1	13	—	—	1	[2]—
Surrey	2	5	—	—	1	3	—	—	—	—	1	3
East Sussex	2	26	—	—	2	6	—	—	1	8	—	—
West Sussex	11	157	1	14	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	12
Warwickshire	11	78	2	73	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	9
Wiltshire	6	59	1	12	1	3	—	—	1	12	—	—

	Horse based activities[1]		Golf Courses		Game cover for commercial shoots		Sports Ground		Other recreational facilities		Other uses under non agricultural use option	
	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares
North Yorkshire	5	62	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	5	27
West Yorkshire	2	22	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total (1988)	232	2,193	21	671	13	72	13	107	5	35	26	424

[1] Livery stables, riding schools, stud farms, hay for horses, grazing for horses, horse rides.
[2] Less than 1 hectare.
Note: Total may differ due to rounding

1989

	Horse based activities[1]		Golf Courses		Game cover for commercial shoots		Sports Ground		Other recreational facilities		Other uses under non agricultural use option	
	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares
Avon	8	77	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	8	86	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—
Berkshire	7	244	—	—	1	4	—	—	1	16	—	—
Buckinghamshire	16	164	1	65	1	4	3	31	—	—	1	4
Cambridgeshire	9	165	—	—	—	—	1	6	—	—	2	19
Cheshire	7	79	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	4	29	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	4	—	—
Derbyshire	6	63	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Devonshire	13	74	1	48	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset	6	68	1	63	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Durham	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	16	83	1	54	1	1	—	—	—	—	2	12
Gloucestershire	14	251	—	—	1	3	1	22	—	—	—	—
Greater London	1	26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	2	32	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	17	163	—	—	2	28	—	—	—	—	1	6
Hereford/Worcestershire	7	98	2	100	1	11	—	—	1	1	1	3
Hertfordshire	11	95	1	46	1	6	—	—	—	—	1	19
Humberside	2	20	2	76	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	47
Isle of Wight	2	19	—	—	—	—	1	4	1	4	—	—
Kent	14	123	1	50	3	21	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	—	—	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	8	144	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	2
Lincolnshire	4	49	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	4	56	—	—	2	7	1	3	—	—	1	4
Norfolk	8	81	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
Northamptonshire	5	78	2	84	—	—	1	3	—	—	2	17
Northumberland	6	105	—	—	1	43	—	—	—	—	1	8
Nottinghamshire	2	28	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	8	2	5
Oxfordshire	18	181	2	121	1	6	—	—	—	—	2	15
Shropshire	5	89	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	24
Somerset	4	43	2	55	—	—	—	—	1	4	—	—
Staffordshire	5	35	1	63	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	19
Suffolk	10	165	1	32	—	—	3	6	—	—	—	—
Surrey	9	111	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	6	46	—	—	1	3	—	—	—	—	3	44
West Sussex	8	83	2	61	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Tyne and Wear	3	48	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	4	37	2	55	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	34
Wiltshire	10	87	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	11	135	1	36	2	15	—	—	1	2	1	6
South Yorkshire	1	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Yorkshire	2	18	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total (1989)	304	3,590	25	1,019	19	153	11	76	10	43	28	290

[1] (Livery stables, riding schools, stud farms, hay for horses, grazing for horses, horse rides)
[2]— less than 1 hectare.
Note: Total may differ due to rounding

1990

	Horse based activities[1]		Golf Courses		Game cover for commercial shoots		Sports Ground		Other recreational facilities		Other uses under non agricultural use option	
	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares	Number of agree-ments	Land area hectares
Avon	3	17	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	5	37	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Berkshire	6	108	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire	6	133	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	7	34	5	270	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	37
Cheshire	1	19	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	5	36	—	—	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	3	36	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	26
Devonshire	2	77	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset	2	34	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Durham	3	86	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	13	131	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	8	38	—	—	1	7	2	44	—	—	1	2
Greater London	3	46	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	9
Greater Manchester	5	26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	8
Hampshire	6	60	—	—	1	8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hereford/Worcestershire	5	41	1	50	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	64
Hertfordshire	1	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—
Humberside	2	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	16	222	3	133	1	2	—	—	—	—	2	94
Lancashire	1	26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	136
Leicestershire	8	67	1	66	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	6	76	2	92	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	2	53	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	[2]—
Norfolk	3	25	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	5	85	1	96	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	4	13	2	104	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oxfordshire	12	144	2	127	—	—	1	29	—	—	—	—
Shropshire	2	4	1	31	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	7	141	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	6
Staffordshire	6	49	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	10	85	1	23	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	44
Surrey	5	71	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
East Sussex	7	70	2	94	1	2	—	—	—	—	2	17
West Sussex	5	42	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	15
Tyne and Wear	2	25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	7	67	2	124	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	11	194	—	—	—	—	1	13	—	—	1	1
North Yorkshire	7	67	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	167
West Yorkshire	1	24	1	50	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total (1990)	213	2,528	24	1,259	8	29	5	87	2	3	24	627

[1] (Livery stables, riding schools, stud farms, hay for horses, grazing for horses, horse rides)
[2]— less than 1 hectare
Note: Total may differ due to rounding

Fishing Boats (Decommissioning)

26. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to introduce a decommissioning scheme for fishermen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend has already made it clear that he is prepared to consider proposals for a decommissioning scheme, but only as part of a wider package including effort control. We are currently debating these ideas with the industry.

Sheep Producers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has made of the likely effect on United Kingdom sheep producers of the MacSharry proposals to reform the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: The proposed reform of the sheepmeat regime seriously discriminates against United Kingdom producers, many of them in the most difficult areas of the country. Reducing ewe premium headage limits would exclude up to 15 per cent. of our animals from the premium whereas only about 3 per cent. of the rest of the EC's ewes would be excluded.

Farmers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of farmers in 1980 to 1991.

Mr. Curry: The number of farmers, partners and directors in England in the years 1980 to 1991 as at the annual June census, including estimates for minor holdings, are shown in the table.

Farmers, partners and directors, England (including minor holdings)

Year	Thousands
1980	196·4
1981	193·9
1982	192·1
1983	189·8
1984	190·1
1985	187·8
1986	187·4
1987	185·5
1988	183·5
1989	182·4
1990	181·9
1991	[1]179·5

[1] Provisional.

Bottled Mineral Water

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy for consumers of current regulations for the labelling of bottled mineral water; and whether he has raised this issue with his consumer panel.

Mr. Gummer: The labelling and marketing of natural mineral waters is harmonised in the EC by the natural mineral waters directive (80/777) and implemented in the UK by the Natural Mineral Waters Regulations 1985. The EC Commission is currently reviewing the operation of the directive and some time ago we passed to it comments on improvements in labelling. We expect the Commission to propose amendments to the directive. When these are received we will consult UK interests, including consumer organisations. I will at that time assess the need to consult the consumer panel as well; in the meantime it is always open for a member of the panel to raise any relevant issues with me.

Salmonella

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the percentage of poultry consumed in the United Kingdom which has been imported for the latest available date; how many tests for the presence of salmonella were carried out and with what results; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: In 1990, imports of poultrymeat represented 12·4 per cent. of domestic use and is forecast at 12 per cent. for 1991.

Information on the results from the bacteriological testing of imported poultrymeat is not held centrally.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what information he has on the number of reports received by local authorities and water companies about carcases of farm animals left by the roadside or in water courses for each year since 1986;

(2) if he will list the number of *(a)* initiated and *(b)* successful prosecutions against those who deliberately leave carcases unburied or dump them under the (i) Control of Pollution Act 1974, (ii) Environmental Protection Act 1990 and (iii) Dogs Act 1906 in 1990 and 1991, respectively.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available centrally.

Knackers and Renderers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals to monitor the range of prices that different renderers charge knackers across the country.

Mr. Maclean: Although some information is obtained regularly by the Ministry on the broad movement of collection charges by renderers, I have no intention of setting up a formal monitoring system in relation to the financial arrangements between knackers and renderers.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, in tonnes, the amount of waste arising from knackers' yards in each year since 1986.

Mr. Maclean: The information in the form requested is not available. However, it is estimated that the animal waste arising from knackers' yards accounts for between 5 per cent. and 10 per cent. of the material processed by the rendering industry. The rendering industry currently processes up to 1·75 million tonnes of animal waste a year.

Illegal Catches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many United Kingdom trawler captains have been successfully prosecuted during the last 12 months for landing illegal catches of fish at United Kingdom ports and harbours;

(2) how many United Kingdom trawler captains have cases awaiting to be dealt with by the courts for landing illegal catches of fish at United Kingdom ports and harbours.

Mr. Curry: Ninety-one United Kingdom fishing skippers have been successfully prosecuted during 1991 for offences against fisheries legislation; 153 cases are waiting to be dealt with by the courts. Information on how many of these convictions and pending cases result from the landing of illegal catches is not readily available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what precautions he is taking to prevent United Kingdom trawler fishermen from landing illegal catches at United Kingdom ports and harbours.

Mr. Curry: Enforcement of national and community fisheries legislation is carried out by the sea fisheries inspectorates of the Fisheries Departments in co-operation with patrol ships of the Royal Navy and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency and surveillance aircraft. The United Kingdom control and inspection procedures are acknowledged to be among the best in the Community.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ensure that local badger groups and wildlife protection groups are notified in advance of any section 43 licences it may be proposed to issue within their area; if he will allow a period for representations to be made prior to such licences taking effect; and if he has yet finalised details of his licensing scheme.

Mr. Maclean: In considering an application for a licence to permit interference with a badger sett the licensing authorities will consult local interests as they consider appropriate.

Horses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to review the status of the horse as an agricultural animal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have no current plans to do so.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the numbers and proportion of fallen stock disposed of by *(a)* knackering/rendering, *(b)* hunt kennels and *(c)* on farm burial for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: It is estimated that knackers and hunt kennels dispose of well in excess of 700,000 fallen animals each year. Figures for other means of disposal, such as burial on farm, licensed landfill sites or incineration are not known.

Dioxins and Furans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish his food surveillance report on dioxins and furans.

Mr. Gummer: I hope to be able to publish this report by the end of January.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Pensioners (Welfare)

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being considered to look after the welfare of pensioners during the winter months, particularly regarding financial support for adequate heating in their homes.

Mr. Hanley: Basic pensions, together with any income support which may be payable, are intended to cover pensioner's day-to-day living costs, including heating throughout the year. Income support includes special premiums, ranging from £13·75 to £26·20, to help with pensioners' extra needs. From April 1992 there will be, over and above the normal uprating provision, a special increase of £1 a week in premiums for single pensioners and £1·50 for pensioner couples who are disabled or over 80. The cold weather payments scheme has also been considerably improved. Payments of £6 will be paid automatically to eligible people as soon as a seven-day period of exceptionally cold weather is forecast by the Meteorological Office or actually occurs. The capital rule has also been abolished, making more people eligible.

In addition to cash benefits, the Department of Health and Social Services seeks to provide elderly people with practical advice and information as part of its annual "Keep Warm, Keep Well" campaign. This aims to alert elderly people and their carers to the dangers of winter weather; encourage them to take simple steps to keep well; and provide them with information on services, such as insulation and draught-proofing schemes, and the availability of social security benefits.

Housing Benefit

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will bring forward proposals to abolish the non-dependant deduction in relation to housing benefit cases.

Mr. Hanley: There are no plans to do so.

Education Authorities (Duties)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which sections of legislation covering education in Northern Ireland contain provisions comparable to section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Dr. Mawhinney: Provisions comparable to section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 are contained in article 101 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, as substituted by article 158 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

Northern Ireland Block

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) further to his answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *324*, if he will now publish details of the programmes of expenditure which have been running ahead of plans in this financial year, and of those which have been behind forecast expenditures, showing in each case the subheadings and the sums involved; if he will show details of the capital works postponed and the maintenance works deferred until next year; and what is his estimate of the consequences for employment in the current and the next financial year;

(2) further to his answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) on 9 December, *Official Report*, column *324*, when the above target expenditures which have led him to postpone expenditure on maintenance works and capital works in Northern Ireland first became known to him.

Dr. Mawhinney: Expenditure requirements are monitored by Departments from the start of the financial year. It was the balance between new demands and savings emerging in the third quarter which led to the decision to postpone some expenditure. The situation continues to evolve and final decisions on the adjustments required will be taken in the context of spring supplementary estimates. The details will be available in the revised estimates, which cover most areas of public expenditure. These will show the main changes proposed and will be laid before the House in February. The debate on the appropriation order will provide the opportunity for discussion.

Information on individual projects affected is not centrally available but the delay in releasing new projects will be short-lived. The overall employment effects are also expected to be minimal—at most only a temporary change in the balance of activity between sectors—as the total volume of public expenditure is not being reduced.

Criminal Injury and Damage

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision was made for *(a)* criminal injury, and *(b)* criminal damage in each financial

year since 1987-88; how much was actually expended in those years; and what projections he has made for the current financial year and the next two financial years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is shown in the table:

	Criminal injuries £k	*Criminal damage £k*
1987-88		
Provision	12,100	17,855
Expenditure	12,925	19,004
1988-89		
Provision	14,500	19,600
Expenditure	14,968	20,606
1989-90		
Provision	17,063	21,592
Expenditure	16,450	22,124
1990-91		
Provision	19,000	23,396
Expenditure	19,548	22,711
1991-92		
Projection	25,000	33,500
1992-93		
Projection	25,235	27,884
1993-94		
Projection	23,477	22,406

Note: Provision includes supplementary provision.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the incidence of farmed salmon escapees entering salmon rivers in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hanley: Northern Ireland salmon rivers are not regularly monitored for farmed salmon escapees. All the information available in shown in the table.

River	*Number of Escapees*				
	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Bush	4	0	1	2	3
Glenarm	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]159	0
Other Co. Antrim Rivers	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]0	n/a

Notes
n/a —No monitoring undertaken.
[1] As a result of a special exercise undertaken following a known escape from a salmon farm.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums he has expended on research into the effect of farmed salmon escapes on the native stocks of salmon in Northern Ireland rivers in each of the last three financial years and the current year.

Mr. Hanley: The sums expended were as follows:

	£
1988-89	Nil
1989-90	Nil
1990-91	2,560
1991-92	[1]4,844

[1] Up to 30 November 1991.

Housing Benefit

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will co-ordinate the activities of the Social Security Agency and the Housing Executive in order that they use their computerised systems to synchronise all transactions relating to housing benefit changes, benefit deductions, payment of rent from such deductions, and rent statements to tenants.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alex Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and Public Information Office.

Magharafelt Primary School

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when he expects the perimeter fence at Magharafelt controlled primary school to be repaired;

(2) how many mobile classrooms there are at Magharafelt controlled primary school; and when he expects them to be replaced by permanent buildings.

Dr. Mawhinney: Any necessary repairs will be carried out by the north eastern education and library board as soon as possible. The school has two mobile classrooms. The north eastern education and library board has no immediate plans to replace them.

Hospital (Coleraine)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in the last six months on the provision of the new hospital at Coleraine; what sums have been expended on that programme to date; and when he expects work to begin.

Mr. Hanley: I announced approval in principle for the new Causeway hospital on 13 September. A site has been identified at Lodge road, Coleraine and negotiations for its purchase are in hand. I hope to be able to announce the time scale for the construction in the near future.

Fishing

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will, for as long a number of years as is possible at reasonable cost, publish a table to show for each river in the area covered by the Foyle Fisheries Commission the number of *(a)* salmon, *(b)* grilse and *(c)* sea trout taken by (i) anglers and (ii) by commercial fishermen showing the number of fish taken by nets and fishing engines in each river estuary and in Lough Foyle, by other coastal fishing stations and by drift nets.

Mr. Hanley: The tables set out the information which is available. Separate figures for salmon and grilse cannot be provided.

Anglers' catch returns
Salmon and Grilse

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Camowen/Drumragh	5	17	4	4	37	14	3	13	3	2
Culdaff	1	8	—	—	2	1	—	—	1	1
Dennett	6	6	3	3	6	2	1	—	4	15
Derg	32	193	11	13	103	10	3	9	5	40
Deele	4	7	—	—	2	—	—	3	—	—
Faughan	420	403	273	52	564	371	89	165	370	332
Finn and Reelan	248	273	339	75	309	324	77	208	170	188
Foyle	14	68	15	80	7	25	14	39	20	4
Glenelly/Owenkillew	27	125	10	5	64	22	12	20	22	25
Mourne/Strule	183	479	89	79	496	270	82	410	299	156
Roe	552	519	80	53	224	119	96	77	81	119
Others	25	27	7	15	—	14	13	16	2	45
Totals	1,517	2,125	831	379	1,814	1,172	390	960	977	927
Percentage submission of returns[1]	12	17	7	15	10	8	4	5	6	4

Sea Trout

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Camowen/Drumragh	4	15	2	4	40	30	—	—	—	6
Culdaff	10	19	15	27	29	22	5	—	—	4
Dennett	299	165	165	152	68	39	14	17	95	220
Derg	73	196	5	6	121	13	11	23	5	10
Deele	15	22	—	—	36	11	5	16	—	8
Faughan	2,950	2,188	5,723	1,425	2,808	1,864	1,210	1,003	648	660
Finn and Reelan	408	337	103	209	137	245	253	135	55	138
Foyle	199	224	39	188	46	42	263	175	122	9
Glenelly/Owenkillew	163	319	85	84	148	79	73	25	23	38
Mourne/Strule	1,092	644	368	254	633	271	97	364	170	63
Roe	1,687	756	195	773	772	135	207	216	166	193
Others	521	114	57	466	—	178	218	107	128	50
Totals	7,421	4,999	6,567	3,588	4,838	2,929	2,356	2,081	1,412	1,399
[1]Percentage submission of returns	12	17	7	15	10	8	4	5	6	4

[1]Anglers in the Foyle Fisheries Commission area are required, as part of the licensing arrangements, to submit catch returns but do not always do so. Figures cannot be extrapolated to give catch returns for 100 per cent. submission of returns as, among others factors, anglers are more likely to make a return if they have caught fish.

Commercial fishermen's catches
Salmon and grilse

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Drift nets—Sea and Lough Foyle	21,252	37,165	65,654	18,299	24,528	32,280	12,587	17,321	55,108	33,850
Draft nets—River Foyle	10,296	17,036	14,237	9,697	12,921	11,355	4,883	15,358	30,612	9,188
River Roe	1,485	3,268	1,244	595	1,145	1,354	551	818	478	1,011
Fixed engines—Coastal	435	943	627	78	674	282	47	79	330	371
Londonderry fishery River Foyle	1,313	1,745	1,490	863	1,253	1,083	415	763	—	—
Totals	34,781	60,157	83,252	29,532	40,521	46,354	18,483	34,339	86,528	44,420

Sea trout

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Draft nets River Roe	473	352	942	846	225	279	285	259	22	62

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will for as long a number of years as is possible at reasonable cost, publish a table to show for each river in the area covered by the Fisheries Conservancy Board the number of *(a)* salmon, *(b)* grilse and *(c)* sea trout taken by (i) anglers and (ii) commercial fishermen, showing the number of fish taken by nets/fishing engines in each river estuary, fresh water lough or by coastal fishing stations and by drift nets.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available in the form requested. In the Fisheries Conservancy Board area anglers are not required to submit catch returns but records of some catches are submitted on a voluntary basis and these are set out in the table together with the commercial fisherman's returns. Separate figures are not available for salmon and grilse and figures for sea trout are available only in respect of commercial fishing.

Anglers' catch returns
Salmon and grilse

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Lower River Bann	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	2,530	1,831	983
Bush River Private Stretch	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	170	70	47
New Stretch[2]	—	—	—	14	47	93	65	74	25	35
Town Stretch	[1]	145	89	41	146	201	195	108	57	114
Leap Stretch	[1]	17	30	9	119	122	108	122	105	150
Rest of FCB area except L Erne	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	1,000	757	1,900

[1] Not available.
[2] Opened in 1984.

Commercial Fishermen's returns
Salmon and Grilse

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Tidal draft nets	180	215	520	549	400	27	69	114	74	12
Tidal drift nets	992	1,041	1,231	662	1,010	479	248	675	812	252
Fixed engines	7,474	13,773	13,366	12,607	7,944	11,382	10,577	12,968	17,364	9,950
Total	8,646	15,029	15,117	13,818	9,354	11,888	10,894	13,757	18,250	10,214

Sea Trout

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Tidal draft nets	254	231	721	757	418	263	332	162	221	138
Tidal drift nets	—	—	3	—	2	1	1	2	3	—
Fixed engines	138	102	155	189	65	142	120	120	163	101
Total	392	333	879	946	485	406	453	288	387	239

North Down (Economy)

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to regenerate the local economy in the North Down area.

Mr. Needham: The North Down area benefits from the many measures currently being undertaken by the Government and their agencies to promote economic development throughout Northern Ireland.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all capital projects in the areas for which he has responsibility, either directly or indirectly through the South Eastern education and library board, which have been postponed by the recently announced capital expenditure moratorium.

Dr. Mawhinney: The following capital projects in the area of the South Eastern education and library board will be delayed by the moratorium:

Extension to St. Colm's High School, Twinbrook, Dunmurry
Extension to St. Colmcille's High School, Crossgar
Minor works at Longstone Special School, Dundonald
Site purchase at Ballymacross, Lisburn

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what hospitals in the Province have applied for trust status.

Mr. Hanley: The Royal group of hospitals has applied for health and social services trust status and its application has been accepted. The trust will become fully operational as from 1 April 1993.

Public Expenditure, Strangford

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which projects by the roads service of the Department of the Environment in the constituency of Strangford are now delayed due to the moratorium on public expenditure.

Mr. Needham: A number of maintenance schemes to a value of approximately £200,000 and the following minor works schemes have been delayed:

A20 Saltwater Bridge, Kircubbin
Moss Road, Millisle
Manse Road/Saintfield Road Junction, Carryduff
Killynure Road/Church Road Junction, Carryduff

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which projects by the Northern Ireland fire authority in the constituency of Strangford are now delayed by the moratorium on public expenditure;

(2) which projects, supported by the industrial development boards, in the constituency of Strangford are now delayed due to the moratorium on public expenditure;

(3) which projects by the water service of the Department of the Environment in the constituency of Strangford are now delayed due to the moratorium on public expenditure.

Mr. Needham: None.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which projects by the Department of Agriculture in the constituency of Strangford have been delayed as a result of the moratorium on public expenditure for capital projects;

(2) which projects by the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbours authority have been delayed following the moratorium on public expenditure in capital projects.

Mr. Hanley: None.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which projects by the police authority in the constituency of Strangford are now delayed by the moratorium on public expenditure;

(2) which educational projects in the constituency of Strangford are now delayed due to the moratorium on public expenditure.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what locations in the constituency of Strangford *(a)* the building of new homes and *(b)* improvement schemes to existing homes are delayed due to the moratorium on public expenditure; and how many homes are involved at each location.

Mr. Needham: The chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has advised me that the pause in public spending in 1991-92 will have no affect on the building of new homes or improvement schemes to existing homes in the constituency of Strangford.

Electricity Employees (Pensions)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will be receiving a reply to his letter of 28 November regarding pension arrangements for employees of Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Needham: I wrote to the hon. Member on 16 December.

Undergraduate Statistics

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the most recent figures available for the number of undergraduates *(a)* from Great Britain, *(b)* from the Republic of Ireland and *(c)* in total at (i) the University of Ulster and (ii) Queen's University of Belfast.

Dr. Mawhinney: Provisional figures for full-time undergraduates enrolled for the current—1991-92—academic year are:

	Queen's University	*University of Ulster*
Great Britain	241	452
Republic of Ireland	455	1,190
Total enrolement	7,990	9,313

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 18 December 1991]:* Through the Local Enterprise Development Unit—LEDU—and the Training Employment Agency the Department of Economic Development runs or supports 38 schemes. These are:

Training and Employment Agency Schemes

Training
Overseas Export Marketing Programme
Export Development Programme

Finance
Success through Quality
Quality Management Training
Small Business Development Programme
Enterprise Allowance Scheme
New Enterprise Programme
Graduate Enterprise Programme
Entrepreneurial Arts Programme
Manpower Training Scheme

Innovation
Development of Enterprise in Boston in Ireland

Local Enterprise Development Unit Schemes

Information, Counselling and Consultancy
Advisory Business Consultancy Scheme
Health Checks
LEDU Workshops
Technical and Marketing Appraisal Visits
Business Information Services
European Information Centre
Small Firms Counsellors
Mentor Programme
Acumen Programme

Finance
Capital Grant
Working Capital Grant
Unsecured and Secured Loans
Setting-Up Grant
Leasing Grant
Equity
Employment Grant
Rent Relief Grant
Interest Relief Grant
Buying Time Assistance
Management Salary Grant
Incentive Grants
Enterprise Grants
Marketing Development Grant
Development Grant

Property
Local Enterprise Programme
Property Development Scheme

Innovation
Strategic Programme for Innovation and Technology Transfer

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 20 December 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the organisations to which the consultative draft of the Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules was sent and the dates on which it was sent.

The Attorney-General: Copies of the consultation draft of the Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules were lodged on 1 November 1991 with the appropriate authorities in both Houses of Parliament and have since then been available to the public generally, upon request, from the Lord Chancellor's Department. I shall write to the hon. Member listing the organisations to which the consultation draft has been sent.

Murder (Provocation Defence)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received about the use of provocation as a defence in murder cases involving women.

The Attorney-General: Any representations received by me about this subject would be referred to the Home Secretary since he has policy responsibility for the substantive criminal law.

A full list of representations received and treated in this manner could be produced only at disproportionate cost, by searching all correspondence.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average time between *(a)* a request for a hearing date and *(b)* a hearing date being set for immigration appeals in (i) Leeds and (ii) other immigration appeals centres in the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: The average time between a request for a hearing date and a hearing date being set at the individual centres of the immigration appellate authorities (IAA) is currently as follows:

Place	*Time*
Leeds	7 months
Thanet House, London	3-4 weeks
Harmondsworth	1-2 weeks
Manchester	1-2 weeks
Birmingham	3 months
Glasgow	3 months

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General what action is being taken to reduce delays in hearing immigration appeals in *(a)* Leeds and *(b)* other immigration centres in the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department plans to make an additional hearing room available early in 1992 at the Leeds centre of the immigration appellate authorities (IAA) for the hearing of immigration appeals. This will enable the adjudicators at Leeds to sit more frequently and so reduce the current waiting times for cases to come before them. The Lord Chancellor's Department will also be exploring the feasibility of immigration appeals being heard at other locations in Leeds to help reduce the current backlog of cases.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has plans to increase the number of sittings by adjudicators in 1992 at all of the hearing centres of the IAA and the number of staff will be increased. These measures will help the IAA to tackle more effectively their rising workload. Furthermore, a multi-terminal case-tracking computer system will be operational by January 1992. This will enable the IAA to monitor more accurately and frequently the progress of appeals.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average delay between the receipt of immigration appeal papers, received in London from British overseas posts, being forwarded to the representatives of the parties.

The Attorney-General: Upon receipt of immigration appeal papers from a British overseas post, the IAA is usually able to dispatch copies of the case papers to the parties' representatives in this country within two weeks.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* staff and *(b)* adjudicators are retained in Leeds and other immigration appeal centres in the United Kingdom; and what proposals there are to increase staff and adjudicators, both part time and full time.

The Attorney-General: The staff and adjudicators currently in post at the individual hearing centres of the immigration appellate authorities are as follows:

Hearing centres	*Staff*	*Adjudicators*	
		Full-time	*Part-time*
Leeds	8	1	13
Thanet House	64	7	19
Harmondsworth[1]	10	3	10
Manchester	5	1	11
Birmingham	8½	2	10
Glasgow	1½	—	5

[1] Includes Belfast and Cardiff.

The Lord Chancellor's Department plans to recruit additional staff during 1992 and to deploy part-time adjudicators more frequently.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Michael: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all items of United Kingdom legislation which have been or are being subjected to legal challenge in the European Court *(a)* on the grounds of an alleged conflict with article 30 of the treaty of Rome, *(b)* on the grounds of an alleged conflict with another article of the treaty or *(c)* on some other grounds, together with the date on which each challenge was instituted and the date of the court decision.

The Attorney-General: The information is not readily available. I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the occasions, since 1 November 1991, on which he has made official statements or appeals covering the attitude which retailers should adopt towards the laws on Sunday trading.

The Attorney-General: It is not my responsibility to advise retailers on the attitude that they should adopt towards the laws on Sunday trading, so I have not made any official statements or appeals about this.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Special Needs

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will specify the performance indicators to be used to measure the quality of education for pupils with special educational needs in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: This is a matter for local education authorities, which have duties under the Education Act 1981 to ensure that provision is made to meet pupils' special educational needs.

GCSE

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the total number of pupils in the United Kingdom who sat GCSE examinations in the years for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The number of pupils who had attempted GCSE in England by the age of 16 in at least one subject in the academic year 1988-89 and 1989-90 were as follows:

	Total 16-year-olds	*Those attempting GCSE at age of 16 or earlier*
1988-89	619,800	581,300
1989-90	582,100	544,400

The figures for Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what action he proposes to take to ensure that publication of examination results will not deter schools from accepting pupils with special educational needs on to their rolls;

(2) how he proposes to publicise the achievements of pupils with special educational needs in non-examined courses and public examinations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: It is my right hon. and learned Friend's intention that the statutory requirements governing the publication of schools' examination results should apply equally to all pupils, including those with special educational needs. This accords with the Government's policy that pupils with special educational needs should be integrated as far as possible into ordinary educational provision, subject to the conditions set out in section 2 of the Education Act 1981 in respect of those pupils with statements of special educational needs.

The achievements of pupils with special educational needs will not always be poorer than their peers; some of these pupils are academically very able. It is right that their results should be published in the same way as those of all other children.

There is no reason to expect that the publication of examination results will deter schools from accepting pupils with special educational needs; indeed, under the law only selective grammar schools are allowed to discriminate on grounds of ability between applicants for places.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the total number of pupils with special educational needs in the United Kingdom who sat GCSE examinations in the years for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not available centrally for pupils with statements of educational need in England. The figures for Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Inspectors' Reports

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many Her Majesty's Inspectorate reports on average, per annum, are intended solely for internal readership by his Department.

Mr. Eggar: This information is not available centrally.

LINC Project

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has now received the Her Majesty's Inspectorate report on the progress of the language in the national curriculum programme; and if he proposes to publish it.

Mr. Eggar: The Her Majesty's Inspectorate report is an interim document intended for internal use. It has not yet been seen by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Primary Education

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the change in standards of reading and literacy in primary schools since 1979; and to what causes he attributes such change.

Mr. Eggar: There is at present insufficient evidence on which to base reliable conclusions about changes in the reading standards of younger primary pupils over the past decade. However, the introduction of the national curriculum and its associated testing arrangements at ages seven and 11 will provide reliable information for the future. My right hon. and learned Friend yesterday announced the results from the first round of these tests for seven-year-olds in 1991.

School Assessments

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what qualifications he expects to be possessed by any team of inspectors engaged in the assessment of a school in his proposed arrangements.

Mr. Eggar: Under the arrangements proposed in the Education (Schools) Bill, it will be for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools to determine whether applicants are fit to lead inspection teams as registered inspectors. It will be for registered inspectors to assemble teams with the appropriate qaulifications and experience, taking account of any conditions imposed or guidance offered by the chief inspector.

Nursery Education

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to the reply to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *700*, if he will publish figures showing the numbers of free or subsidised places for children under statutory school age in nursery schools or similar in each country of the European Community; and if he will also show the numbers of places as precentages of the numbers of children in the relevant age group in each country.

Mr. Fallon: Information is not available centrally, in the form requested. The latest available participation rates in pre-compulsory schooling are given in the table.

Participation in pre-primary education by age group, 1988

Country	*Age at which compulsory schooling starts*	*Percentage of age group*	
		Education 3 to 5	*[1] Day care 3 to 5*
Belgium	6	96	—
France	6	99	—
Germany (Fed. Rep.)	6	64	—
Ireland	6	51	[2]14
Italy	6	76	—
Luxembourg[3]	6	65	—
Netherlands	5	66	[2]17
Spain	6	71	—
United Kingdom	5	64	[4]27

Sources:
Table AA: Education Statistics for the United Kingdom.
[1] Possible overlap with the education data. It is not advisable, therefore, to combine the two rates.
[2] 1984.
[3] 1987.
[4] 1987. DES estimate avoiding double counting.

ENVIRONMENT

Business Rates

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account will be taken in determining property values for the purposes of the uniform business rate and the council tax of the recent fall in the market price of property.

Mr. Portillo: New non-domestic rateable values will come into force on 1 April 1995. It is proposed that these rateable values be based on market rents as at 1 April 1993. The valuation of domestic properties for the council tax is now under way. Properties will be valued on the basis of open market capital values as at 1 April 1991.

Rates (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was, in 1991-92 prices, *(a)* the value of rate support grant paid to Newcastle city council in every year since 1979-80, and revenue support grant since 1990 and *(b)* the value of non-domestic rate revenue received by the city council in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

	Rate Support Grant £ million at 1991-92 prices	*Non-domestic rate revenue £ million at 1991-92 prices*
1979-80	122·1	n/a
1980-81	[1]122·6	n/a
1981-82	[2]88·5	n/a
1982-83	64·6	n/a
1983-84	67·5	n/a
1984-85	62·6	n/a
1985-86	[3]58·0	n/a
1986-87	27·0	107·7
1987-88	54·7	93·0
1988-89	68·4	82·3
1989-90	64·7	84·7

	Revenue Support Grant	*[5] Receipts from NDR pool*
1990-91	[4]85·5	62·7
1991-92	75·2	71·9

Note:
The information given is not available on a comparable basis for all years.
[1] In 1979-80 and 1980-81, no Rate Support Grant (RSG) payments were made to Metropolitan County Council and Newcastle's RSG was correspondingly higher in those years.
[2] In 1981-82 to 1985-86 inclusive, RSG payments were made to Metropolitan Counties (and other upper tier authorities) and Newcastle's RSG was correspondingly lower.
[3] In April 1986, the Metropolitan County Councils were abolished and arrangements for paying grant changed accordingly.
[4] In April 1990, the new local authority finance system was introduced and Revenue Support Grant replaced Rate Support Grant as the main Central Government grant to local authorities. The 1990-91 figure is for Revenue Support Grant after the Safety Net Payment.
[5] Under the local government finance system introduced in 1990, the level of Revenue Support Grant is affected, inter alia, by the amount of non-domestic rates distributed from the national pool. The decrease in non-domestic rate receipts between 1989-90 and 1990-91 was largely compensated for by the increase in Rate/Revenue Support Grant.

Emissions

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the emissions in the years 1970 to 1979, 1980 to 1989 and 1990; and what are the projected figures for 1991 to 2005 for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland for (i) industrial carbon dioxide, (ii) land use change carbon dioxide, (iii) non-agricultural methane and (iv) agricultural methane.

Mr. Baldry: Emission estimates for carbon dioxide and methane, covering the preceding 10 years, are published annually in the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics", copies of which are placed in the Library of the House. Estimates for earlier years are available from Warren Spring laboratory which maintain the national emissions inventory on behalf of the Department. Data for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland separately and for carbon dioxide emissions due to land-use change are not available. Total emission estimates for the years 1970 to 1979 and 1980 to 1989 and for 1990 are as follows:

	1970-79	*1980-89*	*1990*
Industrial CO_2[1] (electricity supply, refineries and other industry)	1,179	967	[2]96
Non agricultural methane[3]	28·3	33·5	[4]—
Agricultural methane[3]	11·9	11·7	[4]—

[1] Expressed as millions of tonnes of carbon emitted.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Expressed as millions of tonnes of methane emitted.
[4] Not yet available.

Projections for carbon dioxide and methane emissions were set out in energy paper No. 58 "UK Country Study for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Response Strategies Working Group Energy and Industry Sub-Group", October 1989, copies of which are in the Library of the House. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secrtary of State for Energy to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 6 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *258*, for the latest projections for CO_2 emissions.

The Government have set a target, if other countries take similar action, of returning emissions of CO_2 to 1990 levels by 2005 and is taking steps to reduce emissions of methane.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many discharges of chemicals into the Merseyside environment have been notified to his Department in the past 12 months; if he will list these and the toxic chemicals involved; if he will specify whether the discharges were into the air, water, or land; whether he will extend the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to ensure that annual levels of emissions are monitored and declared; and whether he will require disclosure of information about emissions to his Department.

Mr. Baldry: Dangerous occurances involving uncontrolled or accidental releases of chemicals must be notified to the Health and Safety Executive. Individual authorised releases of chemicals are not notified to my Department. However, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Water Resources Act 1991 provide for monitoring information about releases to the environment which are reported to or obtained by the relevant enforcing authority or the National Rivers Authority to be placed in public registers.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to include information on historical emissions of the following greenhouse gases *(a)* industrial carbon dioxide, *(b)* land-use change carbon dioxide, *(c)* non-agricultural methane and *(d)* agricultural methane in his negotiations on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Questions relating to past, present and future emissions of all greenhouse gases are included among the issues covered by the preparatory committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what methodology he uses when assessing net greenhouse gas emissions in the United Kingdom in relation to gross emissions.

Mr. Baldry: Net greenhouse gas emissions are not currently estimated for the United Kingdom on a routine basis. To do so will require the development of methods for quantitatively assessing activities, such as afforestation, which remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Work to develop such methods is proceeding within the Department's own research programme and internationally through the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Poll Tax

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his Department's estimates on how much local authorities have spent on publicity and advertising in connection with the poll tax.

Mr. Key: My Department has made no such estimates.

Global Warming

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount has been spent to date on the global warming campaign in the press.

Mr. Baldry: The campaign, "Helping the Earth Begins at Home", which is being conducted jointly by my Department and the Department of Energy, placed advertisements in national newspapers between 5 November and 1 December 1991. The net cost of the advertisements was £393,045. This figure includes media buying and agency fees.

Incinerators

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many incinerators there are in the United Kingdom which are capable of dealing with *(a)* hazardous and *(b)* toxic wastes; what is the total annual capacity of these plants; and what is the annual production of these wastes in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: Waste containing substances hazardous to life are classed as special wastes in the United Kingdom and local authority records showed 2·315 million tonnes arising for disposal in 1989-90. However, high temperature incineration of special wastes can take place within a wide range of factory premises, where so authorised, and special wastes dealt with in-house are not recorded. United Kingdom merchant incinerators available for disposal contract have a total annual capacity of about 200,000 tonnes and are:—

ReChem at Fawley, Hampshire and Pontypool, Gwent
Cleanaway at Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
Leigh Industrial Services at Killamarsh, Sheffield

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the number and capacity of incinerators capable of dealing with hazardous and toxic wastes which are *(a)* under construction and *(b)* to be constructed over the next five years; what he expects the total annual capacity of those plants and the existing plants to be at the end of that time; and what are his projections as to the annual production of these wastes in the United Kingdom in (i) five years and (ii) 2000.

Mr. Baldry: Industry could have a variety of incinerator proposals at various stages of consideration. There is no central record of these and it would not be possible to say what the annual capacity of proposed plant might be until such proposals become definitely operative. Planning proposals for merchant incinerators in England and Wales of which the Secretary of State is aware are those currently before him for decisions:—

Ocean Environment, Seal Sands, Cleveland Northumbrian Water/ITE, Portrack, Cleveland Northumbrian Water/ITE, East Howdon, Tyne and Wear.

It is not possible to provide forward projections of any waste arisings which might be dealt with at existing or new plant.

Skin Cancer

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain from the United Nations Environment Programme for his departmental library a copy of the panel study, chaired by Dr. Jan van der Leun of Utrecht university, on the risks of skin cancer increases resulting from ozone depletion.

Mr. Baldry: The departmental library holds a copy of the 1989 report of the United Nations Environment Programme's environmental effects panel, chaired by Dr. J. van der Leun. The most recent environmental effects assessment is in preparation and is expected to be published in the next few months. Copies will be obtained for my Department.

Radiological Emergencies

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to communicate to the public and all relevant emergency service personnel information, the nature of any radiological emergency, its possible effects and emergency counter-measures.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has lead responsibility for the response to radiological emergencies resulting from overseas nuclear accidents. The arrangements for communicating details of the accident, its possible effects and counter-measures are set out in the HMSO booklet, "The National Response Plan and Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET). Phase 1", copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Energy Tax

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with his opposite numbers in the other European Community member states regarding the Commission's proposals for a carbon tax or energy tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on 17 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *105*.

Building Maintenance (Date of Return)

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what further action he proposes to take against the failure of Copeland borough council to make the statutory rate of return on building maintenance work undertaken in 1989-90.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the response of Copeland borough council to the notice served on it on 9 July 1991, and has today given a direction under section 19B of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 in respect of building maintenance work. The effect of the direction is to preclude the council from undertaking works of maintenance other than emergency work and works to the properties in the council's ownership.

Mr. Bart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he has decided to take against the failure of Rochdale metropolitan borough council to make the statutory rate of return on its building maintenance work in 1989-90.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the response of Rochdale metropolitan borough council to the notice served on the authority on 7 February 1991, and has today given a direction under section 19B of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 in respect of building maintenance work. The effect of this direction is to preclude the council from undertaking works of building maintenance other than emergency work and works to properties in the council's ownership. It also permits the authority to undertake a range of small building maintenance works with an individual value of less than £25,000.

Ordnance Survey (Corporate Plan)

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the Ordnance Survey corporate plan for 1992 to 1995.

Mr. Baldry: The Ordnance Survey corporate plan has been published today and I shall arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

EC Environmental Legislation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list details of each of the cases in which the EC is taking action against the United Kingdom Government over alleged non-implementation of EC environmental legislation.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* The European Commission has made applications to the European Court of Justice against the United Kingdom for alleged non-compliance with EC environmental legislation in the following cases:

Case 337/89 concerning various aspects of the implementation of directive 80/778/EEC on the quality of water for human consumption.

Case 56/90 concerning implementation of directive 76/169/EEC on the quality of bathing water at Blackpool, Southport and Formby.

The court has not yet issued a judgment in either case.

In addition, the Commission has delivered reasoned options under article 169 of the treaty of Rome to the United Kingdom in the following cases:

Case 211/89 concerning implementation of directive 80/779/EEC on air quality limit values and guide values for sulphur dioxide and suspended particulates.

Case 212/86 concerning implementation of directive 82/884/EEC on a limit value for lead in air.

Case 187/87 concerning compliance with directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds in connection with the construction of a ski tow in part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest at Glas Maol, Glenshee, Scotland.

Case 354/88 concerning compliance with directive 80/68/EEC on the protection of groundwater against pollution caused by certain dangerous substances in connection with discharges from a waste depot in Pakefield, Suffolk.

Case 26/88 concerning compliance with directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds and Commission directive 85/411/EEC replacing Annex I of directive 79/409/EEC in connection with the designation of habitats and other protection measures.

Case 387/87 concerning the application of directive 80/779/EEC on air quality limit values and guide values for sulphur dioxide and suspended particulates in Sunderland.

Case 147/90 concerning compliance with directive 85/337/EEC on assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment in connection with the disposal of waste material at Outlands Head Quarry, Derbyshire.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the chlorine loading potential of all CFCs and HCFCs for the time intervals of 10, 20 and 50 years.

Mr. Baldry (*pursuant to his answer, 10 December 1991, c. 363]:* Chlorine loading potentials, calculated on a steady state emission basis, have been published in report No. 20 of the World Meteorological Organisation Global Ozone Research and Monitoring Project, "Scientific Assessment of Stratospheric Ozone: 1989," as follows:

Species	*Chlorine loading potentials*
CFC-11	1·0
CFC-12	1·5
CFC-113	1·11
CFC-114	1·8
CFC-115	2·0
HFC-22	0·14
HCFC-123	0·016
HCFC-124	0·04
HFC-125	0·0
HFC-134a	0·0
HCFC-141b	0·10
HCFC-142b	0·14
HFC-143a	0·0
HFC-152a	0·0
CCl^4	1·0
$CH^3{}_1CCl^3$	0·11

The Montreal protocol scientific assessment, due to be published early next year may provide some time-dependent values for either chlorine loading potential or the related ozone depletion potential.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service College

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service (1) what is the annual cost of running the Civil Service college at Sunningdale Park, Ascot; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider relocating the Civil Service college to the north of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: These are operational matters for the Civil Service college and I have asked the chief executive to reply directly to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what plans he has to make places available at the Civil Service college for the induction of new Members after the general election; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: In 1988 the college arranged two briefing seminars on the civil service for hon. Members new to the House. I shall be delighted to ask the chief executive to make similar arrangements for new Members after the next general election, if there is sufficient demand. This will provide a welcome opportunity for the college to extend its already excellent reputation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Free Markets

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department takes to promote free markets in the countries to which United Kingdom aid is sent.

Mrs. Chalker: We promote free markets through focusing our aid on support for economic reforms and sound policies, agreed with the IMF and the World bank, designed to create the environment in which private enterprise and initiative can flourish. We are ready to provide help with privatisation. The Commonwealth Development Corporation invests directly in commercially viable projects in the private sector.

Kenya

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Kenya on freedom of access and movement of Somalis in Kenya; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have made no such representations. In our exchanges with the Government of Kenya, we have focused on the broader issue of respect for the human rights of all Kenyan citizens. We recognise that Kenya has faced a serious problem dealing with an influx of non-Kenyan Somali refugees and Somali bandits operating from outside her borders.

Somalia

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent fighting in Somalia.

Mrs. Chalker: On Wednesday 18 December I issued the following statement:

"The British Government is deeply concerned at the continued fighting in the Somali capital, Mogadishu. Apart from the senseless destruction of the city, there are distressing reports of heavy civilian casualties caused by indiscriminate shelling. The British Government particularly deplores the recent shooting of aid workers and the failure of those in charge of the warring factions to ensure that medical and relief supplies can safely enter the port and be distributed to innocent civilians.

Along with its European Community partners, the United Kingdom has already called on all parties to reach a peaceful negotiated settlement. It reiterates that call and strongly urges all concerned, including the elders of the clans in Mogadishu, to implement an immediate ceasefire which will permit aid agencies to attend to the desperate needs of the Somali people. It appeals to all protagonists in this conflict to put an end to the violence."

Development Co-operation (Treaty of Rome)

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the inclusion of a text on development co-operation in the treaty of Rome, as agreed at the European Council in Maastricht.

Mrs. Chalker: I am pleased that for the first time the objectives of Community policy in development co-operation will be set out in the treaty. We welcome the aims of fostering sustainable economic and social development, especially in the most disadvantaged developing countries; integrating them into the world economy; alleviating poverty; and consolidating democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The text recognises the complementary nature of EC and bilateral aid programmes with emphasis on co-ordination and consultation. The United Kingdom has consistently supported such moves in order to enhance the efficient use of EC aid resources.

Aid Budget

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many and in which cases arms deals have been linked to the overseas aid budget.

Mrs. Chalker: United Kingdom aid is provided in support of sustainable development and to alleviate poverty in developing countries. There is no question of linking aid and arms "deals".

NORTHERN IRELAND

Emigration

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the net emigration of people from Northern Ireland over the past 10 years, giving a breakdown by age group.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

Year	*Total*	*Under 1*	*15-44*	*45-64*	*65 and over*
1980-81	6,100	1,049	4,489	269	293
1981-82	9,900	1,327	7,650	710	213
1982-83	5,300	1,360	3,616	191	133
1983-84	4,000	809	2,893	180	188
1984-85	4,500	328	4,512	[1]+193	[1]+147
1985-86	3,600	138	3,578	[1]+52	[1]+64
1986-87	5,900	995	4,893	60	[1]+46
1987-88	7,900	857	7,237	[1]+42	[1]+152
1988-89	6,400	877	5,726	[1]+57	[1]+146
1989-90	4,600	[1]+104	5,362	[1]+323	[1]+335

[1] Net inflow.

Figures are derived from the mid-year estimates of population which cover the period 1 July in each year to 30 June in the following year.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what capital projects in the areas for which he has responsibility, either directly or through the Eastern health board, have been postponed by the recently announced capital expenditure moratorium.

Mr. Hanley: No capital works projects in the Eastern board's area have been postponed as a result of the moratorium.

Replacement of the ambulance service radio communications network in the four boards has been postponed and the installation of equipment costing about £0·5 million in the Eastern board's ambulance control centre will therefore be delayed.

Replacement of aging medical equipment at a number of the board's hospitals, for which £2·1 million had been earmarked, may have to be postponed. Purchase of special high-cost medical equipment, for which £1·75 million had been earmarked, may also have to be deferred.

Heart Bypass Operations

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland are on the national health service waiting lists for heart bypass operations; and what steps he is taking to reduce the period of waiting.

Mr. Hanley: I am advised by the Eastern health and social services board that at 30 November 1991 there were 758 people in Northern Ireland waiting for heart bypass operations.

The recent completion of the £1·5 million extension to the cardiac recovery area at the Royal Victoria hospital will permit an increase in the number of operations and I understand that the RVH has advertised for additional staff to support the extra workload. In addition health and social services boards are actively considering purchasing further operations from outside Northern Ireland. The Western board has already taken an initiative this year in arranging to buy additional cardiac operations for its resident population from hospitals in London.

Benefits

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full-year cost of raising one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance by (i) £0·34 and (ii) £0·36 for (1) 1991-92 and (2) 1992-93, (x) including increases in means-tested benefits, and (y) without increases in means-tested benefits, in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The gross costs of increasing one-parent benefit, widowed mother's allowance and income-related

benefit by these amounts for each week in 1991-92 and 1992-93 are given in the table. It is not possible to estimate what the costs would be without increases in income-related benefits.

Benefit	*Increase per week*	*1991-92 £*	*1992-93 £*
One Parent Benefit	34p	468,000	488,000
Widowed Mothers Allowance	34p	58,000	55,000
One Parent Benefit	36p	496,000	517,000
Widowed Mothers Allowance	36p	61,000	58,000

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year cost of raising one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance by 32p (i) for 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, (1) including increases in means-tested benefits and (2) without increases in means-tested benefits, in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The gross costs of increasing one-parent benefit, widowed mother's allowance and income-related benefits by this amount for each week in 1991-92 and 1992-93 are given in the table. It is not possible to estimate what the costs would be without increases in income-related benefits.

Benefit	*Increase per week*	*1991-92 £*	*1992-93 £*
One Parent Benefit	32p	441,000	459,000
Widowed Mothers Allowance	32p	54,000	52,000

State Earnings-related Pension

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the total cost to the national insurance fund in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of the 2 per cent. banded earnings offered as an incentive to opt out of SERPs, in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

2 per cent. Incentives in respect of personal pensions and 2 per cent. incentives for contracted-out schemes

Northern Ireland (£ million)

Paid in year	*In respect of year*	*Personal pensions*	*New schemes*	*Total*
1991-92	1990-91	11·9	2·4	14·3
	[1]1989-90	0·2	0·2	0·4
	Total	12·1	2·6	14·7
1992-93	1991-92	13·6	3·1	16·7
	[1]1990-91	0·3	0·1	0·4
	Total	13·9	3·2	17·1

[1] And earlier.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for changes in the thresholds for criminal injuries compensation claims under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend intends in the near future to bring forward an order under article 23 of the 1988 order to raise the general lower limit for criminal injuries compensation claims from £400 to £1,000 and to raise the lower limit for nervous shock claims in the same proportion from £1,000 to £2,500.

Public Expenditure, Strangford

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which projects by the Eastern health and social services area board in the constituency of Strangford are now delayed by the moratorium on public expenditure.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* None.

PRIME MINISTER

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to the letter of 6 November from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Chief Rabbi and the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council asking him to make a public appeal to retail companies to obey the existing law on Sunday trading.

The Prime Minister: It is not my practice to release such information. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) on 28 November at column 1066.

New Zealand (Royal Navy Visits)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his policy regarding Royal Navy visits to New Zealand.

The Prime Minister: Following the Defence Secretary's announcement in September that our ships would not carry tactical nuclear weapons in normal circumstances, the New Zealand Prime Minister has agreed that there is now no reason for British warships not to visit New Zealand. The timing of any possible future visit by a British ship to New Zealand remains to be decided in the light of operational needs.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Racehorse Breeding

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the conclusions of the ECOFIN meeting on 12 June 1991 are applicable to the British racehorse breeding industry.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Yes. The conclusions apply to all industries of EC member states.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce value added tax rates on bloodstock sales similar to those charged in France on the basis of item 6 (Agricultural Inputs) in ECOFIN's list of services on which reduced value added tax rates may be charged.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Discussions on which goods and services will attract a reduced rate of VAT after 1992 are presently taking place in Brussels and no conclusions have been reached. Until these discussions are complete, it will

not be known whether any EC member states will be able to introduce or keep a reduced rate for bloodstock. The Commission's current view is that racehorses do not fall within the list of goods and services which will qualify for a reduced rate of VAT.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the stated policy of the European Commission as regards whether the breeding of racehorses is an agricultural activity for the purposes of levying value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The European Commission views the breeding, rearing and care of all animals, including racehorses, as an agricultural activity falling within the activities which can be included in an agricultural flat rate scheme. The Commission's current view is that racehorses do not fall within the list of goods and services which will quality after 1992 for a reduced rate of VAT.

VAT

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of the Maastricht treaties on the rates of value added tax which may be levied in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: They have no effect.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full-year revenue effect if all tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance were restricted to the basic rate (i) in 1991-92 and (ii) in 1992-93, in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, giving the revenue from each separately and the total.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the yield, in a full year, from restricting all tax allowances and reliefs—except the personal allowance—to the basic rate of tax would be about £900 million. The corresponding provisional figure for 1992-93 is £950 million under the illustrative assumption of 4 per cent. increases in allowances and the basic rate limit from table 4.2 of the autumn statement 1991.

The combined effect of restricting these allowances and reliefs to the basic rate is greater than the sum of the effects of restricting each component separately. This is due to the cumulative effect of bringing more people into higher rate tax. For 1991-92 the estimated yields from the main components individually are:

	£ million
All allowances except the personal allowance	300
Occupational pension contributions	250
Personal pension contributions	150

The effect on receipts in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements for the restrictions.

It is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown for the components in respect of 1992-93 with acceptable accuracy.

Bus Companies

Mr. Fry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is considering to encourage bus companies to be able to purchase new vehicles.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer on 19 December 1991]:* No steps are being considered at present to encourage bus companies to be able to purchase new vehicles.

Football Pools

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the rates of levy for football pools and the amount received by the Consolidated Fund, in 1991 prices, for each year since 1961.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer on 19 December 1991]:* The table gives the rate of pool betting duty and the amount paid to the Exchequer between 1961 and 1991. All figures are approximately indexed to 1991 prices.

	Amount paid (£'000s)	*Duty rates per cent.*
1961-62	371,255	30
1962-63	295,347	33
1963-64	309,418	33
1964-65	292,940	33[1]
		25[2]
1965-66	289,592	25
1966-67	293,494	25
1967-68	276,346	25
1968-69	314,464	25[3]
		33⅓[4]
1969-70	349,898	33⅓
1970-71	320,068	33⅓
1971-72	400,977	33⅓
1972-73	417,410	33⅓
1973-74	393,714	33⅓
1974-75	407,398	40
1975-76	353,823	40
1976-77	332,827	40
1977-78	317,320	40
1978-79	309,207	40
1979-80	307,001	40
1980-81	304,562	40
1981-82	306,240	40
1982-83	323,811	42½
1983-84	318,092	42½
1984-85	322,085	42½
1985-86	328,178	42½
1986-87	343,698	42½
1987-88	360,045	42½
1988-89	342,061	42½
1989-90	345,577	42½
1990-91	315,256	40
1991-92	(n.a.)	37½

[1] To 2 August 1964.
[2] From 3 August 1964.
[3] To 24 March 1968.
[4] From 25 March 1968.

EMPLOYMENT

Gas Heating Appliances

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action the Health and Safety Executive is taking regarding the monitoring, safety and regulation of home gas space heating appliances in Wales.

Mr. Forth: The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1984 set out detailed requirements for the safe

installation and use of applicances where the gas is supplied through pipes. The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 require all gas installation businesses working with piped gas to register with the Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI), which aims to ensure that all such businesses work in a competent manner. The Health and Safety Executive is reviewing both of these regulations with the aim of bringing into scope the installation and use of appliances which use liquefied petroleum gas supplied from a tank or cylinder located on the consumer's premises.

HSE inspectors have powers under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to investigate any reported incident involving gas and to take any enforcement action which may be necessary.

International Biosynthetics

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the operation of the emergency plans required under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 in dealing with the recent chemical emission at the International Biosynthetics plant on Merseyside; and if he will make a statement about the co-ordination of information and emergency services on Merseyside in the event of a chemical or radiation incident.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is investigating the accident at the International Biosynethetics plant. The investigation includes discussions with the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority to establish whether any changes are required to the off-site emergency plan for the site as required by regulation 11(1) of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations (CIMAH) 1984.

Emergency plans are usually drawn up locally; this is normally done by the local authorities at county level or the fire and civil defence authorities in the metropolitan areas. HSE is also involved as the enforcing authority for regulations requiring the preparation of off-site emergency plans for the limited number of sites subject to CIMAH regulation 11. Comprehensive emergency plans for civil nuclear installations are currently prepared by the licensee as a condition of the site licence. In October, the Health and Safety Commission published proposals to put off-site planning at these installations on the same basis as the CIMAH regulations.

HSE publishes advice to assist emergency planners in these areas in the form of two booklets "Arrangements for responding to nuclear emergencies" and "The Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 (CIMAH): further guidance on emergency plans".

BR Escalators

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many British Rail escalators, to which the public have access, have been examined by the Health and Safety Executive in the last five years; and what plans they have to examine the remainder.

Mr. Forth: The examination of escalators is primarily the responsibility of each railway undertaking. Her Majesty's inspecting officers of the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate check the general condition of escalators in the course of routine inspections of stations, and if they find a fault that might be considered hazardous to public safety, it would be brought to the notice of the operator. The major stations where most British Rail escalators are situated are inspected at least once every two years. Her Majesty's railway inspectorate does not keep records of individual escalators.

Employment Training

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what policy considerations govern the choice of 24 years as the upper age limit for the payment of child care costs for women seeking to re-enter the labour market under the aegis of employment training.

Mr. Forth: No such upper age limit exists. Training and enterprise councils (TECs) must meet or reimburse the support costs, including those of child care, to a level which is reasonable and necessary for training to take place, for all those entering employment training aged 18 to 24 who have been unemployed between six and 12 months—that is, those from the adult guarantee group. But others eligible to join employment training may also be helped with support costs at the discretion of the TEC.

National Dock Labour Board

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the progress in winding up the affairs of the National Dock Labour Board.

Mr. Forth: Yes. The wind-up has been concluded successfully and all the board's properties have been sold. I have placed in the Library copies of the board's final accounts covering the period from 4 July 1989 to the board's dissolution on 30 June 1990.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Royal Commonwealth Society

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what approaches he has received concerning the future of the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In recent months a number of approaches have been made to FCO Ministers on the future of the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society. Ministers are well aware of the problems and of the measures being taken by the Royal Commonwealth Society to tackle them.

Lt. Col. Partap Singh

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Lt. Col. Partap Singh (Retd), president of the Khalsa Raj party, applied to the British embassy in Washington for a visa to visit the United Kingdom; and when a decision is to be taken on his application.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Lt. Col. Singh applied to the embassy in Washington for a visit visa on 4 September. Subsequently, he withdrew his application at the embassy in Oslo on 24 September.

Kenya

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to assist with the travelling arrangements of Somali refugees from camps to the British embassy in Nairobi to attend visa interviews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None. We do not propose to assist with the travelling arrangements of Somali refugees in Kenya. The British high commissioner in Nairobi is not aware of any Somali refugees in Kenya who encounter difficulty in travelling to Nairobi to attend entry clearance interviews.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 December.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom at the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 December.

The Council agreed in principle that a further 200 million ecu (£140 million) of food aid should be sent urgently to the Soviet Union and that a first tranche of 500 million ecu (£350 million) of the 1·25 billion ecu (£875 million) food and medical aid standby credit should be disbursed as soon as possible. The Foreign Affairs Council also decided to establish a task force, based in Moscow or St. Petersburg, to help with food distribution.

The Council discussed the timetable for further technical work on the draft treaty on European union in order to ensure consistency between the provisions on political union and economic and monetary union and to prepare the text for signature. It considered reports on immigration and asylum presented by the Commission and invited Immigration Ministers to continue their work in this area on the lines agreed by the Maastricht European Council.

The Council asked the Commission to draw up proposals for the denunciation of the Lomé convention with respect to Haiti and to report to the Committee of Permanent Representatives on what steps might be taken to provide new humanitarian aid to Albania and to the Baltic states. It also agreed that the Commission should start exploratory talks with Romania on a possible association agreement. The Council adopted measures extending to countries of central America the generalised system of preferences concessions which it granted to the Andean pact countries last year.

The Council considered the way forward on the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement in the light of the European Court of Justices's opinion that the proposed judicial mechanism to be established under the EEA was incompatible with the treaty of Rome. The Council asked the Commission to identify possible solutions with a view to signature early next year.

Ministers discussed human rights in China, and agreed that the Political Committee should carry out a study. In the meantime, no new Community aid projects for China would be agreed.

In the margins of the Council, Ministers and the Commission signed EC association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and a co-operation agreement with San Marino.

Ministers issued a declaration on guidelines on the recognition of new states in eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. They discussed the situation in Yugoslavia in the light of these guidelines. They agreed to recognise on 15 January 1992 the independence of those Yugoslav republics satisfying certain conditions. The Arbitration Commission of the EC conference on Yugoslavia will advise on whether conditions have been met.

Tunisia

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations with Tunisia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: They remain good. I made a successful visit to Tunisia on 2-3 December. On 17 December British Gas signed a $600 million contract to develop an offshore gas field. This is the largest ever British investment in Tunisia. It marks a breakthrough for the British private sector and will, I hope, generate further export opportunities.

Arms Transfers

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards establishing an international register of conventional arms transfers.

Mr. Hurd: On 9 December the United Nations General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to establish at the United Nations a universal and non-discriminatory register of conventional arms transfers, covering the transfer of specific major weapons systems. This follows directly from the initiative which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took at the Luxembourg European Council on 8 April. We played a leading part in drafting and lobbying for the United Nations resolution, whch we tabled with our European Partners and Japan. The register will introduce greater openness and make it easier for the international community to monitor excessive arms build-up in any one country. We expect all responsible governments to recognise the value and importance of the decision taken by the General Assembly, and provide the necessary information for the register.

The register comes into effect from January 1992. It requests all participant states to record their imports and exports of certain major weapon systems and provide this information to the United Nations Secretary-General on an annual basis. The categories of weapon system affected are tanks, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery and missiles and missile systems. In Britain's case, the disclosure of such information will require additional powers. The Government intend to bring the necessary legislation before the House early in the next Parliament. The legislation will require disclosure of all exports and imports within the categories named above with effect from 1 January 1992.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police National Computer

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many names, other than the criminal names category, are entered on the police national computer.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The names database on the PNC holds 5,634,424 records. These include 138,893 wanted or missing persons and 273,296 disqualified drivers, some of whom may also have been convicted of criminal offences. In addition, the PNC holds records of some 40 million vehicles. These records include the name of the registered keeper.

Prisons (Mother and Baby Units)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the staffing complement of each of the mother and baby units in Her Majesty's prisons; and how many of these staff have appropriate qualifications in child care.

Mrs. Rumbold: The staffing complement in each of the units is as follows:

	am	*pm*	*Evening*	*Nights*
HMP Holloway				
	1 senior officer +2 officers	1 senior officer +2 officers	2 officers	2 officers
HMP and YOI Styal				
	1 officer	1 officer	1 officer	1 night patrol
HMP Askham Grange				
	1 officer	1 officer	1 officer	1 night patrol

At present, the prison officers who work on the units do not have qualifications in child care. However, nursing cover is provided on a 24-hour basis and the local health visitor attends each unit regularly. Each unit is being encouraged to make use of the facilities available in the local community, so that where appropriate mothers can attend social service run family centres.

Officers from each unit have attended week long courses at HM prison Holloway devised specifically for staff working on the units. A full staff training needs analysis is being undertaken by the Prison Service College. In addition, HM prison Styal is planning to recruit nursery nurses to work in its unit in the new year.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prisoners have applied in the last year to have their babies with them in prison mother and baby units; and how many have been successful.

Mrs. Rumbold: The numbers of women prisoners who applied for admission to the units in 1991 were as follows:

Askham Grange:
Out of 25 applications received, only three were refused; in each case the mother had a history of child abuse.

Styal:
There have been 36 applications; one was rejected in view of her unsuitability for the mother and baby unit. Due to lack of space, two women have been put on a waiting list.

Holloway:
There have been 65 applications. There have been no rejections but due to lack of space two women have been put on a waiting list.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places have been available in prison mother and baby units in each of the past five years; and if there are plans to increase the number of such places in the future.

Mrs. Rumbold: The total number of places available in the three prison mother and baby units in each of the past five years has been 39. With the arrival of older babies at Styal, it has been necessary to reduce the number of mother and baby places from 12 to 10. The current number of places available is therefore 37. Consultations are taking place at Styal to determine both the medium and long-term requirements of mothers with older babies.

A new purpose-built unit, which will provide an additional closed facility for nine mothers and their babies, is planned at Her Majesty's prison New Hall. This unit should be ready for occupation by the spring of 1994.

Poll Tax

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his Department's estimates of the cost to the prison service and the police force in connection with the imprisonment of poll tax defaulters.

Mrs. Rumbold: There is no central record of the number of people proceeded against and imprisoned for failure to pay poll tax. It is not therefore possible to estimate the associated costs to the prison service or to the police.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his Department's estimates of the costs of debt collection by local authorities, including court costs and legal aid fees, in conection with poll tax defaulters.

Mr. Key: I have been asked to reply.
My Department has made no such estimates.

Lotteries

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government have any plans to increase local authorities' powers to vet applications to hold lotteries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We keep the law governing the conduct and regulation of lotteries under review, but have no current proposals to increase local authorities' powers.

Styal Prison Steering Group

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to the reply given by the Minister of State on 7 November at column *219*, what is the membership of the Styal prison steering group; and how many times it has met.

Mrs. Rumbold: The membership of the Styal prison steering group is as follows:

Area manager, Trans-Pennine (Chairman)
Governor, HM prison Styal
Head of residence, HM prison Styal
Principal nursing sister, HM prison Styal

Group manager, HM prison Styal
Senior psychologist, HM prison Styal
Probation officer, HM prison Styal
A representative from DIP 1 division, prison service HQ
Principal officer from Cheshire social services

The steering group met for the first time on 12 December. Future meetings will be held on a quarterly basis.

Historic Buildings (Broadcasting Complaints)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those cases considered by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission in 1991 concerning programmes which raised issues related to the payment of grants by historic buildings councils.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the Commission have considered two complaints arising from a single programme which looked at the work of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland. The details are as follows:

Complainant	*Date of complaint*	*Programme*	*Date of broadcast*	*Nature of complaint*	*Commission's adjudication*	*Date*
Mr. Marc Ellington	11 March 1991	"Scottish Eye: Making History Pay" Hyndland Television Channel 4	10 March 1991	Unjust or unfair treatment	Upheld in part	23 October 1991
Mr. Richard Emerson	21 June 1991	"Scottish Eye: Making History Pay" Hyndland Television Channel 4	10 March 1991	Unjust or unfair treatment	Upheld	23 October 1991

However, I understand from the Commission that the two complaints considered did not arise from the payment of grants by historic buildings councils. No other complaints have been received.

Closed-circuit Television

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to extending the use of closed-circuit television used for traffic management to such uses as crime prevention and detection; and what guidance he has issued on these matters.

Mr. John Patten: The use of surveillance systems is an operational matter for chief officers. The Home Office has, however, issued guidance that closed circuit television should be used by the police only when necessary for the proper and efficient conduct of police operations.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance he has given to pilot projects on the use of closed-circuit television as an instrument for tackling crime in city centres.

Mr. John Patten: The steering committees of a number of local safer cities projects have recommended giving financial support to a total of nine crime prevention schemes involving the use of closed-circuit television in city centre locations, including schemes confined to car parks. Home Office grant totalling £280,000 has been approved for these schemes. In the case of each scheme, the grant is a partial contribution only to the total cost.

Somalia

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has reviewed the working of the concession made in September 1988 to Somali refugees; if he has plans to extend it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The concession is kept under constant review in the light of circumstances both in Somalia itself and neighbouring countries. The original scheme was criticised on the grounds that those who could not reach the relevant British diplomatic post to apply for entry clearance in person were denied the right of appeal (under section 13(2) of the Immigration Act 1971) which normally applies to applications made abroad. Earlier this year new arrangements were introduced to allow sponsors here to make written application direct to the post concerned in the event of an adverse decision by the Home Office, thus qualifying the applicant for appeal rights. We have no plans to extend the concession any further at present although I will look into the points the hon. Member raised with me when we discussed this matter on 18 December.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of requests from Somalis in the United Kingdom for the issue of visas to relatives abroad seeking asylum at the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 29 November 1991 there were 1,371 outstanding visa applications from Somalis seeking to join relatives in the United Kingdom.

Animal Experiments

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received over increases in the number of tests on live animals carried out in respect of food additives.

Mrs. Rumbold: We are not aware of any such representations.

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will take to reduce the use of animals in experiments for food additive tests.

Miss Rumbold: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is not one of the Ministers responsible for the national and international regulations under which the safety testing of food additives are required. His responsibility is for controlling the conduct of scientific procedures on living animals. We have no plans to refuse licences where my right hon. Friend is satisfied that the work is justified under section 5 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inspectors he employs to monitor tests on live animals; whether he has received representations to increase this number; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: There were 20 members of the Home Office animals (scientific procedures) inspectorate on 19 December. The Home Office receives representations from time to time to increase the number of inspectors, but I am satisfied that the present strength of the inspectorate is adequate.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received urging the amendment of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and whether he proposes any amendment or administrative action to end or reduce tests on live animals *(a)* for cosmetics and *(b)* for drugs similar to those already on the market.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Home Office receives a large volume of correspondence on a wide range of animal procedures matters, part of which will contain particular or general suggestions for changes to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 or the way in which it is administered.

Provided that the requirements of the 1986 Act are fulfilled, my right hon. Friend will continue to grant under section 5 project licences authorising particular programmes of work involving living animals. The modification of drugs to improve their efficacy or reduce their unwanted side effects is an important route of scientific and therapeutic advance. Any application for a project licence which clearly sought to develop a drug already on the market would not, however, be granted. The use of animals in the safety testing of cosmetics accounted for less than one quarter of a per cent. of all animal tests carried out in this country in 1990. Reductions in the number of tests on animals for whatever purpose depend heavily on scientific advances in the development of acceptable alternatives, their validation, and their acceptance by regulatory bodies.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what change there has been, since 1 January 1991, in his policy of counting the number of LD50 force feeding tasks on live animals; and what were the numbers of such tests in each of the last five years;

(2) what representations he has received over *(a)* recent increases in the LD50 force feeding test on live animals and *(b)* the utility and possibility of replacement of this test; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Substances administered in acute toxicity tests are not always given by means of a tube inserted into the stomach. The statistics do not differentiate between routes of administration.

There has been encouraging progress in further reducing the need for formal LD50 tests. As a result of a British initiative led by the Department of Health and supported and part funded by the Home Office, a testing method which does not rely on lethality as an end point has been developed, validated and accepted by international regulatory bodies as a replacement of the LD50 test in many areas of toxicity testing. We understand that the new test will be incorporated into OECD guidelines next year.

There has been no change since 1 January 1991 in the counting of LD50 tests. However, it is not possible to identify these tests separately in the statistics because they are included in the wider group of acute and subacute quantitative whole body lethal toxicity tests. The 1990 figures for this group are given in columns (8) and (9) of table 14 of "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain 1990" (Cm 1574), a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The descriptions of the classifications of toxicity tests were amended slightly for clarification in the 1990 statistics which means that this group now includes tests previously recorded in other columns of the tables. Taking all acute and subacute whole body toxicity tests together gives comparable figures for Great Britain as follows:

Thousands of procedures

Acute and subacute whole body toxicity tests	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Lethal	234	233	176	206
Non-Lethal	166	148	143	139
All	400	381	319	345

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what figures he has for each of the last three years of the number bred of *(a)* animals with a harmful genetic defect or *(b)* transgenic animals; and whether he will make a statement on trends indicated by these figures.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of scientific procedures started in 1990 using animals bred with harmful genetic defects (including transgenic animals as a separate category) is given in table 15 of "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain 1990" (Cm 1574), a copy of which is in the Library. As explained in paragraph 19 of the introductory notes and paragraph 24(m) of the Commentary in the Command Paper, there are no comparable figures for earlier years.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the number of juvenile offenders *(a)* cautioned and *(b)* found guilty by a court in each year since 1980;

(2) what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of incidents reported to police in each year since 1980 he estimates were committed by juveniles;

(3) what was the source of figures on juvenile offending referred to in his oral statement on 12 December at column 1068.

Mr. John Patten: Information referred to in my oral statement at column 1097 on 12 December is published in the annual Command Paper (Cm. 1322) criminal statistics, England and Wales 1989, chapter 5, copies of which can be found in the Library.

Information on the number of incidents committed by juveniles reported to the police is not collected centrally. the data from "Criminal Statistics 1989" given in the table below relate to the number of juveniles (persons aged 10 to under 17 years) cautioned and found guilty of indictable offences and as a percentage of all persons cautioned and found guilty.

"Criminal Statistics 1990" will not be published until the spring of 1992.

Number of juveniles (persons aged 10 to under 17) cautioned and found guilty of indictable offences and as a percentage of all persons cautioned and found guilty 1980-1989

England and Wales — *Thousands*

	All persons cautioned and found guilty (=100 per cent.)	*Cautioned and found guilty*		*Juveniles (10 to under 17)*	
		No.	*Per cent.*	*No.*	*No.*
1980	555·3	175·8	32	85·5	90·2
1981	567·3	174·3	31	87·6	86·7
1982	585·1	174·5	30	93·0	81·8
1983	574·5	167·9	29	94·6	73·4
1984	571·3	169·2	30	99·0	70·1
1985	587·0	175·7	30	112·5	63·1
1986	518·6	141·5	27	93·5	48·0
1987	533·8	137·6	26	95·7	42·0
1988	524·3	119·3	23	82·9	36·5
1989	472·7	99·3	21	72·8	26·4

Sir Basil Feldman

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many times in the last 12 months he has met Sir Basil Feldman;

(2) when was the last time he met Sir Basil Feldman; and what subjects were discussed;

(3) when he last discussed Sunday trading with Sir Basil Feldman.

Mrs. Rumbold: To discuss Sunday trading, Sir Basil Feldman called on my right hon. Friend on 13 March 1991 and on me on 5 June.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that those shops that have been trading on Sundays in contravention of current English law do not retain the resulting profits, in the event of a European Court of Justice decision upholding that law.

Mrs. Rumbold: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has from police authorities and chief constables on the financial and manpower consequences for policing as a result of the opening of shopping facilities on the four Sundays before Christmas.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. Deployment of police officers is a matter for the chief constables concerned.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring before Parliament a statutory instrument to amend schedule 4 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to include offences under section 47 of the Shops Act 1950.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 16 December to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) at columns *10-11*.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he received the Durham university business school report "Women and Work" on women's attitudes to working unsocial hours in the retail trade;

(2) what conclusions he has drawn from the Durham university business school report "Women and Work" for any changes to the law on Sunday trading.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend and I received copies of the report on 27 and 26 November respectively. The report is currently being evaluated.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on changes to the Sunday trading laws in France.

Mrs. Rumbold: None.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent to which food superstores opening on Sundays are complying with the licensing laws in every respect.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Because the enforcement of the liquor licensing law in England and Wales is a local matter for the police, no such assessment is called for.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he has taken of the Robert George industrial tribunal decision on Sunday working in considering his policy on the reform of the law on Sunday trading.

Mrs. Rumbold: Policy implications, if any, of decisions of industrial tribunals are primarily for the Department of Employment. In developing policy on reform of the law on Sunday trading, we work closely with them on the interests of those who do and do not wish to work in retailing on Sundays.

Operation Container

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *580*, what representations he has received from people and organisations in Lancashire outside Greater Manchester about Operation Container.

Mrs. Rumbold: Representations have been received from Lancashire county council and from other sources in respect of the use of police cells in Lancashire. On 18 December the Lancashire constabulary held 100 adult prisoners who should be in prison. As my earlier reply explained, this use of police cells is unacceptable and my right hon. Friend and I are determined that it should be brought to an end in the shortest possible time.

Foundation for Business Responsibility

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the organisation Foundation for Business Responsibility is recognised as a legitimate charity by the Charity Commission.

Mr. John Patten: The Foundation for Business Responsibilities was registered by the Charity Commission on 17 April 1967. Its objects are the promotion of education in industrial and commercial affairs.

BBC Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the pay for the new chairman-elect of the board of governors of BBC Wales, including the pay for being on the BBC main board of governors; and what is the basis of days worked per week or month on which the appointment has been made of Dr. Gwyn Jones.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The BBC board of governors comprises 12 governors, of whom one is chairman, another vice-chairman and three more are respectively national governors for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As part of their duties, the national governors also serve as chairmen of their respective national broadcasting councils. The BBC national governor for Wales is therefore chairman of the Broadcasting Council for Wales.

The remuneration of the BBC national governor for Wales (and that of the national governors for Scotland and Northern Ireland) is £14,150 per annum on the basis of one and a half days per week. Dr. Gwyn Jones' appointment as the new national governor for Wales is therefore on the basis of one and half days per week.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visas were granted at United Kingdom posts abroad for the purpose of entering the United Kingdom to seek asylum in *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1991 to the nearest available date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information, which may understate, is of grants of asylum to principal applications which were made overseas. The recorded figures are shown in the table.

Grants[1] [2] of asylum to principal applications received by British posts abroad and referred to the Home Office for decision

Year	Number
1988	15
1989	15
[3]1990	5
[3] [4]1991	10

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] Provisional figures, which may understate because of delays in recording.
[4] (January to June).

Miscarriages of Justice

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications for compensation for miscarriages of justice he received in the last year for which figures are available;

(2) how many applications for ex-gratia payments for compensation for miscarriages of justice he received in the last year for which figures are available; how many were successful, and what were the highest and lowest payments made.

Mr. John Patten: I will write to the hon. Member.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications he has received for ex-gratia payments from women who were wrongly convicted under byelaws at RAF Greenham Common; how many have been successful; and what has been the average level of award.

Mr. John Patten: We have received eight applications for compensation from women who were convicted under the RAF Greenham Common byelaws 1985. None of these applications has been granted.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications he has turned down for ex-gratia payments from women who were wrongly convicted under byelaws at RAF Greenham Common; and for what reasons he has refused these payments.

Mr. John Patten: We have refused five ex-gratia payment applications from women who were convicted under the RAF Greenham Common byelaws 1985. The applications were refused because they did not meet the criteria of the ex-gratia scheme for compensation.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to pay the first instalment of compensation to John McGranagan following his wrongful conviction.

Mr. John Patten: Mr. McGranaghan's application for compensation was received last month. My right hon. Friend hopes to be in a position to reach a decision soon.

Sexual Offences

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of male homosexual rape have been recorded in Her Majesty's prisons in each of the years for which numbers have been recorded; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I regret that the information requested is not recorded centrally.

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the law so as to make sexual offences under United Kingdom law but committed outside the United Kingdom actionable in the British courts, particularly in respect of minors.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans to extend the jurisdiction of our courts in this way.

Drugs

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of drug-related projects which have received financial support from his Department during 1991; and how much support they have been given.

Mr. John Patten: I will write to the hon. Member.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the lower limit for eligibility for compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: A guiding principle in considering the allocation of available resources for the compensation for victims of crimes of violence is that compensation should go to the more serious cases. The Government are committed to upholding that principle.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have decided that to ensure the maintenance of this principle, applications for compensation received by the board on or after 6 January 1992 will be met only where the injury sustained would attract an award of at least £1,000.

The 27th annual report of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board recently announced a record annual payment to the victims of crimes of violence of £109·3 million in 1990-91, 50 per cent. more than the previous year.

Total spending on the CICB scheme in England, Wales and Scotland is set to rise to £144 million in 1992-93, £157 million in 1993-94 and £161 million in 1994-95.

The increase in funding from £48 million in 1987-88 to £144 million in 1992-93, £96 million amounts to a rise of 300 per cent.

Trevi and Immigration Ministers

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the meetings of Trevi and European Community Immigration Ministers in The Hague on 2 and 3 December.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The meeting of Ministers concerned with immigration was the 11th in the series of meetings held towards the end of each presidency since 1986. The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), attended on my behalf.

Immigration Ministers approved a report for submission to the European Council on the harmonisation of immigration and asylum policies, as requested at the Luxembourg European Council. The report contained a detailed work programme for implementation over the next few years. The report made by Immigration Ministers has subsequently been endorsed by the European Council meeting at Maastricht.

In the asylum field, Ministers agreed that every effort should be made to ensure ratification of the Dublin convention by the end of 1992 at the latest.

Ministers also agreed that everything possible should be done to resolve the outstanding problem (concerning Gibraltar) which has prevented signature of the draft external frontiers convention.

The meeting of Trevi Ministers endorsed measures to strengthen practical police co-operation. These include: the establishment of national contact points for public order matters; guidelines having the aim of strengthening the mutual assistance in criminal cases; recommendations on the controlled delivery of drugs; and police co-operation in common frontier zones. The Ministers agreed to submit a report to the European Council, prepared by the ad hoc working group chaired by the United Kingdom, recommending the establishment of a central European criminal investigation office, "Europol", with a drugs unit as its first stage. Ministers also agreed, at the United Kingdom's suggestion, that car crime be placed on Trevi's agenda and that the United Kingdom should convene an ad hoc seminar of experts on this subject during the Portuguese presidency.

Visas

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will lift visa restrictions for Polish citizens.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to do so.

HEALTH

Children's Homes

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has in hand to ensure the proper protection of children in residential homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that my right hon. Friend gave to a private notice question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) on 2 December at columns 23-29.

Leicestershire county council is today announcing the appointment of Mr. Andrew Kirkwood QC to chair the inquiry to be conducted by the council into matters arising from the recent criminal trial of child care officers formerly employed in the council's children's homes. He will be assisted by two assessors who have yet to be appointed.

Skin Cancers and Cataracts

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of cases of *(a)* skin cancer broken down into melanoma and non-melanoma and *(b)* cataracts as a result of ozone depletion in the United Kingdom in (i) 1995, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2005 and (iv) 2010.

Mr. Dorrell: Any assessment of long-term health effects resulting from depletion of the ozone layer, with a concomitant increase in ground levels of ultraviolet radiation, would be influenced strongly by assumptions made about global future releases of various pollutants, particularly chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). The United Kingdom strongly supports the Montreal protocol on the phasing out or reduction in emissions of the most harmful of these pollutants. In addition, increased awareness of the dangers of excessive exposure to sunlight will influence public behaviour in relation to sunbathing habits. It is therefore not possible to predict with any confidence the incidence of skin cancer or cataracts in the future. However, trends in the incidence rates of these diseases will continue to be monitored.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers, squamous cell and basal cell, have been reported in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for each of the years 1980 to 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: Registrations of cases of malignant melanoma of skin (ICD[1]172), and other malignant neoplasm of skin (ICD[1]173) for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for each of the years 1980 to 1990, the latest year for which figures are available, are as follows.

Malignant melanoma of skin

Year	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
1980	1,827	93	285	37
1981	1,952	96	261	47
1982	1,990	116	285	36
1983	2,080	168	333	35
1984	2,083	148	251	46
1985	2,494	162	429	39
1986	2,635	167	444	50
1987	n.a.	n.a.	404	51
1988	n.a.	n.a.	500	44
1989	n.a.	n.a.	478	35
1990	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	58
	Other malignant neoplasm of skin[2]			
1980	18,965	1,250	2,531	536
1981	20,035	1,234	2,653	530
1982	19,742	1,108	2,650	529
1983	20,981	755	2,816	512
1984	20,892	1,362	2,880	486
1985	21,994	1,349	3,127	484
1986	25,265	1,502	3,221	483
1987	n.a.	n.a.	3,223	549
1988	n.a.	n.a.	3,718	551
1989	n.a.	n.a.	3,956	510
1990	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	538

[1]International Classification of Diseases code (ninth revision)

[2]Registration of cancers from these sites are well known to be particularly difficult and liable to incompleteness.

It would not be possible to distinguish between squamous cell and basal cell carcinomas without disproportionate cost.

It was recognised by the working party chaired by Professor Eva Alberman which reported last year on the national cancer registration scheme (Series MB1 No. 17) that better and more timely figures were required. Many of the working party's 17 recommendations are currently being taken forward by the cancer registries in the regional health authorities and by the NHS information management group in the Department. At OPCS, the large and complex computer system is being completely redeveloped. This will not be ready until 1994, but results for England and Wales for 1987 should be published by spring next year and those for 1988 by the end of the year.

Ozone Depletion

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff are working in his Department full-time on the human health effect of ozone depletion in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: No staff are employed full-time on this specific area. A number of officials are engaged on work relating to health aspects of radiation in the environment, including ultraviolet and other non-ionising radiations. The National Radiological Protection Board also employs scientific staff on work in these areas.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list any studies his Department has undertaken or commissioned on the human health impacts of ozone depletion over the United Kingdom; and if it has any plans to do any further studies.

Mr. Dorrell: The predominant health effects which might arise as a result of the depletion in the ozone layer would be as a consequence of an increased exposure to solar ultraviolet radiation. The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) has three stations in the United Kingdom which constantly monitor levels of ultraviolet light from the sun. The data obtained from these monitoring stations is published annually.

The NRPB and other research groups in the United Kingdom and abroad have undertaken a number of studies into the health effects of ultraviolet radiation and further research is either under way or planned.

In addition, the NRPB has established an advisory group which will, among other things, review these studies and will advise on the need for further research when its review is complete. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) is also being kept informed of development in this area.

Refugee Children

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider providing special funding for the local authorities caring for unaccompanied refugee children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We recognise that the cost of caring for these children bears heavily on a small number of local authorities. The authorities concerned are mostly in London where the standard spending assessments are higher than the national average because they face additional pressures such as this. For 1992-93 the children's personal social services standard spending assessment for London is over twice the national average and that for Inner London nearly four times the national average. It is for the authorities themselves to make their own decisions on priorities for local services.

London Hospitals

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the numbers of empty beds at the Charing Cross hospital, Hammersmith; what is the current waiting list for operations in the North West Thames regional health authority; and if he has any changes planned for the hospital functions in the future.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested for North West Thames regional health authority is given in the table. Information on the number of empty beds is not collected centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Ian Dixon, the chairman of Riverside health authority, for details. There are no current plans for changes in the hospital functions.

North West Thames RHA: Latest waiting times

Waiting time	Total in September 1991	Total in October 1991	Percentage change
Over 2 years	5,687	5,025	−12
1-2 years	11,684	11,471	−2
Under 1 year	44,816	42,933	−4
Total	62,187	59,429	−4·4

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health further to his answer to the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) of 12 December, *Official Report*, columns *484-85*, if he will extend the application in principle of the conscience clause in the Abortion Act 1967 to *(a)* pharmacists who are asked to participate in abortions by dispensing abortifacient drugs for that purpose, *(b)* medical secretaries who are asked to participate in abortions by processing administrative details required for abortions and *(c)* other medical and ancillary staff required to assist in the process of abortion except where their assistance is purely for the purpose of caring for mother and baby.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Section 4 of the Abortion Act 1967 makes provision for conscientious objection to participation in treatment authorised by the Act. Its operation cannot be extended except by primary legislation. However, in recognition of the particular concern expressed about the position of those ancillary staff in hospitals who are involved in the handling of fetuses and fetal tissue, hospital managers have been asked to apply the principle of section 4 to any ancillary staff who express a conscientious objection to participation in that activity. We have no plans to ask managers to apply the principle to other personnel who are not directly concerned with the handling of fetuses and fetal tissue.

Arachnoiditis

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work has been carried out by his Department on arachnoiditis, including investigations of its cause, symptoms and the prognosis for suffers; what research he has funded into treatments and possible cure; and what information his Department has about claims for compensation by sufferers whose condition is alleged to have been caused by the administration of Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science. The MRC is not currently supporting any research specifically into arachnoiditis.

We are aware that litigation is proceeding on behalf of people who claim damage through the administration of myodil.

General Medical Services

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources will be made available for the cash limited general medical services in 1992-93.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on 19 December.

RHAs (Capital Spending)

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the amounts to be allocated to regional health authorities for capital spending in 1992-93.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 19 December.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will announce National Health Service trusts' external financing limits for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) on 19 December.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is possible for a national health service trust to merge with non-trust health services without *(a)* public consultation or *(b)* without application to the Secretary of State for Health.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We will be issuing detailed guidance on NHS trust mergers and acquisitions early in the new year. Where an NHS trust plans to merge with non-trust health services and this requires an amendment to the original statutory instrument formally establishing the trust the regional health authority will consult in accordance with section 5 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 under an order made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In any other case the district health authority in question will consult the community health council.

Hospital Eye Service

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many referrals to the hospital eye service of persons above the age of 60 years took place in each year since 1987;

(2) how many referrals to the hospital eye service there were of *(a)* glaucoma, *(b)* cataract and *(c)* age-related maculopathy, in each year since 1987.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Complex Lenses

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the values of the complex lens entitlements within the spectable voucher scheme of the national health service for patients who have had a national health service eye examination on grounds of their complex lens eligibility only, and for patients who have had a national health service eye examination on grounds of insufficient income and who are found to require a prescription for complex lenses; and what information he has on the prevailing market prices of the cheapest available complex lenses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The value of the complex lenses "supplement" for patients who are entitled to vouchers on the grounds of complex lens eligibility is £3·70 for single vision spectacles and £19·70 for bifocals. Patients who are otherwise entitled under the voucher scheme and who have prescriptions for complex lenses will receive a C voucher (£49·00) for single vision spectacles or an F voucher (£104·20) for bifocals. The Department's annual survey of voucher values indicates that spectacles with complex lenses are available within voucher values.

Spectacles

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is made for people claiming attendance allowance to meet the cost of spectacle lenses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: People in receipt of attendance allowance can claim help with their spectacle lenses under the NHS low income scheme.

North East Thames RHA

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that the procedures leading up to the recent appointment of North East Thames regional health authority's general manager followed good practice in equal opportunities employment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Individual appointments to NHS posts are a matter for the relevant employing authorities. The NHS is committed to equal opportunities in employment. Normally, we would expect all NHS posts, including those at senior management level, to be advertised and openly competitive. However, there may be exceptional circumstances in which the adoption of other procedures is justified.

WALES

Trawsfynydd Power Station

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the results and conclusions of the recent radiation monitoring programme carried out on the environment around Trawsfynydd power station by the fisheries radiological inspectorate on behalf of the Welsh Office.

Mr. David Hunt: On behalf of the Welsh Office, the fisheries radiological inspectorate regularly monitors levels of radioactivity in a variety of materials in the aquatic environment around Trawsfynydd power station. The results of this monitoring are pubished annually in the report "Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles", copies of which are placed in the Library of the House.

In addition to this regular monitoring of fish and sediments at Trawsfynydd an enhanced programme of analysis was set up earlier this year by the inspectorate to measure radioactivity in sediment profiles at Trawsfynydd lake. This work has recently been completed and the results have been made available to the local community liaison committee. They are broadly consistent with earlier readings obtained by Nuclear Electric. The radioactivity present in the sediments is at a low level.

In terms of overall exposure to radioactivity by the public, the most highly exposed group are people who fish the lake and consume their catch. Expert advice is that the total radiation dose likely to be received by this group is no more than 10 per cent. of the internationally recommended limit of 1 mSv per year, i.e. well within the recognised safety limit.

Roads

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost, expected start and completion date of the Deeside Park to Drove Corner road scheme.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The scheme is expected to start between April 1994 and March 1997 at a cost of around £17 million. Construction is likely to take two years.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost and expected start and completion date of the Woodbank Junction to Deeside Park road scheme.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This scheme is planned to start between April 1994 and March 1997 at a cost of around £16 million. Construction is likely to take about one and a half years.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the numbers of people registered as disabled in each grade in his Department and Cadw.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

	Number
Grade 6	2
SEO	1
HEO	4
EO	6
AO	7
AA	15
Support grades	6

The grade categories shown include equivalent professional grades.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's policy on the employment of people registered as disabled; and what initiatives he has taken to increase the number of people registered as disabled employed by his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department is fully committed to an equal opportunities policy which states that no job applicant or employee should receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of disablement. I have placed a copy of my Department's "Guide to Equal Opportunities" in the Library of the House.

The initiatives my Department has taken include the appointment of a departmental disabled persons officer; close liaison with the Department of Employment, disablement advisory services and disablement resettlement officers, particularly on recruitment of disabled staff; the establishment of a work experience scheme for clients of the Cardiff employment rehabilitation centre; and the provision of special aids and equipment to disabled officers to enable them to carry out their duties effectively.

A further programme of action to achieve equality of opportunity in the Welsh Office for disabled people is to be issued to staff early in 1992. This will contain details of current practice and areas for future development with measurable objectives and target dates for their achievement.

RECHAR

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the coalfield communities concerning RECHAR funds.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received a significant number of representations from hon. Members, including the hon.

Gentleman himself, local authorities and other bodies about RECHAR and have discussed the matter with a number of them. I have consistently made it clear that I am extremely concerned that these EC resources remain blocked by Commissioner Millan and I hope that the whole matter can be resolved as soon as possible.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to release RECHAR funds for Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I am concerned that Commissioner Millan has not yet approved the RECHAR programme for industrial south Wales and I discussed this matter with his director general when I was in Brussels last month.

Run-Down Mining Areas (Grants)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what European funds have been received by his Department for (i) factory units, (ii) small businesses, (iii) promotion of tourism, (iv) training, (v) retraining and (vi) infrastructural and environmental improvements in run-down mining areas.

Mr. David Hunt: For the period 1989-91, £88 million from the European structural funds was committed to the Clwyd and industrial south Wales integrated development operation programmes, which cover Welsh coalfield areas. The operational programmes allocate the funding as shown in the table:

1989-91 structural funds commitments to industrial south Wales and Clwyd IDOP areas

	ESF[1] *£ million*	*ERDF*[2] *£ million*
Industrial South Wales IDO		
Industrial infrastructure	—	14·03
Communications	—	13·31
Business development	9·87	2·61
Environment	0·84	4·17
Tourism	3·42	9·73
Research and development	3·30	4·46
Total	17·43	48·31
Clwyd IDO		
Productive Activities	—	7·37
Communications	—	3·19
Business development	1·49	0·60
Regional Image	0·13	3·38
Tourism	0·47	5·18
Technology	0·50	0·20
Total	2·59	19·92

[1] European social fund.
[2] European regional development fund.

Children's Homes

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to encourage local authorities in Wales to appoint mature women who have brought up a family to run children's homes.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A review of children's homes in Wales has recently been completed by social services inspectorate, Wales, and a report is currently under consideration. While its recommendations are designed to secure improvements in the management and running of all children's homes in Wales, and it discusses in particular the need to develop the existing skills of mature and experienced staff in order best to meet the needs of the children, the selection of staff is, and will remain, the responsibility of local care authorities.

BBC Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes there will be in the pay and terms and conditions of employment of Dr. Gwyn Jones as chairman of the Welsh Development Agency subsequent to his appointment as chairman-elect of the BBC Wales board of governors.

Mr. David Hunt: The pay and terms and conditions of Dr. Jones's commitment to the WDA will now be reviewed.

Swansea College

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the revised articles of government for Swansea college have been approved by the Welsh Office; and what are the current articles in force for the college.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Using powers vested in him under the Education Reform Act 1988 my right hon. Friend approved the revised articles of government for Swansea college submitted by West Glamorgan local education authority subject to amendments in August. I understand that the authority has accepted the amendments and will shortly be making the necessary order to bring the articles into effect. Until this is done the articles in force are those which were made by the authority under the Education (No. 2) Act 1968 which came into effect in March 1976.

Training (Cardiff)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his reply of 16 December, *Official Report*, column *73*, if he will make it his policy to meet representatives of the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council, the South Glamorgan women's workshop and the Cardiff information technology centre, to consider alternative locations for a training centre of excellence; if he will meet the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation to consider alternative uses for the previously earmarked training centre of excellence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: No. The location of the proposed training centre is a matter for the development corporation and the other bodies concerned in the first instance and it would be inappropriate for me to intervene at this stage.

House Repossessions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with Tai Cymru regarding the resources required by Welsh housing associations to acquire mortgaged properties at risk of repossession for rent to occupants eligible for housing benefit as sitting tenants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The statement yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, about the package agreed between the Government and mortgage lenders to tackle mortgage repossessions, explained that mortgage lenders would be providing the

resources for housing associations to acquire mortgaged properties at risk of repossession. We and Housing for Wales are having discussions with mortgage lenders in Wales about the implementation of their scheme.

Third Dee Crossing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will convene a conference at shire hall, Mold, of Clwyd county councillors, Alyn and Deeside councillors, town and community councils of Deeside, employers and trades unionists to discuss plans for a third Dee crossing.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. A meeting has been arranged in London on 28 January to discuss the third Dee crossing with the hon. Member and a delegation from the Alyn and Deeside district council.

Groundwater

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of representations he has received since 6 December in connection with his groundwater consultations.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 6 December I have received 77 letters about groundwater-related matters, 61 of which were in identical terms; 59 of those 77 letters were included in the total figure that I gave the hon. Gentleman in my answer on 13 December.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the correspondence between him and the Welsh Region of the National Rivers Authority referred to in the December 1991 National Rivers Authority position statement on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, relating to the National Rivers Authority and the Secretary of State's general environmental duty and the assurances sought by the authority that the conservation implications of the barrage had been taken into account in arriving at the decision to promote the Bill.

Mr. David Hunt: No. The correspondence referred to was between officials of the NRA and my Department. It would not be appropriate for it to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policy considerations were taken into account in removing in the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill the right conferred by paragraphs 52(1) and (2) of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill for householders outside the protected property line to make a claim for remedial work against damage caused by rising groundwater, irrespective of whether that householder had previously commissioned a pre-impoundment survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Bill provides for properties within the protected property line to be surveyed before and after impoundment in order to determine whether there have been any effects from rising groundwater. Owners and occupiers of properties outside the protected property line but within Cardiff, Penarth and Llandough who choose to have pre- and post-impoundment surveys undertaken are also entitled to benefit from the scheme. By an anomaly, cause 52 of the private Bill also entitled householders in Cardiff, Penarth and Llandough but outside the protected property line to a survey and remedial works even if they had not opted for the initial surveys.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the intake of new patients per million population in Wales in 1990 for kidney treatment.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There were 80·6 new patients accepted for treatment of end stage renal failure per million population in Wales in 1990.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he has taken to assist kidney patients in Wales; and what new measures he proposes to help kidney patients in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave on 12 November 1991.

Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the rate of *(a)* female unemployment, *(b)* male unemployment and *(c)* long-term unemployment in Dyfed.

Mr. David Hunt: In November 1991 the unemployment rates for men and women in Dyfed were 11·3 per cent. and 5·6 per cent. of the work force respectively.

The latest available long-term unemployment data are for October, when 1·8 per cent. of the Dyfed work force had been unemployed for more than one year.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to assist the unemployed in Dyfed.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department, the Welsh Development Agency and other Government agencies operate a wide range of measures aimed at combating unemployment. The Welsh Office and all the other bodies will continue to look for and respond swiftly to opportunities that arise which have the potential to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to assist the unemployed in the Fishguard area.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department, the Welsh Development Agency and other Government agencies operate a wide range of measures aimed at combating unemployment. The Welsh Office and all the other bodies will continue to look for and respond swiftly to opportunities that arise which have the potential to reduce unemployment. I have, in particular, asked the Welsh Development Agency and West Wales TEC, in association with the local authorities and employment services, to consider what action needs to be taken to alleviate the effects of the proposed closure of RNAD Trecwn.

Naval Base, Trecwn

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the Royal Navy base at Trecwn, Dyfed.

Mr. David Hunt: At present, I have no plans to do so. I met a deputation from the depot on 9 September.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his written answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *137*, what was the average annual rate of increase in national health service expenditure in Wales as measured in input unit costs *(a)* from 1974-75 to 1978-79 and *(b)* from 1979-80 to 1990-91.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The average increases were as follows:

a. 2·8 per cent. pa
b. 2·3 per cent. pa

However, I was interested in why the hon. Gentleman chose these dates and asked for input unit costs. Taking the dividing year as 1979-80 (the last year of the Labour Government spending programme) the figures are:

a. 1·7 per cent. pa
b. 2·4 per cent. pa

As I pointed out in the answer that I gave the hon. Gentleman on 17 December, changes in input volumes are an inadequate guide to the level of services the NHS can be expected to achieve since they do not reflect the continuing success of NHS management in increasing the efficiency with which it uses resources.

In two of the five years of the last Labour Government NHS spending adjusted by the GDP deflator actually fell. The increase in the five years of the last Labour Government in real terms was 9 per cent. compared with about 60 per cent. in 12 years under this Government. No amount of mathematical ingenuity on the part of the hon. Gentleman can hide the fact that real terms increases in spending under the Government is double that of the last Labour Government—a Labour Government who cut the hospital building programme and reduced the pay of doctors and nurses in real terms.

Rail Services

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will respond to the fourth report of the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 1990-91, "Rail Services in Wales (HC Paper 262).

Mr. David Hunt: I am pleased to announce that the response has been published today as Cm 1785.

Operations

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what variations may be found between the costs of each type of operation carried out under the national health service in Wales; what is the average cost; and what are the highest and lowest costs.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* Information regarding the costs of each type of operation carried out under the national health service in Wales is not collected centrally.

Data relating to specialty costs are available in the booklet "Welsh Health Costing Returns" and the latest version of this, for 1989-90, is available in the Library of the House. However, for ease of reference the following tables provide some information from the booklet giving high and low costs, and average costs by specialty within the least heterogeneous group of Welsh hospitals—acute general hospitals group I (i.e. those which are the main general acute hospitals providing a wide range of in-patient and out-patient specialist services together with the necessary support services)—illustrating:

(i) cost per patient using bed (in-patients) Table 1
(ii) cost per day care attendance (day cases) Table 2
(iii) cost per out-patient attendance. Table 3

Table 1

Cost per patient using a bed — *Unit cost—£ per day*

Hospital type B—acute general hospitals: group 1

	Low	*Average*	*High*	*Number of hospitals*
Medical specialties:				
Paediatrics	74·37	124·38	179·81	13
Geriatrics	51·29	64·44	312·39	9
Other	58·82	83·25	103·09	15
Surgical specialties:				
General surgery				
Urology	102·74	113·51	141·21	15
Orthopaedics	58·76	95·68	123·30	13
ENT	68·10	128·44	250·80	11
Opthalmology	67·34	123·27	158·96	10
Gynaecology	79·39	111·71	134·26	13
Dental Specialties	105·52	200·76	279·88	10
Neurosurgery	151·45	151·45	151·45	1
Other surgical	104·40	113·43	113·58	2
Maternity function:				
Obstetrics	109·59	147·64	543·97	11
GP	109·71	124·56	125·11	2
Psychiatric specialties:				
Mental handicap	106·85	106·85	106·85	1
Other	41·97	63·39	108·65	5
Other specialties:				
GP (excluding maternity)	1·61	1·61	1·61	1
Radiotherapy	80·86	80·86	80·86	1
Patheology-radiology	8·20	82·42	113·81	4

	Low	Average	High	Number of hospitals
Anaesthetics	35·73	170·56	1,161·90	3
A and E	10·24	38·28	74·36	2

Table 2

Cost per day care attendance — £ unit cost

Hospital type B—acute general hospitals: group 1

	Low	Average	High	Number of hospitals
Medical specialties:				
Paediatrics	33·64	33·64	33·64	1
Geriatrics	22·20	27·75	35·37	7
Psychiatric specialties:				
Other	8·92	18·09	24·42	5
Other specialties:				
Radiotherapy	26·63	26·63	26·63	1

Table 3

Cost per out-patient attendance — £ unit cost

Hospital type B—acute general hospitals: group 1

	Low	Average	High	Number of hospitals
Medical specialties:				
Paediatrics	28·37	42·05	69·40	14
Geriatrics	22·72	38·34	60·88	11
Other	10·13	25·75	42·14	15
Surgical specialties:				
General surgery/urology	23·36	27·83	37·34	15
Orthopaedics	13·42	24·83	37·14	14
ENT	14·64	29·72	44·22	14
Ophthalmology	8·40	20·32	28·42	12
Gynaecology	18·20	27·09	46·34	13
Dental specialties	11·24	22·46	52·50	13
Neurosurgery	3·02	29·59	169·22	8
Plastic surgery	4·89	10·61	19·13	10
Other surgical	7·93	23·64	29·22	3
Maternity function:				
Obstetrics	15·87	26·49	229·36	11
GP	18·87	30·02	35·96	2
Psychiatric specialties:				
Mental handicap	26·87	31·26	40·17	2
Other	13·63	32·75	95·64	14
Other specialties:				
Radiotherapy	1·97	41·41	96·87	13
Path/Radiology	2·70	12·65	43·81	6
Anaesthetics	19·05	46·96	69·97	4
A & E	12·78	26·66	27·06	2

Specialty costing in its current form was introduced in 1987-88 and represents the average cost of treating a broad range of conditions within each specialty grouping. This costing is undertaken annually by disaggregating total costs via a process of direct allocation and cost apportionment.

Whilst it represents an improvement on the sort of "whole hospital" costing available prior to 1987-88, caution should be taken when using this information for comparison purposes since it does not take account of (i) differences in the case mix (in terms of condition, complexity and severity) within each specialty as between different hospitals which have an impact upon the levels and type of staffing and equipment necessary to provide appropriate care and (ii) differences in the range, age and condition of the hospital accommodation which have an impact upon the pattern and overhead costs of service delivery. The averages shown should not therefore be regarded as normative standards against which efficiency or quality of service can be judged, since it must be recognised that a wide and complex range of factors need to be taken into account when making such assessments. However, authorities are encouraged when analysing their costs to explore those areas of service delivery where costing figures suggest significant differences between authorities.

The specialty costing booklet for 1990-91 is due to be published in the new year, and it will be the last produced regarding the period prior to the NHS reforms. From 1991-92 onwards one of the benefits, indeed an imperative

of the NHS reforms, is that service providers will be obliged to cost their services more frequently, more accurately and in greater detail. To this end a major programme of investment in better information systems for resource management and case-mix costing purpose is currently under way. When fully implemented throughout Wales, these new systems will enable service providers to identify costs to sub-specialty levels—for example to "Diagnosis Related Groups" and, where necessary, to particular operations and procedures or even to individual patients, depending on the nature of the service contracts with purchasing authorities or GP fundholders.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Anthrax

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what review he has undertaken of the anthrax regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Following an outbreak in north Wales in 1989, the agriculture departments reviewed our arrangements for dealing with this disease. It was concluded that while the existing provisions were effective for the protection of animal and public health, the legislation should include some additional powers. These include powers to restrict the use of feedingstuffs, to require vaccinations where necessary and to move healthy animals to another place.

The Anthrax Order 1991, which comes into force on 1 January 1992, incorporates these changes and clarifies responsibilities for dealing with anthrax, bringing the arrangements more into line with those for other diseases.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the changes made to the national insurance retirement pension since 1979, noting the date of implementation, the numbers affected and the full-year savings or cost, gross and net of savings or cost in other benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: The major changes and the effect of those changes made to the national insurance retirement pension since 1979 are as follows:

1. November 1980—pensions uprating
   Alteration of statutory up-rating requirement to increase by prices, rather than whichever was the higher of prices or earnings. Affected all in receipt of retirement pension. Gross savings £65 million (1980-81).
2. December 1984—married women's half-test
   Abolition of married women's half-test for those women who reached age 60 before 6 April 1979. Affected 25,000 women. Gross cost £30 million—net £25 million (1985-86).
3. December 1984—hospital in-patients
   Husbands of married women in hospital treated as dependants for hospital downrating purposes in all cases. Implemented retrospectively April 1989. Actual numbers affected and costs not known.
4. April 1988—time limits
   Time limits for claiming Retirement Pension extended from 3 to 12 months. Delayed claims can be backdated up to a 12 month absolute limit. Affected 27,000 potential cases. Gross cost estimated to be £2·5 million in first year (1988-89).
5. October 1989—earnings rule
   Abolition of retirement pensions earnings rule for men between age 65-69 and women between age 60-64. Resulted in 115,000 new claims and increased the rate of pension for a further 2,500 pensioners whose pension was reduced on account of the earnings rule. Gross cost £300 million (1990-91).

Notes:

1) Estimates of the net cost and savings on other benefits are not available, except for item 2.

2) Records of ongoing costs are not retained for most benefits due to the expense of collating the information. The amounts quoted therefore apply to the information available at the time the change was implemented.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year cost of raising the retirement pension by £5 per week for a single person and by £8 per week for a married person (i) in 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in means-tested and national insurance benefits for Great Britain.

Miss Widdecombe: The gross cost would be £3·0 billion in 1991-92 and provisional estimates suggest that the gross cost will be the same in 1992-93.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the statutory instrument which links benefits to the category A basic retirement pension; and what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year cost, net of tax, of raising by £5 per week for a single person and by £8 per week for a married person the retirement pension and (i) each linked benefit, (ii) each linked and means-tested benefit so that all of the people on linked benefits receive the increase, (iii) each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension, (iv) each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension and means-tested benefits so that all of the people on these linked benefits receive the increase, (1) for 1991-92 and (2) 1992-93, in each case including and excluding those below retirement age;

(2) What would be the numbers of people affected above and below retirement age by raising by £5 per week for a single person and by £8 per week for a married person, the retirement pension and *(a)* each benefit linked by statute to the Category A Basic Retirement Pension, *(b)* each linked and means-tested benefit so that all of the people on linked benefits receive the increase, *(c)* each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension and *(d)* each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension and means-tested benefits so that all of the people on these linked benefits receive the increase, for Great Britain in 1991-92, listing separately the numbers on each benefits, including and excluding those below the retirement age.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* The following statutory provisions link the rate of other contributory benefits with the category A retirement pension: sections 14, 15, 25, 26 and 29 of the Social Security Act 1975 and sections 6, 7, 8, 13 and 14 of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975.

The full-year net benefit cost of raising the category A, B, C and D basic retirement pensions by £5 for a single person and £3 for a category BL pension would be £1·84 billion in 1991-92 and £1·64 billion net of income tax. Detailed estimates for 1992-93 are not yet available.

The full year costs of the other options in 1991-92 are as follows:

Table 1—Those at or above state pension age

£ billion

	Net benefit cost			Net of tax cost		
	RP	*IVB*	*WB*	*RP*	*IVB*	*WB*
(i) Each linked benefit	1·84	0·07	0·01	1·64	0·07	0·01
(ii) Each linked and income related benefit increased too	2·47	0·09	0·01	2·27	0·09	0·01

At this level of rounding the costs of options (iii) and (iv)—which cover only linked benefits paid at the same rate of category A retirement pension—are the same as (i) and (ii) respectively.

Table 2
Those below state pension age.

£ billion

	Net benefit cost			Net of tax cost		
	IVB	*WB*	*IS*	*IVB*	*WB*	*IS*
(i) each linked benefit	0·25	0·05	0·00	0·25	0·04	0·00
(ii) each linked and income related benefit increased too	0·33	0·07	0·05	0·33	0·06	0·05
(iii) each linked benefit at same level as RP	0·25	0·03	0·00	0·25	0·02	0·00
(iv) linked benefits at same level income related benefits increased too	0·33	0·04	0·05	0·33	0·03	0·05

10 million people would be affected by raising the Category A, B, C and D Basic Retirements Pension by £5 for a single person and £3 for a Category BL Pension in 1991-92. 1·15 million benefit units would receive less Income Support as a result of this increase; 1·6 million benefit units would receive less housing benefit and 2·35 million benefit units would receive less Community Charge Benefit (some of these benefit units would receive less from both benefits). The numbers of people (benefit units for income related benefits) affected by the other options are as follows:

Table 3: Those at or above state pension age (millions)

	RP	*IVB*	*WB*	*IS*	*HB*	*CCB*
(a) Benefits linked to category A RP	10·00	0·25	0·05	1·15	1·65	2·40
(b) Linked benefit plus income related benefits increased too	10·00	0·25	0·05	—	—	—

Note: In option *(a)* those on IS, HB and CCB see reductions in their income related benefits when they receive the increase in their contributory benefit; this does not happen in option *(b)*. At this level of rounding options *(c)* and *(d)*—which cover only linked benefits paid at the same rate of Category A Retirement Pension—the numbers are the same as *(a)* and *(b)* respectively.

Table 4 those below state pension age (millions)

	IVB	*WB*	*IS*	*HB*	*CCB*
(a) Benefits linked to category A RP	1·10	0·30	0·10	0·25	0·35
(b) Linked benefit plus income related benefits increased too	1·10	0·30	[1]0·15	[1]0·05	[1]0·00
(c) Linked benefits at same level as category A RP	1·10	0·20	0·10	0·15	0·30
(d) Linked benefits at same level as category A RP plus income related benefits increased too	1·10	0·20	[1]0·15	[1]0·15	[1]0·00

Notes:

In table (4) numbers shown on IS, HB or CCB as affected by the changes for options (a) and (c) are those who would not receive the full £5 or £8 per week due to reductions in income related benefits. Those cases marked with a [1] are those men aged 60 to 64 who gain from the increase in the pensioner premium for income related benefit of £5 and £8 per week.

Unemployment benefit and sickness benefit paid to those over state pension age are linked statutorily to the basic category A retirement pension but the numbers of people in receipt of these benefits are comparatively very small and are not included in these estimates.

RP is all categories of retirement pension.
IVB is invalidity benefit.
WB is widows benefit.
IS is income support.
HB is housing benefit.
CCB is community charge benefit.

Local Offices (Regrading)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals are being considered for the regrading of the D&S offices covering Cunninghame, North constituency.

Miss Widdecombe: Operational matters concerning Benefits Agency offices are a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of extending receipt of invalid care allowance for a further eight weeks to carers after the death of their dependant; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated cost would be £2·4 million in a full year.

Carers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of restoring the right to claim unemployment benefit for carers who have ceased to care; and whether he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of preserving entitlement to unemployment benefit for the estimated 2,600 former carers who seek work and who satisfied the contribution conditions prior to caring would be about £2 million in a full year.

Expenditure

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will break down the real increases or decreases at 1991 prices in expenditure for all benefits from 1979 to 1991 showing what amount and proportion is

attributable to *(a)* a rise or fall in the real level of benefit, *(b)* a rise or fall in the numbers claiming benefits and *(c)* other factors.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Earnings and Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the level of national average earnings for each year since 1979, the level of supplementary benefit/income support for a single unemployed adult aged over 25 years for each of these years, and the percentage the latter represents of the former for each year.

Miss Widdecombe: The figures requested are in the following table.

The table lists supplementary benefits rates for a single householder aged 25 up to 1987. This rate is not however the one paid to all of the client group. Across all age groups, approximately 52 per cent. of single unemployed claimants were non-householders (May 1987 annual statistical inquiry). This group received a lower rate of benefit. Separate figures relating to the over-25 age group are not available.

It should be noted that in the period from April 1988 (when income support was introduced) to April 1991, the average weekly earnings of all adult males rose by 30 per cent.

A *Date of uprating*	*B* *Benefit date*	*C* *Average weekly earnings*	*D* *Percentage of column B/column C*
November 1979	18·30	114·10	16·0
November 1980	21·30	135·10	15·8
November 1981	23·25	149·50	15·6
November 1982	25·70	160·60	16·0
November 1983	26·80	175·30	15·3
November 1984	28·05	187·40	15·0
November 1985	29·50	199·50	14·8
July 1986	29·80	210·90	14·1
April 1987	30·40	224·00	13·6
April 1988	33·40	245·80	13·6
April 1989	34·90	269·50	12·9
April 1990	36·70	295·60	12·4
April 1991	39·65	318·90	12·4

Explanatory Notes:
Column A: Date of each uprating.
Column B: Supplementary benefit scale rate for a 25-year-old householder from 1979 to 1987. From April 1988, this is the income support rate for a single person aged 25 or over.
Column C: Average earnings of all adult males (*Source:* New Earnings Survey).
Column D: Percentage of the benefit rates (Column B) compared to the average weekly earnings (Column C).

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure over the last 12 months in benefits paid to unemployed persons to assist with mortgage repayments; and what is the total number of individuals who have claimed mortgage relief over this period.

Miss Widdecombe: Help with mortgage interest is given through income support. The estimated amount included in income support for unemployed persons for mortgage interest in 1990, the latest year for which information is available, is £207 million, paid to some 88,000 claimants.
Note: The estimates are rounded to the nearest £1 million and 1,000 claimants.
Source: Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry, May 1990.

Crisis Loans

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines he issues as to whether the inability to repay should take precedence over the crisis need when refusing a crisis loan.

Miss Widdecombe: No guidelines are necessary. The Secretary of State's directions require social fund officers to decide whether a crisis need exists before looking at the question of an applicant's ability to repay.

Poll Tax

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his Department's estimates of the costs of deducting poll tax payments from benefits in each of the years 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

State Earnings-related Pensions

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total cost to the national insurance fund in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of the 2 per cent. banded earnings offered as an incentive to opt out of SERPs, for Great Britain.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is contained in appendix 7 of the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Uprating Order and the Social Security (Contributions) Rerating Order which was laid before the House on 4 December.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent consultations he has had concerning the operation of the advance warning system available to

inform potential recipients of special cold weather payments that the temperature trigger points had been reached; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Regular consultations on the cold weather payments scheme take place between the Meteorological Office and the Department. The new elements of the scheme are being monitored particularly closely.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people will receive cold weather payments from the social fund following the recent spell of cold weather;

(2) how many people who would have been eligible for payment will not receive the £6 payment because the area of the country they lived in did not fully meet the temperature criteria of the scheme during the recent spell of cold weather.

Miss Widdecombe: Following the recent spell of cold weather 1,432,044 cold weather payments have been authorised out of an estimated total of 2,600,000 people, who would have been entitled to a payment if every area of the country had met the temperature criteria.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by United Kingdom standard region, and by Benefits Agency administrative division, the numbers of recipients of cold weather payments in the week commencing 9 December.

Miss Widdecombe: The following table sets out, by individual weather station, the number of cold weather payments authorised during the recent cold spell. The information is not held by Benefits Agency administrative division, and could be obtained in this form only at disproportionate cost.

Cold Weather Payments

Station	*Period*	*Payments*
Bedford RAE	5-11 December	46,879
Birmingham AP	5-11 December	192,901
Boscombe Down	6-12 December	6,165
Brize Norton	6-12 December	36,036
Coningsby	6-12 December	8,234
Dumfries/Drungans	5-11 December	3,456
Easthampstead	6-12 December	21,696
Eskdalemuir	3-9 December	3,530
Finningley	5-11 December	68,911
Gatwick AP	6-12 December	21,474
Honington	6-12 December	8,078
Leeming	5-11 December	86,012
Lyneham	6-12 December	13,394
Marham	6-12 December	10,165
Shawbury	5-11 December	68,611
Stansted	6-12 December	70,865
Watnall	6-12 December	113,978
Wyton	6-12 December	18,807
Clifynydd	8-14 December	18,336
Coltishall	7-13 December	25,222
Cwmbargoed	7-13 December	20,838
Heathrow AP	8-14 December	382,487
Leeds WC	7-13 December	93,812
Waddington	7-13 December	55,445
Wattisham	8-14 December	22,161
Yeovilton	8-14 December	14,551
	Total	1,432,044

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to waive the seven-day qualifying period for cold weather payments to ensure that all those eligible under the scheme receive a £6 payment.

Miss Widdecombe: Seven days of cold weather is a fair representation of a sustained period which is likely to lead to extra heating costs. We have no plans to reduce the qualifying period.

Over-80s

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to uprate the basic state pensions for people over the age of 80 years.

Miss Widdecombe: Basic state pensions for those over 80 will be uprated next April in line with prices. In addition, expenditure on income-related benefits for pensioners over 80 and for disabled low-income pensioners will be increased by £60 million in a full year over and above the normal uprating.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what earnings rule currently applies to unemployment benefit; and whether he plans any changes.

Mr. Scott: Unemployment benefit is not payable for any day on which earnings exceed £2, or for any week in which earnings exceed the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions (currently £52 a week).

The daily earnings rule does not apply to payments made to individuals for certain special purposes notably allowances paid to members of the Territorial Army, coastguards, lifeboatmen and part-time firemen. We intend shortly to consult the Social Security Advisory Committee on extending exemption to local authority councillors in respect of their basic and special responsibility allowances.

Pension Schemes (Fraud)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he intends to take to deal with the potential for fraud in pension schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* Safeguards already exist in trust law to protect the interests of members of occupational pension schemes. Trustees have a duty to act at all time in the interests of all the beneficiaries of the scheme in accordance with the trust deed.

In addition, the Government will bring forward, early next year, regulations to restrict to 5 per cent. the level of self-investment. Action is in hand to produce a booklet for pension fund trustees, setting out their role and legal responsibilities. Regulations extending the existing disclosure requirements to include information as to whether each trustee has received a copy of the booklet, will be introduced.

Benefits

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year cost of raising one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance by 32p, (i) for 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, (1) including increases in means-tested benefits and (2) without increases in means-tested benefits, in Great Britain.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full-year cost of raising one-parent benefit and widowed mother's allowance by (i) £0·34 and (ii) £0·36 for (1) 1991-92 and (2) 1992-93, *(x)* including increases in means-tested benefits, and *(y)* without increases in means-tested benefits, in Great Britain.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The cost of increasing these benefits by these amounts for each week in 1991-92 and 1992-93 is given in the table:

	£ million	
	1991-92	*1992-93*
32 pence per week		
(1) Including increases in income related benefits		
One parent benefit	23	24
Widowed mother's allowance	1	1
(2) Excluding increases in income related benefits		
One parent benefit	7	8
Widowed mother's allowance	1	1
34 pence per week		
(1) Including increases in income related benefits		
One parent benefit	24	25
Widowed mother's allowance	1	1
(2) Excluding increases in income related benefits		
One parent benefit	8	8
Widowed mother's allowance	1	1
36 pence per week		
(1) Including increases in income related benefits		
One parent benefit	25	27
Widowed mother's allowance	1	1
(2) Excluding increases in income related benefits		
One parent benefit	8	9
Widowed mother's allowance	1	1

Note:
The first year benefit cost is the same in this case as the full-year cost for 1991-92.

ENERGY

River Wyre Barrage

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to consult the farming community and environmental groups over the proposed barrage across the River Wyre in Lancashire when he considers the feasibility study of this project.

Mr. Moynihan: Yes. All interested parties will be consulted on the results of the preliminary feasibility study of a proposed barrage across the River Wyre.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to publish the results of the feasibility study into the proposed barrage across the River Wyre in Lancashire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: A report on a preliminary feasibility study of a proposed barrage across the River Wyre has been received by my Department. This report is now being considered and will be published in due course.

Oil Drilling

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on recent technological developments on long-reach horizontal drilling for oil; how many horizontal wells are currently operational off the coast of the United Kingdom; what information he has on future plans for horizontal wells; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Most fields in the United Kingdom sector of the North sea have been developed with a proportion of the wells deviated to angles between 30 and 75 degrees from the vertical. Over the last three years improved understanding of the technical factors relevant to high angle drilling has enabled an increasing number of wells to be drilled into the productive areas of reservoirs at angles of up to 90 degrees. It is estimated that to date about 40 such wells, have been drilled or are currently drilling in the UKCS. Since, depending on circumstances, economic recovery from horizontal wells can be significantly higher than from conventional wells, I would expect the incidence of such drilling to increase in the future as knowledge and experience of the techniques involved improve further.

Dounreay

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has yet received the report from Dr. Wyn Llewelyn into the disappearance of a quantity of enriched uranium at Dounreay; if the findings of his report will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A report on the investigation into the accountancy discrepancy at Dounreay has not been received by my Department. I will consider what information might be provided when I have received the report and have studied its findings.

Coal Mining Subsidence

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to table the statutory instruments necessary to implement aspects of the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Secretary of State has made the following statutory instruments under powers granted by the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991:

The Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 (Commencement) Order 1991 (SI 1991/2508)

The Coal Mining Subsidence (Notices and Claims) Regulations 1991 (SI 1991/2509)

The Coal Mining Subsidence (Preventive Measures and Rates of Interest) Order 1991 (SI 1991/2510)

The commencement order brought the Act into force on 30 November 1991. The other two instruments also came into force on that date.

The Government have no plans to make any further instruments at present, but will keep the need for further instruments under review.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what discussions he has had with the director general of OFFER regarding his report on the distribution and transmission system performance in the electricity supply

industries of England, Wales and Scotland 1990-91, the league table of relative interruptions per 100 customers included in it and the powers available to the director general to improve the performance of the poorest performing distribution companies;

(2) what consultations he has had with the director general of the Office of Electricity Regulation concerning the level of supply interruptions to electricity consumers in the South Wales Electricity company area; and what remedial actions have been proposed by the director general.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Director General of Electricity Supply from time to time and we discuss a range of issues.

We welcome the publication of information of the kind included in the director general's report on the reliability of the electricity supply industry's transmission and distribution systems. This is a good illustration of the openness of the new regulatory regime. The director general has already stated that he will consider this information carefully as part of the transmission and distribution price control reviews that he will be undertaking.

Caminus Energy Consultants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the director general of OFFER regarding the recent study commissioned by OFFER from Caminus Energy Consultants of Cambridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Director General of Electricity Supply from time to time and discuss issues of mutual interest. The investigation into pool prices is a matter for the director general.

Coal Mining Consortium

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the Coal Mining Consortium about its proposals to apply for all or part of a privatised coal industry and to enable employees in the industry to become shareholders.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I met representatives of the Mineworkers Consortium specifically to listen to their proposals concerning British Coal's Monktonhall colliery. We will be considering a number of options for the privatisation of the coal industry; however, no decisions will be taken on the form or timing of the sale until after the next general election.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the director general of the Office of Electricity Regulation concerning the impact on the promotion of competition in electricity generation in England and Wales of National Power's purchase of the Deeside power station project at Shotton, Clwyd from ASEA Brown Boveri; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Director General of Electricity Supply from time to time and discuss issues of mutual interest. The implications of mergers in the electricity generating industry are a matter for the Office of Fair Trading in consultation with OFFER.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fax Paper

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the supply of House of Commons fax paper to hon. Members.

Mr. MacGregor: The Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee has previously concluded that the present range of stationery items held in the Serjeant at Arms Stores should not be extended beyond the primary function of supplying writing paper and envelopes identified by the crowned portcullis. Facsimile paper is not held in the stores.

Written Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will publish a table showing in descending order the 30 Members who tabled the most written questions in Session 1990-91, indicating how many were tabled.

Mr. MacGregor: The precise information requested, on questions tabled, is not available. The Members receiving the most answers to written questions, as recorded on the House of Commons Library's POLIS database, were as follows:

	Number of questions
1. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn)	928
2. The hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond)	646
3. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)	593
4. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan)	560
5. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen)	527
6. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen)	465
7. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)	429
8. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)	393
9. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. S. Hughes)	384
10. The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. D. Clark)	359
11. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Austin Mitchell)	353
12. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill)	345
13. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)	339
14. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. B. Jones)	329
15. The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. R. Davies)	314
16. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)	301
17. The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster)	275
18. The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell)	242
19. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)	237
20. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett)	230
21. The hon. Member for Newham, North West (Mr. T. Banks)	218
22. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd)	216

		Number of questions
23.	The hon. Member for Newcastle Upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins)	216
24.	The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman)	212
25.	The hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. John D. Taylor)	210
26.	The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion)	209
27.	The hon. Member for Coventry, South East (Mr. Nellist)	205
28.	The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden)	203
29.	The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn)	197
30.	The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle)	191

Disabled People (Access)

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects work to begin on the installation of a chairlift on the staircase leading to the Grand Committee Room and the Jubilee Room to facilitate access for elderly and disabled people.

Mr. MacGregor: Work has already begun on the detailed planning required to install a stairlift on the staircase leading to the Grand Committee Room. I would expect the design work consultations and tendering to be complete by March 1992 allowing the contractor to begin by April.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Alton: To ask the Lord President of the Council when his office last scheduled a meeting with Viscount Brentford concerning Sunday trading; when he last met Viscount Brentford; when he next expects to meet Viscount Brentford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have had requests for meetings both from Lord Brentford in his capacity as chairman of the Keep Sunday Special Campaign and from the director of the Shopping Hours Reform Council. I have already made it clear that the Government see no prospect for legislation on Sunday trading in this Session of Parliament, and it would be inappropriate for me to enter into any discussions with either organisation as the issues are for my right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Home Office. I therefore declined both requests at this stage.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing

Mr. Alton: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will publish a list of the previous employers of his special adviser, Mrs. Eleanor Laing.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows:

Lindsays W. S., solicitors
Herbert Smith and Co., solicitors
Lane and Partners, solicitors
George Wimpey PLC
Shopping Hours Reform Council

Palace of Westminster (Occupation)

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many rooms at the House of Commons and its outbuildings and how many square feet have been occupied by *(a)* media staff and *(b)* hon. Members over the last three years.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* Information in the form requested is not readily available.

However, work commissioned last year by the New Building Sub-Committee as part of its work to prepare the brief for phase II of the New Parliamentary Building indicates that Members occupy some 10,000 sq metres, the media about 1,500 sq metres. Further information is available in the Services Committee's Second Report 1990-91 "New Parliamentary Building (Phase II): The Initial Brief" (HC 551) memorandum 3.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many security passes have been issued in each of the last three years for *(a)* members of staff at the House of Commons, *(b)* the media and *(c)* allied departments.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* I regret that this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Office Costs Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects to receive the Top Salaries Review Body report on the office costs allowance.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* The conduct of the review is a matter for the Top Salaries Review Body, but I understand that it is proceeding according to the agreed timetable.

DEFENCE

Submarines

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence *(a)* what will be the cost, *(b)* when work will commence and *(c)* how long it will take, to correct a major design fault on the submarines HMS Upholder, HMS Unseen, HMS Ursula and HMS Unicorn; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on 13 December at column *590*.

Simulated Attacks on Shipping

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the pre-flight briefing of the crew of the Tornado aircraft which crashed in the North sea on 16 August 1990 included plans for simulated attacks on shipping.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the specified minimum horizontal and vertical separation distances between an attacking aircraft and a target vessel doing simulated low-level attacks on civilian shipping targets of opportunity.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The specified minimum separation distance from civilian shipping for aircraft in low level flight over the sea is 250 ft both horizontally and vertically.

Weapons Exchange

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by year for the last four years, and for 1991 to date, the countries with which his Department has carried out weapons exchanges for testing purposes, showing in his answer *(a)* those that his Department have received from other countries and *(b)* those that his Department have sent to other countries.

Mr. Alan Clark: Such information is not held centrally and could not be assembled without disproportionate cost.

Buster Crabb

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the files and information on the Buster Crabb affair will be released for public scrutiny.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Any files and information held by the Ministry of Defence on the Buster Crabb affair will be considered for release at the appropriate time, under the criteria of the Public Records Acts of 1958 and 1967.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he proposes to investigate the claims for compensation made by the service men exposed to radiation during the Christmas Island tests.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence will pay appropriate compensation whenever the Crown's legal liability is established. There is, however, no firm evidence to show that any ill-health suffered by those who attended the test was caused by their participation. This is supported by the last report on the subject by the National Radiological Protection Board—which continues to accumulate data and will produce a further report.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many special studies on *(a)* the safety in storage, *(b)* the safety in transport, *(c)* the safety in deployment and *(d)* the mechanics of dismantlement of nuclear weapons have been conducted by his Department since 1979; and what has been the respective cost of such studies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The safety of our nuclear weapons is under continuous review to ensure that stringent safety standards are maintained in all such areas. It is not possible to identify separately the costs of studies from the general costs of work on safety.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether United Kingdom citizens are permitted access *(a)* to board Polaris submarines, *(b)* to visit the Faslane royal naval base and *(c)* to the Trident nuclear submarine base under construction at Coulport; whether any foreign nationals of countries (i) which are NATO member states and (ii) which are outside NATO have been permitted to visit British nuclear submarines and bases during the past month; and what criteria are adopted to permit visits to such submarines and bases.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Visits by both United Kingdom and foreign non-entitled personnel to service units and establishments, including vists to nuclear submarines and their shore support facilities, are considered on a case by case basis. The only visit by non-NATO nationals to the Clyde submarine base, including a visit to an alongside Polaris submarine, in the last month was by General Lobov. The criterion by which requests for all visits is judged is whether such a visit will assist in meeting defence or foreign policy objectives.

M25 (Military Vehicle Breakdown)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of accidents caused by motorists rerouted from the M25 on 1 December as a result of the closure of the motorway because of the breakdown of a military transport vehicle.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Defence Equipment

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide an approximate in-service date for *(a)* the GWS MOD 1 Sea Wolf vertical launch ship system/missile, *(b)* Sonar 2093, *(c)* the type 23 frigate command system, *(d)* the AS90 self-propelled howitzer, *(e)* the high-velocity missile, *(f)* the Rapier field standard C system, *(g)* the Trigat medium-range system, *(h)* the counter battery radar, *(i)* the European fighter aircraft, *(j)* the Blue Vixen radar and *(k)* the Harrier T10.

Mr. Alan Clark: Approximate in-service dates are as follows:

	Approximate in-service date
(a) GWS MOD 1 Sea Wolf vertical launch ship system/missile	In-service
(b) Sonar 2093	Early 1990s
(c) Type 23 frigate command system	Mid 1990s
(d) AS90 self-propelled howitzer	Early 1990s
(e) High-velocity missile	Early 1990s
(f) Rapier field standard C system	Mid-1990s
(g) TRIGAT medium-range system	Mid-1990s
(h) Counter battery radar	Late 1990s
(i) European fighter aircraft	Mid-1990s
(j) Blue Vixen radar	Early 1990s
(k) Harrier T10	Mid-1990s

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the present estimated total cost of the procurement programme for *(a)* the GWS MOD 1 Sea Wolf vertical launch missile/ship system, *(b)* the Sonar 2093, *(c)* the Challenger improvement programme, *(d)* TOW thermal imaging, *(e)* the Rapier field standard C system, *(f)* the Trigat medium range system, *(g)* the Tornado GR1 mid-life update, *(h)* the RN EH 101 helicopter and *(i)* the Blue Vixen radar.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 28 November at column *648*. The other figures requested are classified and commercially confidential apart from that for the Tornado GR1 mid-life update programme, where the estimated total procurement cost —at 1990-91 average outturn prices, not including in-service support costs—is £550 million.

Hydrographic Office

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the annual income generated by the Hydrographic Office through chart sales in each year since 1980; and what proportion are exports;

(2) what resources will be dedicated to the metrification of maritime charts within the Hydrographic Office;

(3) whether the metrification of maritime charts will be completed by 1999.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These are matters for the chief executive of the Hydrographic Office Defence Support Agency. I have asked him to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Walter Somers Ltd.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now state the dates on which the two telephone conversations between Walter Somers Ltd. and his Department's metallurgical expert took place; what was established by the conversations; what advice was provided by his Department's expert to Walter Somers Ltd.; and how the expert identified himself or herself to Walter Somers Ltd.

Mr. Alan Clark: The telephone conversations took place on 16 and 22 June 1988. On the basis of the available information they established that the steel tubes which Walter Somers Ltd. proposed to export to Iraq were almost certainly pressure vessels of some kind whose function was unclear. No advice was provided to Walter Somers Ltd. by the Department's expert. At this distance in time it is not possible to say how the expert identified himself to Walter Somers Ltd. other than be name, though his normal practice was to indicate that he worked for the Ministry of Defence.

Resettlement

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service resettlement officers are currently in post; and what is the establishment level for service resettlement officers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

	Strength	*Establishment*
Royal Navy		
Naval Resettlement Information Officers (civilian)	8	8
Education and Resettlement Officers[1]	27	27
Army		
Senior Resettlement Advice Officers	7	7
Resettlement Advice Officers[2]	16	11
RAF		
Professionally Qualified Education Officers [3]	86	86

Notes:

[1]Seven of these are at sea; in addition, every ship which does not have a full-time education and resettlement officer on its establishment appoints an officer to undertake these responsibilities on a part-time basis.

[2]In addition, 27 resettlement advice officers are deployed on a part-time basis.

[3]This figure relates to the number of RAF professionally qualified education officers who have resettlement as a significant element of their responsibilities.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment is made of the effectiveness of the current programmes of retraining and resettlement for service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The resettlement centres carry out regular surveys of personnel who have attended their courses, to try and establish the relevance to their subsequent employment of the training they have received. Some of the results were summarised in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) on 29 November at columns *683-86*.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have occurred to his resettlement policy for service personnel in the last 12 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It remains our policy to provide a comprehensive resettlement service and we are making provision to extend this service to cater for the increased numbers who will be leaving over the coming years. A temporary post of director general resettlement has been established within the Ministry of Defence to direct and coordinate this activity over the months ahead.

Service Accommodation

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *96*, how many houses are in the process of being sold; and what is the average length of time for which these houses have been empty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No later figures than those previously given are yet available for the total number of houses in the process of being sold. The average length of time these houses have been vacant could only be calculated at disproportionate cost.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much surplus service property will be made available to housing associations to give temporary help to service personnel in severe housing need;

(2) pursuant to his reply of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *355*, if he will list each announcement made to date about the transfer of service married quarters to housing associations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Discussions with housing associations are continuing and announcements will be made in due course.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have purchased their homes through the services' discount scheme in each *(a)* year and *(b)* quarter since its inception.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since the services discount scheme was introduced, the following numbers of service personnel have purchased their homes at a discount:

Financial year	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total
1984-85	—	—	—	—	153
1985-86	—	—	—	—	308
1986-87	—	—	—	—	438
1987-88	—	—	—	—	452
1988-89	—	—	—	—	562
1989-90	—	—	—	—	610
1990-91	200	247	138	141	726
[1]1991-92	124	158	—	—	282

[1] To 30 September 1991.

In addition, some 500 properties are in the process of being sold through the discount scheme.

Quarterly figures are available only from financial year 1990-91.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current backlog of anavoidable and essential repairs for service accommodation at Tidworth garrison.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current backlog of maintenance for service accommodation at Tidworth garrison amounts to £8·7 million on unavoidable repairs and £2·3 million on essential repairs. An extensive modernisation programme is planned.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the location of those service properties that are currently being irregularly occupied.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Most service establishments throughout the United Kingom have some married quarters irregularly occupied, but the information is not held centrally.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the backlog of unavoidable and essential repairs for *(a)* single accommodation, *(b)* married quarters and *(c)* empty accommodation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 14 November at column *671*.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for East Lothian, (Mr. Home Robertson), *Official Report*, column *96*, if he will publish the number and location of vacant married quarters that are awaiting *(a)* unavoidable and essential repairs and *(b)* urgent repairs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current expenditure to date on the work of the service housing task force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: To date, expenditure on the work of the service housing task force, including staff costs, amounts to £173,500.

Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessels

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many orders for *(a)* type 23 frigates and *(b)* auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels will be placed in the next 10 years; and in which years they will be ordered.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We hope to make an announcement on the outcome of the recent tender exercise for type 23 frigates early next year. We plan further orders of auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels, but no decisions have been taken on their size or timing. It is not our practice to disclose details about the longer-term internal planning assumptions for equipment orders.

Homelessness

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with local authorities regarding the acceptance by them of a certificate of impending discharge as evidence of impending homelessness.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The code of guidance on homelessness issued by the Department of Environment provides advice to local authorities on the acceptance of certificates of impending homelessness for service personnel who are shortly to leave the services. It is not normal practice to produce separate certification of impending discharge, but certification will be provided if it is requested by individual local authorities.

"Options for Change"

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether officers and men discharged from the Army as a result of "Options for Change" outside the United Kingdom will be required to be responsible for the costs of their own furniture and movements expenses.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: When United Kingdom based service personnel and their families return from an overseas station on discharge they will do so at public expense. Their personal possessions will also be conveyed at public expense within the same limits as those returning on normal posting.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the final civilian establishment of his Department once the proposals contained in "Options for Change" have been fully implemented.

Mr. Alan Clark: By 1997, the number of United Kingdom-based and locally entered civilians will be about 134,000.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the differences in the terms of redundancy offered to civilians as a result of the implementation of "Options for Change" from those that are offered to officers and men of the Army.

Mr. Alan Clark: Redundancy payments to civil servants and military personnel are made under two quite separate arrangements, the principal civil service pension

scheme and the armed forces pension scheme. With both schemes, the benefit varies according to pay and length of service.

The two schemes are different and, within each, different criteria apply. A direct comparison cannot, therefore, be made. The principal differences affecting benefits relate to the entitlement qualifications, the age at which pensions benefits come into payment and the relationship between benefits and earnings.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the costs of redundancy as a result of the reduction in the civilian establishment of his Department once the proposals contained in "Options for Change" are fully implemented.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is too early to say what the scale, and therefore the costs, of redundancy arising from our plans to reduce civilian numbers will be.

Rattan Cane Fenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider his Department's decision to terminate on 13 January the contract under which the workshop at Cardiff Institute for the Blind has provided rattan cane fenders for the use of the Navy worldwide.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The current contract for the supply of rattan fenders will continue and action is in hand to let a replacement contract with the Cardiff Institute for the Blind.

Magnetic Treatment Facility, Faslane

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why the magnetic treatment facility at Faslane has not been proceeded with; how much has been spent on it; and how degaussing will now be carried on.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 26 June at column *496*. Work to define a more cost-effective solution to the requirement is under way. Approximately £15 million had been spent on the contract at the time of cancellation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Beer

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to implement section 43 of the Weights and Measures Act 1985.

Mr. Leigh: I have fought hard in Europe to retain the traditional British pint. I want to ensure that a liquid pint is what consumers get, in full. My view on consumer protection is that people should get what they think they are getting and what they pay for.

In 1988 my Department made regulations on the measures to be used for serving beer with the aim of encouraging licensees to use the glass most appropriate to the type of beer they served and to help ensure a fair deal for the consumer. However, since then I have continued to receive reports from local authority trading standards departments showing that a significant proportion of the draught beer they have checked comprised considerably less than a pint of liquid beer. I have also received complaints from the public about this issue.

Accordingly, I now propose to implement section 43 of the Weights and Measures Act 1985 which provides that, in ascertaining the quantity of beer or cider under the Act the gas comprised in any form shall be disregarded. I shall be consulting consumers, the trade and the enforcement authorities about a timetable for this. This should be cheering news for beer drinkers everywhere.

Swiss Research Policy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the speech delivered by Professor H. Ursprung to the Royal Society on 27 November on Swiss research policy.

Mr. Leigh: A copy of Professor Ursprung's speech on Swiss research policy delivered to the Royal Society in November this year has been placed in the departmental library and also in the Library of the House of Commons.

Japanese-owned Manufacturing

Sir Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the number of people employed in Japanese-owned manufacturing industry within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: From information available to my Department, based on announcements by the companies at the time of the investment, it is estimated that some 45,000 direct jobs have been created by Japanese manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom.

EC-EFTA Agreement

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provision has been made in the EC/EFTA agreement to establish the European economic area to provide grants and loans to *(a)* the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* Greece, *(c)* Portugal and *(d)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Sainsbury: Under the terms of the European economic area agreement, EFTA would set up a fund to assist the development of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Greece, Portugal and specified regions of Spain. The fund would be managed by EFTA and comprise 500 mecu in grants over five years and an interest rate subsidy of 3 per cent. on 1·5 becu of loans to be repaid within 10 years.

Credit Marketing

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect he expects his proposals for new legislation on credit marketing to have on the housing market.

Mr. Leigh: People considering a mortgage would be given more information about the obligations involved and the consequences of not meeting those obligations.

House of Fraser

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *178*, about the takeover of the House of Fraser, what steps he is taking to ensure that further relevant information is available.

Mr. Redwood: My officials are in touch with regulators.

Steel Production

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *113*, what assessment he has made of the production performance at *(a)* Llanwern and *(b)* Ravenscraig before the closing of the hot strip facility.

Mr. Leigh: None. This is a matter for the board of British Steel.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *113*, what is the average cost of production of an average tonne of steel at *(a)* Llanwern, *(b)* Teesside, *(c)* Dalzell and *(d)* Scunthorpe.

Mr. Leigh: This is a matter for the board of British Steel.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the size of the steel stockpiles in the United Kingdom in the last two years of *(a)* steel pipes, *(b)* heavy plate and *(c)* light plate; and what proportion of each stockpile was imported.

Mr. Leigh: Available information is shown in the following table. Comprehensive information about light and heavy plates, an the proportion of stocks imported, is not collected.

'000 tonnes

Steel stocks	*end of: March 1989*	*June 1989*	*September 1989*	*December 1989*	*March 1990*	*June 1990*	*September 1990*	*December 1990*	*March 1991*	*June 1991*
Plate[1]										
held by:										
producers	103	95	99	103	94	101	82	110	73	116
steel stockholders	425	410	396	419	416	417	384	340	319	288
consumers	121	136	150	150	165	156	151	156	156	149
Total	649	641	645	672	675	674	617	606	548	553
Tubes and pipes										
held by:										
producers	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
steel stockholders	126	119	111	112	92	83	88	114	81	60
consumers	306	347	395	407	418	391	344	319	296	267

[1] Plate in lengths, 3mm thick or over.
[2] Tonnage not available.
Source: Producers' stocks information from the Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau. Stockholders' and consumers' information from the Central Statistical Office's Business Bulletin on the Steel Stocks and Consumption Inquiry.

Iraq

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *501*, if he will set out *(a)* the end-use stated by Iraq for bismuth exports in 1981, 1982, 1983, 1985 and 1988, respectively, and *(b)* the reason for commercial confidentiality covering the sale of bismuth to Iraq in 1986.

Mr. Sainsbury: End user information is required to be submitted to DTI only for licensable exports.

Information used to compile the Overseas Trade Statistics (OTS), is taken from Customs entries which importers, exporters or declarants on their behalf are required to render under sections 37 and 53 to 54 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. Under common law information compulsorily required may only be used for the purposes for which it was obtained.

Although the OTS does not provide names of importers or exporters, statistics for certain commodities may easily be attributed to specific traders by anyone knowledgeable in that market area; this is particularly a problem where the statistics are broken down by country of consignment or destination. In such circumstances the public release of information may give valuable commercial information to competitors. It is therefore treated in confidence.

Mahogany

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he will take to prevent the further importation of mahogany from the Philippines; and how many such imports there have been since 1988.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government attach importance to the sustainable management of tropical forests. Imports from the Philippines are subject to the same controls as imports from other countries.

Available statistics of imports since 1988 of mahogany from the Philippines are:

	m³	*metric tonnes*	*£000*
1988	980	566	252
1989	74	40	21
1990	308	131	126
[1]1991	18	12	7

[1] January to October.

Some other imports may have been accounted for under the residual codes within the SITC headings 247.52 and 248.5.

Cumbria Action Team

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the proportion of the budget of the north-west regional office spent on administrative costs for the Cumbria action team.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The Cumbria action team is involved in the co-ordination of a

wide range of Government initiatives, most of which are administered either from Manchester or London. These are not costed on a geographical basis and are in addition to the direct administrative costs of the action team. This is an inter-departmental body, led by DTI and the costs fall across participating Departments. The DTI direct cost element represents about 2 per cent. of the total DTI-North West's running costs.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 December 1991]:* My Department runs or supports 40 schemes which provide help or finance and for which small firms are eligible. Of these, some are exclusive to small firms whilst others are open to companies of all sizes.

DTI schemes and services for business development

Scheme	*Eligibility*	*Level and type of assistance*
Innovation		
LINK	Minimum one United Kingdom industrial partner and one United Kingdom science base partner. Pre-competitive, collaborative research.	Up to 50 per cent. grant of eligible project costs.
EUREKA	Companies undertaking high technology R & D with at least one other company from a different EUREKA country.	Up to 50 per cent. grant of eligible project costs.
ATP (Advanced Technology Programmes)	At least two firms or research organisations in collaboration. Pre-competitive research.	Up to 50 per cent. grant of eligible project costs.
Club R & D	A group of companies RTOs, REs, in pre-competitive, collaborative research undertaken by a host organisation.	Up to 50 per cent. of eligible project costs.
SMART (Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology)	Single United Kingdom firms with fewer than 50 employees. High risk innovative ideas.	75 per cent. grant of project costs; max. £45,000.
SPUR (Support for Projects Under Research)	Single companies up to 500 employees. For new product and process development.	Fixed 30 per cent. grant; max. £150,000.
TAL (Technical Action Line)	Single independent firms or groups with up to 500 employees. Some exclusions as in CI. Immediate technical problems.	Tapering support for operation by RTCs and support of consultancy.
MPT (Manufacturing Planning and Implementation Studies programme)	Single companies up to 500 employees for planning the introduction of modern manufacturing systems.	Fixed 50 per cent. grant for external advice up to £50,000 maximum.
ROTTP (Regional Office Technology Transfer Programme)	Public and private sector. Technology transfer	Grant, underwriting, subsidy for SMEs to attend conferences.
OTIS (Overseas Technical Information Service)	United Kingdom Government and industry. Technology transfer	Firms pay only variable cost arising from their use of service at present.
OSTEMS (Overseas Science and Technology Expert Missions Scheme)	United Kingdom industry, science base, research association. Technology transfer	Approximately 50 per cent. grant.
Regional Technology Centres	RTCs are intended to provide technology transfer and training services to SMEs.	Pump-priming. £75,000 over three years tapered funding DES pay 60 per cent.; DTI 40 per cent.
AIT3 (Advanced IT Technology Transfer)	Mainly contract work carried out by competitive tendering.	100 per cent. funding.
OSTT (Open Systems Technology Transfer)	A variety of activities carried out by specialist consultants on short-term contracts.	100 per cent. funding.
Materials Matter	Increasing awareness and transfer knowledge of new material technologies.	Attendance at technology transfer events free for SMEs, but industrial contributions sought for clubs, support likely to be up to 50 per cent. funding.
Other miscellaneous technology transfer activities under innovation budget	United Kingdom organisations, especially those with up to 500 employees. Miscellaneous technology transfer projects.	Up to 50 per cent. grant.
Single European Market		
Single Market Campaign (info service/publicity and promotional materials)	All firms, business support organisations intermediaries and HEIs.	Free info service on single market related matters; includes literature, quarterly newsletter, telephone enquiry point, access to Government officials, signposting to business support organisations/intermediaries.

Scheme	*Eligibility*	*Level and type of assistance*
Single Market Campaign (Help for representative organisations)	Independent business support organisations, such as trade associations and chambers of commerce, whose principal activity is the provision of services to firms.	Up to 50 per cent. of costs for two years of recruiting extra member of staff; applications closed 31 March 1991. Fifty per cent. of costs of attending single market related training courses; database; and help with specialist seminars/workshops.
Managing into the 90s		
Managing into the '90s	All firms.	Spread of best practice mainly directed at smaller and medium sized firms. Advice/info on self-help to improve management practices.
The Environment		
Environmental Enquiry Point	All Businesses	Advice on environmental issues. Free if answers involves four hours work or less. At WSL charge out rates if more.
DEMOS (DTI Environmental Management Options Scheme)	Companies (single or consortia) demonstrating best environmental practice.	Grant aid up to 50 per cent. of eligible costs.
ETIS (Environmental Technology Innovation Scheme)	Normally consortia of United Kingdom companies, research organisations or HEIs looking to research and develop new environmental technology.	Grant aid up to 50 per cent. of eligible costs.
Euroenviron	At least one United Kingdom company looking to research and develop new environmental technology with at least one EC or EFTA partner.	Grant aid up to 50 per cent. of eligible costs.
Regional		
Regional Selective Assistance (RSA)	Available to manufacturing and some service sector projects in Assisted Areas. Project must create or safeguard jobs, and satisfy other scheme criteria including viability, need and national and regional economic benefits.	Grant, payable in instalments. Amount offered is negotiated as the minimum necessary for the project to proceed.
Regional Enterprise Grants	Available to businesses employing fewer than 25 for manufacturing and some service sector projects in the Development Areas and the Intermediate Areas in South Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Plymouth and Fife.	Grants for investment and innovation projects investment grants: 15 per cent. cost of fixed assets (max. £15,000) innovation grants: 50 per cent. of project costs (max. £25,000). Only one innovation and one investment grant per business (or group).
Exports		
Export Intelligence Service	United Kingdom producers of goods and services.	Market Intelligence available world-wide at commercial rates.
Market Information Enquiry Service	United Kingdom producers of goods and services.	Provision of customer specific information from overseas posts. Charges according to time taken to complete work.
Export Representative Service	United Kingdom producers of goods and services.	Provision of customer specific information from posts on overseas contacts. Charged according to time taken to complete work.
Overseas Status Report Service	United Kingdom producers of goods and services.	Provides a report on an overseas organisation. Charged according to time taken to complete work.
Export Marketing Research Scheme	Available to producers of goods or services of mainly United Kingdom origin with less than 200 employees.	DTI pay up to half the cost, up to a grant of £20,000, for the commissioning of professional consultants to undertake research, support for "in-house" studies and DTI pay up to one-third of the cost of purchasing published research. Support is also available to Trade Associations on a sliding scale.
New Products from Britain Service	Products and processes must be British and new to target markets.	Service helps test and promote new products overseas. Charge £60 for first market, thereafter £30 per market targeted.
Overseas Trade Fairs	United Kingdom manufactured goods.	Subsidy—Exhibitors charged 50 per cent. of DTI costs at a maximum of three participations in each market (five in Germany, USA and Japan). Thereafter payment is at full DTI cost. Also travel grant available for events outside western Europe.

Scheme	*Eligibility*	*Level and type of assistance*
Outward Missions	United Kingdom producers of goods and services.	Subsidy—Support of first three occasions in a market and half the rate for the fourth visit (Japan full rate up to five visits). Also travel grant for one company representative. *Note:* Scheme not available for western Europe.
Overseas Seminar Scheme	United Kingdom producers of goods and services.	Subsidy—Participants charged 55 per cent. of estimated costs. Travel grants available outside western Europe.
Store Promotions	United Kingdom producers of goods and services.	DTI supports overseas stores with financial assistance towards costs of expenses incurred in promoting the event.
Inward Missions	The host should be a group of United Kingdom companies who represent their industry.	Subsidy—Travel to the United Kingdom (50 per cent. or 75 per cent.), travel in the United Kingdom 50 per cent., interpreters 50 per cent., accommodation and a reception 50 per cent.
Consultancy Help		
Consultancy Help	Firms with fewer than 500 employees.	A free business review and up to 15 days subsidised consultancy. DTI pays 50 per cent., or two thirds is Assisted Areas and Urban Programme Areas.
Enterprise and Education		
Teaching Company Scheme	All companies, no restrictions on size.	TCS helps to stimulate collaboration between industry, academia, provides industry based graduate training and facilitates technology transfer. Companies contribute between 30 per cent. and 75 per cent. of direct costs depending on size, with public sector funding making up the balance.
Inner Cities		
Task Force Development Fund (TFDF)	Firms should be within a task force area and have up to 25 employees; funding is on a "last resort" basis.	Grants of up to £4,000 and loans of up to £10,000. £1·1 million levered in from private sector.

Bus Building Industry

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration he is giving to promote assistance to the British bus building industry.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* The British bus building industry has, in common with manufacturing industry in general, been hit by the world economic climate. It has suffered from excess capacity and is currently undergoing a period of restructuring.

We have recently been in close contact with the main company in this field but have not been asked for and are not considering any direct assistance. The Government are continuing their policy of creating the right conditions for business and investment as we believe that this yields greater and longer lasting benefits.

"The Two-edged Sword"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the transcript and a video cassette of the programme, "The Two-edged Sword", on international arms trading, broadcast on BBC2 on 13 December.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* No.

TRANSPORT

Mobility Allowance

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to reply to letters from the hon. Member for Harborough of 15 March 1991 and 30 September 1991, forwarded to him by the Department of Social Security, about the concern of the hon. Member's disabled constituent of Northleigh grove, Market Harborough, about the effect of vehicle excise duty changes on mobility allowance.

Mr. Chope: I received a letter from my hon. Friend, dated 5 March 1991, in which he raised a question on behalf of his disabled constituent about the effect that abolition of vehicle excise duty (VED) would have on disabled people who are currently exempt from paying this duty. I replied to that letter of 15 April 1991. I am sending my hon. Friend a copy of my earlier reply.

Railways (Noise)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will undertake to examine the feasibility of introducing thresholds on noise levels for new railways.

Mr. Freeman: We plan to draw up noise insulation regulations for new railway lines. I gave details of our proposals in my answer to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 28 November at column *577* about the recommendations of the Mitchell committee.

Diesel Fumes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements exist to monitor the exhaust emission levels from diesel vehicles in general and London taxi-cabs in particular; and what further checks he proposes to control the exhaust emissions from diesel engines.

Mr. Chope: Large diesel-powered vehicles are inspected annually and at roadside checks for the cleanliness of their exhaust emission by the Department's vehicle inspectorate. This is at present a subjective assessment of the level of smoke emitted. Testing using smoke measuring instruments will be introduced in 1992.

Taxis are subject to a roadworthiness test after one year from new. Taxis are usually submitted not to an annual MoT roadworthiness certificate but to an alternative test, conducted by the licensing authority, which is generally more stringent than the MoT test.

The licensing authority, which for taxis in London is the Public Carriage Office, has the power to carry out spot checks on a taxi at any time during the licensed year and can prohibit use of the vehicle until faults, which may include excessive smoke, are rectified. The Public Carriage Office is also currently liaising with Westminster council to set up a complaints hot-line for, among other vehicles, taxis which smoke excessively.

For the future, studies are under way to determine the extent to which smoke measuring instruments can be adapted or modified for use on diesel-powered cars, taxis and light vans.

Road Improvements, East Sussex

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations have been undertaken between his Department and East Sussex county council on the proposed improvements to the A26 at Beddington Itford Farm and to the A27 from Lewes to Polegate.

Mr. Chope: East Sussex county council is being consulted as part of the current public consultation on both these schemes. County, district and parish councillors were invited to a presentation about the schemes at a preview of the consultations exhibition.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the impending decision on the alignment to the proposed A27 Polegate bypass.

Mr. Chope: A small number of objections and representations have been received following publication of draft orders under the Highways Act for the A27 Polegate bypass. They are currently being assessed. The objection period ends on 29 February.

Motorways

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the proposed southern and western motorway and the proposed slip road linking it with the A59; what consultations he has had with Lancashire county council on the proposals; and what environmental matters he has taken into consideration in planning the motorway alignment.

Mr. Chope: Several hundred representations have been received so far. Consultations with Lancashire county council have taken place throughout the development of the scheme and are continuing. In proposing a route for consultation full account has been taken of all environmental matters including the effects on people and property and on special landscape areas.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will examine the feasibility of introducing a maximum speed limit for heavy goods vehicles.

Mr. Chope: Vehicle speed limits are already contained in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The speed limit for goods vehicles over 7·5 tonnes gross weight is 60 mph on motorways, 50 mph on dual carriageways and 40 mph on other roads, subject to any lower road speed limits.

Lorry and Bus Speeds

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason Her Majesty's Government agreed to the directive on Euro speed limits for lorries and buses on 16 December; and if he will make a statement outlining the costs of the proposal and the benefits which will stem from it.

Mr. Chope: Commission proposal 8046/91 was subject to qualified majority voting and the United Kingdom was the only member state opposed to the inclusion of set speeds in the directive. The Government support the principle that speed limiters should be fitted to lorries and coaches. Moreover, the directive will be of benefit to the United Kingdom because, for the future, EC-registered vehicles, as well as those which are subject to the national construction and use regulations, will have to be fitted with limiters. The restrictions on speed will add to gross operating costs but there will be savings in fuel to set against these.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason Her Majesty's Government agreed to the directive on Euro speed limits for lorries and buses being considered as a majority voting measure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The proposal for a directive on the fitment of speed limiters including speeds at which the limiters must be set was presented under article 75 of the European treaty as a measure in pursuance of a common transport policy. Voting under this article is required to be by qualified majority.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there are any exemptions in any member state from the restrictions on speed limits for lorries and buses agreed in the Council on 16 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The proposed directive on the fitment of speed limiters will not provide any exemptions to permit member states to set limiters above the prescribed speeds.

Midland Metro

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Midland metro.

Mr. Freeman: I announced in October that development funding of £1·5 million was being made available for further work to be done on the project. I have now decided that extra resources, in addition to this sum, should be provided in 1992-93 so that more preparatory work can be carried out. Full funding will be considered in due course.

Rail Electrification (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the West Yorkshire electrification project.

Mr. Freeman: The passenger transport authority has now informed me that the rolling-stock will as agreed be acquired through an operating lease. I welcome this, and we are allocating credit approvals to allow work to begin as soon as possible on the infrastructure for the project.

Transport Council

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the outcome of the meeting of the European Transport Council on 16 and 17 December.

Mr. Rifkind: The meeting of the European Council of Transport Ministers was held in Brussels on the 16 and 17 December. Due to the incident on the morning of the 16 December at Clapham Junction, which resulted in serious and regrettable delay to British Rail services, I was unable to attend the Council. Officials represented the United Kingdom on both days.

The Council agreed in principle that speed limiters should be fitted to heavy goods vehicles and coaches throughout the Community. The requirement will apply to all new vehicles registered after 1 January 1994. Existing vehicles registered after 1 January 1988 will have to have limiters fitted by 1 January 1995 where they are used in international transport, and by 1 January 1996 where they are used exclusively on domestic journeys. The Council also agreed that limiters should be set so as to restrict the road speed of HGVs to 90 kph (56 mph), and that limiters on coaches should be set at 100 kph (62 mph). In addition, there will be restrictions on who can fit and set limiters in order to safeguard against incorrect calibration and tampering.

The Council took note of the Commission's interim report on road safety and requested the Commission to produce a final report by May 1992, including consideration of the establishment of a standing advisory committee on road safety.

Agreement was reached on the definition of technical equivalence to road friendly (air) suspension with a firm commitment to take forward the proposal on maximum authorised drive axle weights.

The Council reached agreement in principle on proposals for an EC road hauliers licence. These would be put before the next Transport Council for adoption subject to receipt of the European Parliament's opinion.

The Council made progress towards Community rules for the single market on international road passenger transport, paving the way for further simplification of the procedures and for abolition for all authorisations as the next step.

A resolution was agreed on transport and disabled people. The Commission have agreed to submit a report by September 1992.

The Commission introduced a paper on transport infrastructure networks which would take account of the Maastricht agreement on networks and the cohesion fund. The Council also reached agreement on its resolution on research and development under the fourth framework programme, with a Council declaration that transport research be
"taken into account in a coherent way".

The Council noted the presidency's report and agreed to ask the Economic and Financial Council to continue to examine fiscal harmonisation in the road haulage sector.

The Council agreed a regulation to liberalise inland waterway cabotage.

On aviation matters, a directive phasing out the operation of older, noisier aircraft between 1995 and 2002 was agreed in principle, subject to further examination of the annex listing certain aircraft from developing countries eligible for exemptions until 2002. The Council had a useful first debate on the third aviation package, agreeing with the main principles and scope of the Commission's proposals whilst noting that more work was needed on the details, particularly as to how and when cabotage and 'seventh freedom' services should be introduced.

On maritime issues, the Council agreed a regulation enabling the Commission to work up a detailed block exemption from the competition rules of the treaty for shipping consortia. The Council also agreed a decision on radionavigation systems. No final decisions were reached on the liberalisation of shipping cabotage but there was general support for the phased approach by the presidency and the proposal was remitted to the Portuguese presidency for further discussion.

Public Transport, London

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to make public transport in London more affordable to travellers.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1984, real fare increases for London Transport have averaged 2½ per cent. per year, somewhat less than London earnings have risen, which means that public transport in London is that much more affordable. In its response to the MMC report on London Underground, the Government made it clear that they did not see a case for much steeper real fare increases than those in the past six years.

River Policing

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he is making for the specialist policing at riverside wharves, jetties, piers, depots, warehouses and other marine installations on the River Thames within the port of London, but not within the designated port of Tilbury.

Mr. McLoughlin: None. The places mentioned by the hon. Member are, and will continue to be, policed by the Thames division of the Metropolitan police if they are within the Metropolitan police area or, if they are outside it, by the appropriate county force.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the future policing of the port of Tilbury; and if he will place copies of such representations and his respective responses in the Library.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have received representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who is parliamentary spokesman for the PLA Police Federation, and from the chairman of the federation itself. In addition, hon. Members have forwarded to me letters from 15 members or former members of the PLA police force.

Rail Coaches

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the longitudinal crushing strength of the pacer, sprinter, type 144, HST and 225 type coaches in use on British Railways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The longitudinal loads specified for mainline and multiple unit coaches at various heights above rail level are set out in the table. All new design of body shell are tested to verify their performance before entering service.

Height	*Load (tonnes)*	
	Mainline[1] *coaches*	*Multiple*[2] *units*
Buffer-coupler height	200	150
Waist height (below windows)	30	30
Cant height (join between body sides and roof)	30	30

[1] Includes HST (Mark III) and 225 (Mark IV) coaches.
[2] Includes Pacers (including Class 144) and Sprinters.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost of *(a)* the electrification of the railway between Edinburgh and London, including costs of locomotives and rolling stock and *(b)* the electrification of the railway between Glasgow and Euston at constant prices, including costs of locomotives and rolling stock.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not immediately available. I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport regarding the overhead catenary on *(a)* the east coast route into King's Cross and *(b)* the west coast route into Euston, if he will list (i) the diameter of the copper traction current wire, (ii) the weight of the type of pillar and arm supporting the wire in both systems and (iii) the reliability of the locomotives on each system in failures per 10,000 miles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department does not hold the information requested. Operational details are matters for British Rail.

East Coast Line

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information the Health and Safety Executive has on the problems being experienced with signal failures on the east coast railway route between Leeds and London.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from BR that signals have been thrown to red, and other equipment has been disabled, as a result of serious problems of vandalism on the east coast main line in recent weeks. Such incidents were not reportable to the Health and Safety Executive since they did not involve a safety risk.

Road Pricing Schemes

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the introduction of road pricing schemes in order to reduce traffic levels in city centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Last year my right hon. and learned friend announced a wide ranging study into urban congestion, its causes and cures including a specific research programme into the potential for road pricing in London. On 24 October he announced the appointment of Programme Consultants for the London programme and work started on 2 November. It will take about two and a half years. Outside London it is for local highway authorities to consider. Cambridge is developing specific proposals, and others, such as Edinburgh and Oxford, are examining the general implications. My Department and the Scottish Office are keeping in touch with these studies. My right hon. and learned Friend made it clear in his original announcement that the Government have an open mind on the desirability of urban road pricing and will await the results of the research before making a decision.

Port of London Authority Police

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the Port of London Police Federation about reviewing his proposals to privatise the Port of London Authority police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The federation has expressed to me its concern about the proposed transfer of the PLA police force to the company set up for the port of Tilbury under section 21 of the Ports Act 1991. I have considered their representations very carefully but remain of the view that the transfer of the PLA police to the Tilbury Company is in the best interests of the PLA, of the future owners of the port of Tilbury and of the PLA police alike.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what employment and pension protection has been afforded to police officers serving in the Port of London Police Authority who are nearing retirement age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The provisions of paragraph 10 of schedule 2 to the Ports Act 1991 make it clear that the transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply to the whole of the PLA's undertaking which is to be transferred to the new Tilbury Company. The effect of these regulations will be to protect at the time of transfer the employment contracts of all PLA employees who transfer, including police officers.

The pension rights of those employees who transfer and as a result cease to belong to the PLA pension fund will be protected by the PLA's scheme of transfer for the Tilbury undertaking, as required by section 23(2) of the Act.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions or guidance he has given to prevent elected officers of the Port of London Police Authority from making their views known on the proposals for privatising the police authority.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have issued no guidance.

127-129 Fillebrook Road, Leytonstone

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why the decision was made to demolish Nos. 127 and 129 Fillebrook road, Leytonstone, rather than secure them for safe occupation; who was consulted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The decision was taken on grounds of public safety: these properties became dangerous after thieves rendered them structurally unsound by systematically removing the bricks over large parts of their rear facades. The decision was endorsed by an officer of the building control department of the London borough of Waltham Forest. Adjoining landowners, including London Underground Ltd., were also consulted.

Car Safety

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide information by make and model of new cars which have any of the following features designed along the lines of the United Kingdom proposals currently under discussion in the European Community *(a)* safer steering wheels, *(b)* front end protection for pedestrians and *(c)* side impact protection.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not available.

Proposals for safer steering wheels, frontal protection for pedestrians and side impact protection are currently under discussion in the European Community with strong support from the United Kingdom. These features do not, however, form part of the United Kingdom national type approval scheme for motor vehicles and are therefore not checked and recorded by make and model as part of that process.

Pollution and Congestion, London

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to take to reduce air pollution in London caused by motor vehicles.

Mr. Chope: From 31 December 1992, we shall require new standards to be met by all cars and light goods vehicles, both petrol and diesel-engined. New requirements for diesel emissions will also apply to heavy duty trucks and buses from 1 October 1993, with further reductions from 1 October 1996. So far as London in particular is concerned, record sums are already being invested in public transport to improve the quality of choice for those who might otherwise use private motor cars. Traffic management projects, such as red routes, are intended to enable traffic to flow more smoothly, and thus give off less emissions than when moving in a "stop-start" manner. The pilot red route scheme in north London has already demonstrated the success of this strategy.

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whart measures he intends to take to relieve traffic congestion in London.

Mr. Chope: The Government have several initiatives designed to tackle urban road congestion, a principal one of which is to continue to make public transport more attractive, reliable and efficient.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce the concentration of private traffic on London's roads.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* The Government have several initiatives designed to tackle urban road congestion, a principal one of which is to continue to make public transport more attractive, reliable and efficient.

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made concerning the further development and adoption nationally of a car secondary safety rating system, to improve consumer information about the relative crashworthiness merits of new cars through technical inspection and impact testing methods.

Mr. Chope: We are currently developing the methodology used in producing the statistics in the publication "Car and Driver: Injury Accident and Casualty Rates Great Britain". The information in the next edition will be further refined to try to isolate secondary safety; if this is successful it could be used as a measure of the secondary safety of cars. In addition we are co-operating with the Consumers Association in the further development of its secondary safety rating system to include some destructive testing.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many companies which have received funding from the Scottish Development Agency have become insolvent.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information readily available from the records of the former Scottish Development Agency is limited to cases where funding was provided in the form of investment assistance. It is available for cases where the amount provided exceeded £50,000 in the years before 1986-87; but is available for all cases for the financial years 1986-87 to 1990-91. On that basis, the number of companies is 1,028, of which 176 are known to have gone into receivership or liquidation, or to have suffered sequestration.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sums he is making available for research into the effect farmed salmon escapees are having on nature stocks in the present and next three financial years; and if he will list the projects and establishments on which the money is being expended.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the current financial year, 1991-92, the Department expects to spend about £210,000, at full economic cost, on studies of the genetic component of population structure and genetic variation in performance of farmed and wild salmon. The work will continue, but detailed plans, or costs, for 1992-93 and later financial years have not yet been finalised.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the source of the brood fish used in the production of farmed salmon in Scotland; what research he has carried out into the genetic differences between them and the salmon in Scottish rivers; and what information he has on how many brood fish came from each source in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the numbers of sources of broodstock used by salmon farmers is not obtained or collected centrally.

Studies on the genetic constitution of farmed fish compared with wild salmon have been undertaken by scientists of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department over the past three years. The findings have been published in specialist papers. Copies of Scottish fisheries working paper No. 4/89 and Scottish fisheries research report 42, published by the Department, have been placed in the Library. The most recent findings have been published this year in the specialist journal "Aquaculture", Vol. 98 Nos. 1-3.

Harbours (Accounts)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by region, the statutory harbour undertakings which are required by section 42(2)(b) of the Harbours Act 1964 to send him a copy of their annual accounts, stating in each case the names of the harbour or harbours covered by the undertaking, and the financial year for which accounts were most recently submitted.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All statutory undertakings which fall within the responsibility of the Scottish Office are excluded from the need to submit annual accounts to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State by virtue of section 42(11)(b) of the Harbours Act 1964, as amended by schedule 6 to the Transport Act 1981. Details of statutory harbour undertakings in Scotland which are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be provided separately by him.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of *(a)* hospital beds and *(b)* acute beds for each health board and the total for Scotland in each year since 1979, and the percentage change from 1979 to 1989.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the number of all NHS hospital beds in Scotland and those beds used for acute specialities, for Scotland and for each health board in Scotland for the years ending 31 March 1979 to 1991 are shown in the table.

The table shows information on the average available staffed beds and indicates the number of beds which are staffed and are available for the reception of inpatients and day cases. Borrowed and temporary beds are included.

The acute specialty group comprises the following main specialty classifications: general surgery, orthopaedic surgery, ENT surgery, ophthalmology, urology, orthodontics and paediatric dentistry, oral surgery and medicine, restorative dentistry, general medicine, dermatology, rehabilitation medicine, respiratory medicine, surgical paediatrics medical paediatrics, gynaecology, GP acute, acute mixed and other acute.

The acute specialty group does not include those specialty classifications attributed to the supra-area specialty group, ie specialties: neurosurgery, cardiothoracic surgery, plastic surgery, neurology, radiotherapy and spinal paralysis.

Average available staffed beds in NHS hospitals in Scotland for all and acute specialties: by health board: years ending 31 March 1979—1991

1979

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	58,788	19,005
Argyll and Clyde	4,623	1,372
Ayr and Arran	2,847	981
Borders	906	319
Dumfries and Galloway	1,707	437
Fife	2,966	801
Forth Valley	3,617	733
Grampian	5,384	1,752
Greater Glasgow	14,078	4,867
Highland	2,470	810
Lanarkshire	5,560	1,680
Lothian	8,432	3,210
Orkney	124	50
Shetland	160	62
Tayside	5,698	1,846
Western Isles	216	85

1980

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	58,334	18,948
Argyll and Clyde	4,561	1,330
Ayr and Arran	2,822	975

	All specialties	Acute specialties
Borders	897	311
Dumfries and Galloway	1,626	423
Fife	2,928	791
Forth Valley	3,610	708
Grampian	5,398	1,758
Greater Glasgow	14,068	4,908
Highland	2,433	810
Lanarkshire	5,515	1,735
Lothian	8,393	3,200
Orkney	120	46
Shetland	159	62
Tayside	5,588	1,808
Western Isles	216	84

1981

	All specialties	Acute specialties
Scotland	58,150	18,755
Argyll and Clyde	4,499	1,263
Ayr and Arran	2,827	977
Borders	910	322
Dumfries and Galloway	1,589	428
Fife	2,912	784
Forth Valley	3,614	727
Grampian	5,387	1,709
Greater Glasgow	14,078	4,859
Highland	2,424	811
Lanarkshire	5,540	1,728
Lothian	8,408	3,175
Orkney	131	58
Shetland	160	62
Tayside	5,465	1,771
Western Isles	207	82

1982

	All specialties	Acute specialties
Scotland	57,928	18,649
Argyll and Clyde	4,484	1,259
Ayr and Arran	2,818	970
Borders	931	337
Dumfries and Galloway	1,559	428
Fife	2,971	791
Forth Valley	3,570	727
Grampian	5,429	1,711
Greater Glasgow	13,919	4,811
Highland	2,417	809
Lanarkshire	5,543	1,733
Lothian	8,419	3,171
Orkney	131	57
Shetland	160	62
Tayside	5,375	1,698
Western Isles	202	83

1983

	All specialties	Acute specialties
Scotland	57,119	18,092
Argyll and Clyde	4,455	1,258
Ayr and Arran	2,795	947
Borders	934	345
Dumfries and Galloway	1,538	424
Fife	3,001	797
Forth Valley	3,426	688
Grampian	5,477	1,694
Greater Glasgow	13,348	4,326
Highland	2,337	815
Lanarkshire	5,518	1,696
Lothian	8,452	3,142
Orkney	131	58
Shetland	160	62
Tayside	5,367	1,754
Western Isles	209	85

1984

	All specialties	Acute specialties
Scotland	57,342	18,079
Argyll and Clyde	4,433	1,255
Ayr and Arran	3,051	1,080
Borders	925	325
Dumfries and Galloway	1,538	421
Fife	3,106	804
Forth Valley	3,465	690
Grampian	5,571	1,729
Greater Glasgow	13,206	4,204
Highland	2,288	797
Lanarkshire	5,442	1,715
Lothian	8,505	3,124
Orkney	131	57
Shetland	159	62
Tayside	5,312	1,731
Western Isles	208	84

1985

	All specialties	Acute specialties
Scotland	56,802	17,753
Argyll and Clyde	4,437	1,248
Ayr and Arran	3,026	1,082
Borders	927	333
Dumfries and Galloway	1,552	435
Fife	3,139	795
Forth Valley	3,401	678
Grampian	5,568	1,725
Greater Glasgow	13,079	4,151
Highland	2,279	766
Lanarkshire	5,338	1,627
Lothian	8,358	2,999
Orkney	129	56
Shetland	159	63
Tayside	5,197	1,711
Western Isles	210	85

1986

	All specialties	Acute specialties
Scotland	55,955	17,384
Argyll and Clyde	4,386	1,245
Ayr and Arran	2,988	1,058
Borders	933	339
Dumfries and Galloway	1,510	443
Fife	3,229	785
Forth Valley	3,418	683
Grampian	5,567	1,722
Greater Glasgow	12,746	4,045
Highland	2,131	686
Lanarkshire	5,271	1,587
Lothian	8,163	2,910
Orkney	106	57
Shetland	160	62
Tayside	5,137	1,678
Western Isles	211	85

1987

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	55,338	17,223
Argyll and Clyde	4,312	1,236
Ayr and Arran	2,951	1,052
Borders	944	348
Dumfries and Galloway	1,493	445
Fife	3,290	811
Forth Valley	3,410	682
Grampian	5,513	1,707
Greater Glasgow	12,559	3,987
Highland	2,165	695
Lanarkshire	5,042	1,570
Lothian	8,047	2,840
Orkney	131	58
Shetland	158	60
Tayside	5,109	1,648
Western Isles	216	85

1988

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	54,487	17,005
Argyll and Clyde	4,307	1,233
Ayr and Arran	2,952	1,074
Borders	939	347
Dumfries and Galloway	1,505	445
Fife	3,254	811
Forth Valley	3,151	643
Grampian	5,457	1,693
Greater Glasgow	12,242	3,933
Highland	2,142	687
Lanarkshire	4,961	1,552
Lothian	8,008	2,761
Orkney	131	61
Shetland	159	62
Tayside	5,057	1,615
Western Isles	221	88

1989

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	54,487	17,005
Argyll and Clyde	4,307	1,233
Ayr and Arran	2,952	1,074
Borders	939	347
Dumfries and Galloway	1,505	445
Fife	3,254	811
Forth Valley	3,151	643
Grampian	5,457	1,693
Greater Glasgow	12,242	3,933
Highland	2,142	687
Lanarkshire	4,961	1,552
Lothian	8,008	2,761
Orkney	131	61
Shetland	159	62
Tayside	5,057	1,615
Western Isles	221	88

1990

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	52,121	16,270
Argyll and Clyde	4,103	1,275
Ayr and Arran	2,925	1,087
Borders	927	335
Dumfries and Galloway	1,439	417
Fife	3,062	805
Forth Valley	2,878	604
Grampian	5,276	1,428
Greater Glasgow	11,918	3,854
Highland	1,968	690
Lanarkshire	4,790	1,529
Lothian	7,578	2,442
Orkney	131	61
Shetland	162	63
Tayside	4,743	1,593
Western Isles	220	86

1991

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	50,640	15,883
Argyll and Clyde	3,976	1,257
Ayr and Arran	2,886	1,071
Borders	917	339
Dumfries and Galloway	1,389	420
Fife	2,987	791
Forth Valley	2,853	592
Grampian	5,155	1,391
Greater Glasgow	11,482	3,716
Highland	1,918	695
Lanarkshire	4,773	1,521
Lothian	7,207	2,312
Orkney	144	61
Shetland	151	53
Tayside	4,578	1,578
Western Isles	224	87

Percentage change 1979-89

	All specialties	*Acute specialties*
Scotland	−9·1	−12·7
Argyll and Clyde	−10·7	−7·0
Ayr and Arran	4·4	10·9
Borders	3·7	6·0
Dumfries and Galloway	−11·9	0·2
Fife	4·7	−0·5
Forth Valley	−14·8	−15·8
Grampian	0·8	−17·2
Greater Glasgow	−13·9	−20·6
Highland	−17·7	−15·2
Lanarkshire	−11·7	−8·6
Lothian	−6·1	−16·4
Orkney	5·5	20·8
Shetland	0·3	0·3
Tayside	−15·8	−12·6
Western Isles	2·4	2·7

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend's Department runs or supports seven schemes providing help or finance for small firms. These are:

Managing Into the 90s[1]
Export Market Research Scheme[1]
Regional Enterprise Grant for Investment
Regional Enterprise Grant for Innovation
Regional Office Technology Transfer Programme[1]
Small Firms Merit Award For Research and Technology (SMART)[1]
Support for Products Under Research (SPUR)[1]

[1] Administered by Scottish Office Industry Department but funded by DTI

In addition small firms also benefit from more generally available schemes run by my Department, including regional selective assistance and the full range of schemes operated by Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies are also available to assist small firms development. Some of these are aimed specifically or primarily at small firms. The local enterprise companies and other agencies also have flexibility to develop their own schemes designed to meet the particular needs of enterprises, including small firms, in their area.

Marine Fish Farms

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will issue for consultation guidance on the location of marine fish farms in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My Department issued today a draft of this guidance which seeks to clarify policy and to balance concern for environment with a sustainable future for marine fish farming. It is being issued for consultation to a wide range of interested parties in Scotland and comments are invited by mid February. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. I look forward to considering all the comments received once the consultation period is completed.

Gifts in Lieu of Inheritance Tax

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any works of art accepted in lieu of inheritance tax have been allocated since he last made an announcement.

Mr. Lang: I am particularly pleased to announce that I am allocating the following pre-eminent works of art accepted in lieu of inheritance tax to the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, on permanent loan.

Items	*Amount of tax satisfied*
Portrait of Selina Thistlethwayte by Thomas Gainsbourgh Portrait of Robert Thistlethwayte of Norman Court by Thomas Gainsbourgh Portrait of Pierre Pecquius by Sir Peter Paul Rubens View of Wageningen by Hercules Seghers	£6,650,000

The Royal Scottish Academy is making arrangements for a short exhibition of the paintings in the Academy building early in 1992. I have agreed that they will then go on loan to the Aberdeen art gallery while preparations are made for their permanent display at the Royal Scottish Academy.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the figures for each region in Scotland for each year since 1988 of *(a)* the number of serious irregularities of the set-aside scheme, *(b)* the number of minor breaches of the scheme and *(c)* the number of cases where payments were withheld in full or in part; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Region	*1988-89*				*1989-90*			
	(a) Serious irregularity	*(b) Minor breach*	*(c) Payment withheld*		*(a) Serious irregularity*	*(b) Minor breach*	*(c) Payment withheld*	
			in full	*in part*			*in full*	*in part*
Borders	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Central	—	1	—	1	—	3	—	3
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Grampian	—	27	3	24	—	30	1	29
Highland	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Lothian	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	1
Tayside	—	8	1	7	—	5	—	5
Others	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	—	37	4	33	—	41	1	40

Full information in respect of the 1990-91 set-aside year is not yet avilable, as claims are still being checked and processed.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farmers have received payment under the set-aside scheme, for each year since 1988, in each region in Scotland for *(a)* horse-based activities, *(b)* golf courses, *(c)* game cover for commercial shoots, *(d)* sports grounds, *(e)* other recreational facilities and *(f)* other; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Payments for 1988-89 (set-aside agreements entered into in 1988)

Region	*(a) Horse-based activities*	*(b) Golf courses*	*(c) Game cover (commercial)*	*(d) Sports grounds*	*(e) Other recreational facilities*	*(f) Other*
Borders	1	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	1	—	—	—	—	—
Grampian	17	—	6	2	3	1

Region	(a) Horse-based activities	(b) Golf courses	(c) Game cover (commercial)	(d) Sports grounds	(e) Other recreational facilities	(f) Other
Highland	1	—	—	—	—	—
Lothian	1	—	1	—	—	—
Strathclyde	2	—	—	—	—	1
Tayside	16	1	—	—	—	—
Others	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	39	1	7	2	3	2

Payments for 1989-90 (set-aside agreements entered into in 1988 and 1989)

Region	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
Borders	2	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	—	1
Fife	2	—	—	—	—	—
Grampian	23	—	6	2	5	2
Highland	1	—	—	—	—	1
Lothian	3	—	1	—	—	1
Strathclyde	3	—	—	—	—	1
Tayside	18	1	—	—	—	—
Others	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	52	1	7	2	5	6

Payments for 1990-91
(set-aside agreements entered into in 1988, 1989 and 1990)

Region	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
Borders	2	—	—	—	—	—
Central	1	—	—	—	2	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	1	—	—	—	1
Fife	3	—	—	—	—	—
Grampian	29	1	9	2	5	2
Highland	1	—	—	—	—	1
Lothian	4	—	1	—	—	2
Strathclyde	3	—	—	—	—	1
Tayside	19	1	1	—	—	—
Others	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	62	3	11	2	7	7

The information provided in respect of payments for the 1990-91 set-aside year, ending 30 September 1991, is provisional, pending completion of the processing of claims. As the scheme provides for five-year undertakings, the third table represents the cumulative position.

Scottish Arts Council

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals for a supplementary financial allocation to the Scottish Arts Council and Edinburgh district council in order to allow the meeting of the Council of Ministers in Edinburh to be marked by a range of cultural events; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* I have no such proposals. These and other bodies may however be eligible to receive limited support for particular projects from funds set aside to promote events associated with the United Kingdom's presidency of the Community. I hope that a wide range of cultural events will be included in the celebrations of Edinburgh's prominent role as the city which is to host the meeting of the European Council of Ministers in December 1992. My officials will be meeting representatives of relevant Scottish organisations early in the new year for further discussions on the part which these organisations intend to play.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 13 January 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

European Court

Mr. Michael: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Lord Chancellor intends to amend or clarify the law in order to ensure that the intentions of the House of Commons are not frustrated by courts imposing requirements which are contingent on the outcome of an unresolved appeal to the European Court.

The Attorney-General: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the recent decision of the Court of Appeal in Kirklees Borough Council *v* Wickes Building Supplies Ltd in which it was held that the council was required to give a cross-undertaking in damages when seeking, by means of an interlocutory injunction, to enforce the Shops Act 1950. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on this decision because it is shortly to be appealed to the House of Lords.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Michael: To ask the Attorney-General if he will seek an early date for the hearing in the European Court of Justice on the alleged conflict between article 30 of the treaty of Rome and United Kingdom legislation on Sunday trading.

The Attorney-General: The United Kingdom has asked the European Court of Justice for an early date for the hearing of this issue.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his statement of 27 November, *Official Report*, column 918, if he will seek clarification from the European Court on the obscure reference in its decision in the Torfaen case, to which he referred, and in particular of those comments which have been interpreted as implying a conflict between United Kingdom Sunday trading legislation and article 30 of the treaty of Rome.

The Attorney-General: In two current cases on Sunday trading the United Kingdom has submitted observations to the European Court of Justice which discuss the effect of previous decisions of the court.

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects the European Court of Justice to reach a decision on Sunday trading; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The European Court of Justice has not yet fixed a date for the hearing of the references by English courts, but the United Kingdom has asked for an early hearing.

CIVIL SERVICE

Job Satisfaction

41. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what recent representations he has received from civil service unions on job satisfaction.

Mr. Renton: I meet civil service unions from time to time to discuss a variety of issues. It is the job of managers in departments and agencies to achieve our aim of having an efficient, effective and well-motivated civil service.

Fair Employment

42. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will commission research to update the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service report into how to identify and overcome barriers to fair employment across the civil service.

Mr. Renton: That report focused on the Department of Employment group. Similar recommendations were incorporated into the civil service programme for action on race, launched in 1990. Last month my department published the first progress report. It showed that departments and agencies have made a good start. The Government are determined to see further progress in this area.

THE ARTS

Music Training

31. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will visit Wales to discuss music training.

Mr. Renton: I visited Wales in May and October last year, and shall be visiting the Principality again on 21 February to attend a performance by Welsh National Opera of "Pelleas and Melisande". Musical training in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales; but I should be pleased to discuss any matters falling within my own remit.

Theatre Visits

35. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next intends to visit the northern region to visit theatres.

Mr. Renton: I visited the northern region twice last year, and I hope to do so again soon. I will be happy to consider invitations to theatres in the region as part of that visit.

Artistic Heritage

38. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received about his proposals to retain the country's artistic heritage in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: I have received a number of representations on the approach suggested by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and on the other option which I floated as an alternative. I look forward to receiving further representations by the end of March.

Business Sponsorship

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement about business sponsorship of the arts.

Mr. Renton: Business sponsorship of the arts is holding up extremely well. Last year £44·5 million was attracted. I have now increased the budget for the business sponsorship incentive scheme, by £1 million, to £4·5 million from 1992-93, to sustain the growth of sponsorship which makes a vital contribution to the well-being of the arts in this country.

ENVIRONMENT

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce a system of independent and objective evaluation of competitive tenders for the provision of local authority services, in cases where private sector agencies are in competition with direct labour organisations.

Mr. Portillo: We have no proposals to remove the responsibility for tender evaluation from local authorities. Our approach is set out in the consultation document "Competing for Quality—Competition in the provision of local services", published on 5 November. We expect our proposals to result in a clearer and fairer framework for compulsory competitive tendering.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Heseltine: The following quality of service performance indicators have been adopted in each of my executive agencies. Unless otherwise specified, they have been adopted since the establishment of the agency.

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre: The key quality of service performance indicators are customer ratings of service in each functional area. These are measured by means of a detailed questionnaire presentation, catering facilities, overall value for money and the client's willingness to use the Centre again.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency: The key quality of service performance indicators are visitors' ratings for enjoyment, value for money, and helpfulness of staff, which are measured by regular surveys of customer satisfaction. The customer survey programme started in 1988, one year ahead of Agency status.

Building Research Establishment: The current quality of service indicators are fulfilment of customer commissions (monitored by a sample survey); adherence to timescales for delivery of contracted outputs; and adherence to customer budgets.

Ordnance Survey[1]*:* The key quality of service performance indicators are to publish on microfilm within three months, each large scale map meeting the criteria and specification for reproduction, and to despatch within seven working days (including the day the order is received) 90 per cent. of orders for 1:50,000 folded maps. The first indicator was tightened from four to three months after the first year of the Agency's operation.

The Buying Agency: This agency was launched on 31 October 1991. Performance indicators have yet to be agreed, and are expected to cover comparative prices for key product and service ranges, response and delivery times, and complaints.

[1] The Ordnance Survey is a separate Government Department

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Mr. Heseltine: The information is as follows.

Agency	*Subject*	*University*
Historic Royal Palaces Agency	Law	London
Building Research Establishment	Natural Science Tripos	Cambridge
Ordnance Survey[1]	Technology	Brunel
The Buying Agency	Geography with Geology	Bristol

[1] The Ordnance Survey is a separate Government Department for which I have ministerial responsibility.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff were in post on the date that each of his Department's executive agencies was established; and how many staff are in post now in each case.

Mr. Heseltine: The information is as follows:

Agency	*In post at launch*	*In post on 1 December 1991*
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	64·0	65
Historic Royal Palaces Agency	344·0	372
Building Research Establishment	684·5	707
Ordnance Survey[1]	2,518·0	2,373
The Buying Agency	115·0	115

[1] The Ordnance Survey is a separate Government Department for which I have ministerial responsibility.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his Department's executive agencies; and whether the cost was borne by the parent department or the new agency.

Mr. Heseltine: The information is as follows:

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre—since the Centre had already been successfully launched as a commercial organisation for nearly 3 years before it became an Executive Agency there was no special launch.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency—was launched with a press conference and a modest event for staff at each Palace. The Department contributed £366 and the Agency £150.

Building Research Establishment—the Agency bore the total cost of £7,000.

Ordnance Survey[1]—the Agency bore the cost from its running cost provision and did not exceed £5,000.

The Buying Agency—the Agency bore the total cost of £25,000.

[1] The Ordnance Survey is a separate Government Department for which I am responsible.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related elements, in each case where appointments from the private sector have been made to his Department's executive agencies at grade 7 or above, since their establishment.

Mr. Heseltine: The information is as follows:

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre—one appointment at Grade 7 level.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency—apart from the Chief Executive, three at Grades 5/6 and two appointments at Grade 7.

Building Research Establishment—five appointments at Grade 7.

Ordnance Survey[1]—apart from the Chief Executive, one appointment at Grade 6.

The Buying Agency—none.

The salaries including performance elements of each appointment in each executive agency are appropriate to the relevant civil service grade.

[1] The Ordnance Survey is a separate Government Department for which I am responsible.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether a group bonus scheme is in operation in each of his Department's executive agencies.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the last annual report for each of his Department's executive agencies was published; and when the next one is due.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those new facilities for staff nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and provide a breakdown by grade of the number of staff taking up each new working pattern for each new agency.

Mr. Heseltine: These are matters for which each chief executive has day-to-day management responsibility. I am therefore asking each chief executive—including that of the Ordnance Survey, which is a separate Government Department for which I have ministerial responsibility—to write to the hon. Member. A copy of their letters will be placed in the Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

Mr. Heseltine: The information is as follows:

Agency	*Maximum salary* £	*Length of contract Years*
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	55,490	[2]5
Historic Royal Palaces Agency	59,000	5
Building Research Establishment	57,300	5
Ordnance Survey[1]	55,700	3
The Buying Agency	56,300	3

[1] The Ordnance Survey is a separate Government Department for which I have ministerial responsibility.
[2] Extended to just over 7 years.

Property Services Agency

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the total amounts unpaid by the Property Services Agency to contractors for work completed which remain outstanding for periods in excess of *(a)* two years, *(b)* three years, *(c)* four years and *(d)* five years.

Mr. Yeo: PSA Services' policy is to make payment promptly as soon as this is due under the terms of the contract; payment will normally be made within 30 days of the presentation of a valid invoice.

Final accounts on major projects often contain claims by contractors for additional costs claimed to be outside the contractor's control. Substantiating these claims can be a slow process. Interim payments are made as sums are justified, but overall the average settlement figure is only 20 per cent. of the original amount claimed. Because of the complex nature of contractors' claims it is not possible to say with any accuracy how much will eventually be paid to contractors for claims currently being discussed and negotiated.

Business Rates, Southend

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average cost for an appeal against business rate valuations in Southend.

Mr. Heseltine: In England the average cost in 1990-91 to the Inland Revenue Valuation Office of handling proposals by ratepayers to alter rating lists is estimated at approximately £230. Separate figures for Southend are not available.

The average cost to the Essex valuation and community charge tribunals—VCCT—of dealing with all types of appeal is estimated at approximately £100 per appeal cleared in 1990-91.

These costs are not, of course, borne by the appellant, though in the case of appeals beyond the VCCT to the Lands Tribunal costs may be awarded.

Indonesia

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department first contacted the director general of the Forestry Protection and Nature Conservation Authority in Indonesia requesting information on CITES annex C2 species; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have had no direct contact with the Indonesian authorities. I understand that the European Commission wrote to them in 1987, and again in 1988, 1990 and, most recently, on 2 December this year. Officials from the Commission and the CITES secretariat have also discussed wildlife issues with the Indonesian authorities.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of appeals for opencast sites his Department has granted since 1980 to British Coal and private companies, the names of the companies, and the location of the sites.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is available only in respect of decisions issued since 1 April 1987. The Department's records show that the number of planning appeals granted for opencast sites in each financial year were as follows:

Planning Authority	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	[1]1991
Barnsley	—	—	1	—	—
Bolton	1	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	2	2	2	2	—
County Durham	3	3	3	3	4
Gateshead	—	—	—	1	—
Huntingdon	—	—	—	1	—
Lancashire	—	1	—	—	—
Leeds	—	—	1	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	1	—	—
North Tyneside	—	—	—	1	
Northumberland	1	1	—	1	1
Staffordshire	—	1	—	—	—
Wakefield	—	—	—	—	2
Total	7	8	8	9	7

[1] 1 April 1991—30 November 1991

Details of companies involved and the precise location of each site are not immediately available. I will write to the hon. Member when the information has been collected.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what initiatives his Department has undertaken to encourage construction firms (i) to ensure maximum standards of energy efficiency in buildings and (ii) to use energy efficient materials;

(2) if he will review all aspects of the Building Regulations and codes of practice with a particular view to improving the long-term durability of construction and energy efficiency;

(3) if he will make it his policy to adopt new standards for house building and introduce a requirement for all newly built, converted or renovated properties to undergo energy audits.

Mr. Yeo: The Building Regulations and codes of practice are kept under review. The Department supports a programme of research at the Building Research Establishment and elsewhere with annual expenditure of £10 million.

Provisions in the Building Regulations for higher standards of energy efficiency came into force in April last year. The Government are committed to seeing how these standards could be further strengthened, including improved provisions when properties are converted or renovated.

A Government "standard assessment procedure" for comparing home energy labels was introduced on 18 December. It is our intention that this system should be developed to enable it to be incorporated into the Building Regulations when these are next amended.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has any plans to carry out an audit of low-income households to identify the steps needed to make homes energy efficient.

Mr. Yeo: The 1991 English house condition survey will include an "energy audit" of dwellings in the sample and record achieved room temperatures and fuel consumption. It will provide an estimate of the energy efficiency of the housing stock, including the homes of low-income households, and the measures needed to make dwellings energy efficient.

A13, Havering

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the decision of the public inquiry on the routing of the A13 trunk road through Havering.

Mr. Yeo: The decision will be announced when the inspector's report has been considered in conjunction with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Defective Housing

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds he has made available to enable London boroughs to buy back from right-to-buy owners houses found to have concrete cancer.

Mr. Yeo: Authorities may choose whether to repurchase or repair dwellings designated under housing defects legislation. Annual housing investment programme HIP—allocations take account of numbers of unreinstated designated dwellings reported by authorities. Recently announced 1992-93 HIP allocations for London boroughs included £56·7 million for specified capital grants, of which £3·7 million was allowed for housing defects obligations. These are notional, indicative figures, and authorities may spend more, or less, according to their statutory obligations. Exchequer contributions are paid to meet 75 per cent of the net cost of repurchases or repairs.

Standard Spending Assessment, Shropshire

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total and percentage increase over the previous year for the standard spending assessment for Shropshire for 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1992-93 in respect of education, personal services, and total expenditure.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is shown in the following table. The increases for 1990-91 are based on a comparison with 1989-90 grant-related expenditure assessments adjusted to take account of changes in authorities' responsibilities between the two years. Those for 1992-93 are based on the provisional standard spending assessments announced on 26 November 1991.

Changes between years in the standard spending assessments for Shropshire

Year	Education		Personal social services		All services	
	£ million	Per cent.	£ million	Per cent.	£ million	Per cent.
1989-90—1990-91	6·048	5·0	3·048	15·4	13·609	7·0
1990-91—1991-92	17·274	13·5	4·808	21·3	33·698	16·1
1991-92—1992-93	8·522	5·9	2·505	9·2	13·945	5·8

Waste Incinerators

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to release the results of the linked planning inquiry into the siting of merchant chemical waste incinerators on Teesside and Tyneside.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend will release the results of the three linked incinerator inquiries on Teesside and Tyneside, along with his decision on the applications, as soon as it is practicable to do so.

Mental Handicap

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the Mencap document regarding the charging for, and provision of, day care centre and educational facility plans for mentally handicapped people.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes.

Homelessness (Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department proposes to give to those charitable organisations which provide shelter to homeless people in the Greater Manchester area over the Christmas period.

Mr. Yeo: In 1991-92, the Government are providing £4·5 million in grants to voluntary organisations throughout England for practical projects to prevent and relieve homelessness. This will rise to £6·1 million in 1992-93—an increase in real terms of around 30 per cent. Among the projects currently funded are three in Greater Manchester—Hulme Action Research Project, SHADES City Centre Project and the Selcare Trust.

The concentrations of rough sleepers in individual local authority areas outside London are comparatively small and I would expect individual local authorities to make emergency provision for people sleeping out in their areas.

Woolwich Common Estate

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much is to be spent on improvements to the Woolwich Common estate; how much is Government funded; when the homes were built; and what the spending is, averaged across the number of dwellings and the number of residents.

Mr. Yeo: I recently approved, under the 1991-92 estate action programme, a scheme on the Woolwich Common estate totalling £9·910 million. Estate action resources will contribute £5·527 million or 56 per cent. of the total scheme costs and will help to improve the living conditions in 688 of the 1,350 dwellings on the estate. The best estimate that we have of the number of residents affected is 2,000. Woolwich Common was built in four phases between 1968 and 1981. Under the proposed scheme a 93-dwelling Bison tower block, built under phase I, will benefit from improved heating, insulation and communal facilities. The security problems of 488 low-rise flats, which were among the last buildings to be constructed on the site, will also be addressed. The scheme also involves reroofing and rewiring these dwellings and others. The average costs per unit for all dwellings included in the scheme is £14,500.

The scheme will be completed over four years and is the second phase of a large-scale programme of works on the estate which has already attracted £3·5 million in estate action funding.

Council Tenants (House Purchases)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which inner London boroughs have not applied for central funds to give help equivalent to the right-to-buy discount to council tenants who wish to purchase a home elsewhere.

Mr. Yeo: In 1991-92, 28 London boroughs are running approved cash incentive schemes and are issuing grants under section 129 of the Housing act 1988 to enable council tenants who could not otherwise do so, to buy a home in the private sector. All are utilising resources made available under the 1991-92 homeless initiative. The five London housing authorities that have not applied to operate a scheme are Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, City of London, Greenwich and Newham.

Council Tax

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether landlords of houses in multiple occupation will be liable for the council tax.

Mr. Key: Yes. We intend to include the necessary provisions in regulations under clause 8 of the Local Government Finance Bill.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether students in households where the landlord is liable for payment of the council tax and passed on this cost through higher rents will be eligible for compensation through a rebate system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Most students do not have access to housing benefit; nor will they be entitled to council tax benefit. However, properties where all the residents are students will be exempt from the council tax. There will be a 25 per cent. discount in respect of any property with only one non-student resident. These arrangements will apply regardless of whether the students or their landlord would be the liable person.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the landlords of student halls of residence will be exempt from liability for the council tax.

Mr. Key: The Government intend to make an order under clause 4 of the Local Government Finance Bill exempting student halls of residence from the council tax. We are presently discussing the details of this exemption with the local authority associations.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the system of personal discounts for the council tax will be implemented in relation to full-time students.

Mr. Key: The Local Government Finance Bill provides for students to be eligible for discounts. Educational institutions will be required to provide students on request with certificates which local authorities will be able to use as evidence that a person should be disregarded.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce a system of joint and several liability for the council tax.

Mr. Key: The Government's proposals for joint and several liability are set out in clauses 6(3) and 9 of the Local Government Finance Bill.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the projected annual costs of collecting the council tax in the Easington district council area.

Mr. Key: We have made no estimate of the cost of collecting the council tax for individual authorities, but over the country as a whole we would expect it to be no more than half the cost of collecting the community charge.

Housing Improvements (Manchester)

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sums have been allocated to the city of Manchester for the housing improvement programme in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* adjusted for inflation.

Mr. Yeo: Since 1981-82 local authorities have been able to augment the borrowing power of their housing investment programme—HIP—allocations by using the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts. Manchester city council has made substantial use of receipts to fund capital expenditure over this period. HIP allocations and gross capital expenditure for the last 10 years were:

£ thousands

	HIP allocation		*Gross expenditure*	
	Cash	*1991-92 prices*	*Cash*	*1991-92 prices*
1982-83	53,430	89,370	52,453	87,736
1983-84	44,528	71,182	50,770	81,160
1984-85	40,499	61,656	70,700	107,635
1985-86	36,050	52,013	46,564	67,183
1986-87	29,227	40,826	49,555	69,222
1987-88	31,555	41,805	83,268	110,316
1988-89	29,234	36,135	93,109	115,089
1989-90	21,005	24,382	110,426	128,180
New Capital Finance System[1]				
1990-91	52,153	55,804	52,783	56,478
[2]1991-92	53,900	53,900	not available	

Notes:

[1]From 1990-91, under the new capital finance system, the HIP allocation does not convey borrowing approval directly.

[2]Provisional estimate of final allocation.

An initial HIP allocation of £34·9 million—£33·4 million at 1991-92 prices—has been issued for 1992-93 and additional resources—supplementary credit approvals—may be allocated later.

Special Wastes

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to update water management paper 23 on special wastes.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside announced in July a timetable for the revision of waste management papers. Waste management paper No. 23, on special wastes, forms part of that timetable and is due to be issued for consultation in July this year and published in January 1993.

House Building

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new houses were constructed in the Easington district council area in each year since 1988-89, by *(a)* the council, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private companies.

Mr. Yeo: The information for 1988 and 1989 is published in "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Area 1980-89", and for 1990 in "Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales", volume No. 97. Copies are in the Library. Returns received for the first 11 months of 1991 show 80 dwellings completed in the Easington district council area, all built by private enterprise.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons waste management papers 4 and 26 do not envisage the granting of a waste disposal licence after planning permission from a district council.

Mr. Baldry: Disposal licences under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 have to be issued in accordance with the Collection and Disposal of Waste Regulations 1988, SI 1988 No. 819, after planning permission has been obtained. The advice given in waste management paper No. 26 on landfilling of wastes is that an application for a licence can be rejected only on the grounds of danger to public health or risk of water pollution—paragraphs 2.50 and 2.54. This reflects the wording of section 5(3) of the Control of Pollution Act. Waste management paper No. 4 is a technical memorandum providing guidance on how a licence should be devised by a waste disposal authority. The paper refers to the extant guidance in WMP 26 and statutory requirements of the Control of Pollution Act on granting of licences and cases where they may be refused.

Light Rail System Coventry

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy to refuse any application for a light rail transit line between Coventry city centre and the Westwood Heath area;

(2) what assessment he has made of the traffic and financial viability of the proposed light rail transit line from Coventry city centre to the Westwood Heath area;

(3) if he will come to an early decision on the viability of the proposed Coventry city centre to Westwood heath light rail transit line;

(4) if he will make it his policy to seek the views of *(a)* traders in Earlsdon street and *(b)* residents of properties in Coventry South West affected by the proposed light rail transit line from Coventry city centre to the Westwood Heath area, before reaching a decision on the viability of the line.

Sir George Young: So far as the matters raised are for central Government, they will be for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to consider. Until a firm proposal is made and detailed justification for it is submitted, no assessment can be made

of the proposed route. However, local residents will be consulted on proposals affecting them and any objections will be considered at a public local inquiry.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, on the basis of the best information available, he will publish a table showing for each region and each class of local authority in England, for housing capital receipts and other capital receipts, showing *(a)* total cash backed capital receipts available to local authorities at 31 March 1990, and the amount of those receipts that were set aside as provision for credit liabilities, *(b)* the total of capital receipts received by local authorities in 1990-91 and the amount of those receipts set aside as provision for credit liabilities, *(c)* total capital receipts spent by local authorities in 1990-91, *(d)* the estimated total of capital receipts local authorities received in 1991-92, and the amount of those receipts that are likely to be set aside as provision for credit liabilities and *(e)* the estimated total of capital receipts spent on capital projects in 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The information requested is as follows. The figures are taken from local authority returns to the Department where available, estimates have been made for missing data.

Capital receipts 1990-91—by region and class

	Total receipts 31 March 1990 £ million	*of which reserved part £ million*	*Total receipts 1990-91 £ million*	*of which reserved part £ million*	*Receipts used in 1990-91 £ million*
Totals by Class					
Shire Counties	247	118	229	102	128
Metropolitan Districts	343	210	607	397	305
London Boroughs	1,396	888	729	485	495
Non Metropolitan Districts	4,554	2,968	1,516	1,059	1,171
Other Authorities	81	53	65	24	57
Total all England	6,621	4,237	3,146	2,067	2,156
Totals by Region					
South East	3,736	2,399	1,627	1,090	1,146
South West	713	449	218	137	173
East Anglia	310	202	106	68	89
West Midlands	444	285	271	184	191
East Midlands	641	404	192	107	168
North West	299	193	300	187	160
Yorks & Humberside	279	175	264	177	139
Northern Region	199	130	168	117	90
Total all Regions	6,621	4,237	3,146	2,067	2,156

Forecast capital receipts 1991-92—by region and class

	Total receipts 1991-92 £ million	*of which reserved part £ million*	*Receipts used in 1991-92 £ million*
Totals by Class			
Shire Counties	167	77	137
Metropolitan Districts	497	301	224
London Boroughs	631	394	350
Non Metropolitan Districts	971	636	804
Other Authorities	50	16	50
Total All England	2,316	1,424	1,565
Totals by Region			
South East	1,124	682	794
South West	163	98	167
East Anglia	106	69	65
West Midlands	201	130	102
East Midlands	140	87	134
North West	239	143	132
Yorks & Humberside	195	120	105
Northern Region	148	95	66
Total All Regions	2,316	1,424	1,565

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what forecasts he has made as to the likely levels of *(a)* housing capital receipts and *(b)* other capital receipts, generated by local authorities in England in 1992-93; what proportion of those receipts is estimated to be required to be set aside as provision for credit liabilities; and what amount of capital receipts are estimated to be spent on capital projects within the financial year.

Mr. Key: Estimates of this nature are uncertain but at the time of the autumn statement total capital receipts likely to be generated by local authorities in 1992-93 were forecast at £3·0 billion. This total is likely to be split between housing and non-housing receipts in the ratio of 3:1. It is estimated that around two thirds of the total would be required to be set aside as provision for credit liabilities. It is further estimated that £1·2 billion of capital receipts, both accumulated and in-year, would be spent on capital projects during 1992-93.

Pollution Control

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the relationship between a district council's planning responsibilities for pollution control and those of a county council.

Mr. Yeo: The main land use planning responsibilities of district councils in England are the preparation of local development plans and decisions on planning applications for most types of development. County councils prepare structure plans, with which local plans must generally conform, and minerals and waste local plans; they are the development control authority for "county matters", principally mineral and waste disposal developments. In all of these functions, authorities may take into account

the pollution aspects of development where they are relevant to the development and use of land. But we do not expect local planning authorities to use their planning powers to duplicate pollution controls under environmental protection legislation—whether operated by the National Rivers Authority, HM inspectorate of pollution, county councils as waste management authorities or district councils as pollution control authorities.

We intend to publish a draft planning policy guidance note on planning, pollution control and waste management issues later this year.

Homelessness

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statistics he has concerning homeless people in the Easington district council area who are aged *(a)* 16 and 17 years, *(b)* 18 to 20 years and *(c)* over 20 years.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of households for whom they accept responsibility to secure permanent accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act. The quarterly P1(E) returns identify such households by the category of need but not by age. The total number of households accepted by Easington district council under these provisions in the third quarter of 1991 was 25.

In the second quarter of this year the return was revised to identify for the first time:

(i) households in priority need who were accepted as homeless because the household contained vulnerable young person(s) (aged 16 and over) and;

(ii) young single homeless people who were not in priority need for whom the authority nevertheless agreed to secure permanent accommodation.

Since then, Easington district council has reported accepting only one such household, in the first of these two categories in the second quarter of 1991.

Cold Weather Credits

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to meet representatives from the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits.

Mr. Yeo: I have no such plans.

Poll Tax

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the costs to the poll tax payers in Easington for collecting the poll tax in 1990-91; and what are the projected costs for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The cost of collecting the community charge in Easington in 1990-91 and 1991-92 is estimated to be £699,000 and £793,000 respectively. Revenue expenditure is financed by Government grants, contributions from the non-domestic rates pool and withdrawals from reserves, in addition to community charges. It is therefore not possible to identify what components of these costs are financed directly by community chargepayers.

Voluntary Sports Clubs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of the areas that are being considered as part of his Department's further analysis of its survey into the granting of discretionary rate relief to voluntary sports clubs; what is the timetable for this further analysis; and by what date his Department will review its guidance to local authorities on discretionary rate relief to voluntary sports clubs.

Mr. Key: The further analysis is of the policy statements provided by charging authorities about the way in which they granted discretionary rate relief in 1990-91 to charities and other non-profit making bodies including sports clubs. We expect the analysis to be complete by mid-February. Depending on the results of this analysis, and taken with details of the numbers of properties granted relief in 1990-91, we will decide whether our guidance to authorities needs to be reviewed. We expect to announce our conclusions following consideration of the analysis.

Municipal Waste Water

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the consultation paper on the modus operandi proposed to be used by Her Majesty's Government in implementing the European Community directive on the treatment of municipal waste water.

Mr. Baldry: A consultation paper on the criteria for identifying sensitive areas and less sensitive areas—urban waste water treatment directive—and polluted waters—nitrate directive—will be issued within the next few months.

Royal High School, Edinburgh

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans for the letting or sale of space in the Royal high school building, Edinburgh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The Crown Office buildings in Edinburgh have been occupied by the Crown Office since January 1982. There are no immediate plans to dispose of this building. Plans are in hand to colocate the Crown Office with the new Edinburgh sheriff court in 1994 and the future of this building will have to be reviewed closer to that date.

Rent Increases

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide information for 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 on the levels of rent increases for rented accommodation for each county in England for *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* stock transferred from local authorities to housing associations.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The estimated annual percentage changes in average local authority rents and registered rents for unfurnished housing association tenancies, which cover the majority of housing association tenants, are as follows. Comparable information is not available for transferred stock.

Annual percentage change in local authority rents

	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	Average weekly rent 1990-91 £
Avon	4	7	9	22	24·17
Bedfordshire	4	13	7	19	24·41
Berkshire	3	10	11	18	25·75
Buckinghamshire	4	10	10	40	27·77
Cambridgeshire	5	8	10	19	22.82
Cheshire	6	4	6	9	17·87
Cleveland	4	7	10	6	25·07
Cornwall	5	5	6	16	22·67
Cumbria	7	10	19	12	22·60
Derbyshire	5	7	6	8	19·80
Devon	4	11	8	20	24·20
Dorset	6	12	10	21	28·10
Durham	0	9	12	12	23·02
East Sussex	5	7	10	14	26·34
Essex	4	8	8	22	25·18
Gloucestershire	5	10	7	26	24·43
Greater Manchester	2	11	13	11	22·27
Hampshire	7	8	9	15	26·60
Hereford and Worcester	4	8	9	15	22·16
Hertfordshire	6	5	11	29	25·08
Humberside	6	9	8	16	20·73
Isle of Wight	8	8	15	11	28·45
Kent	6	9	13	27	28·66
Lancashire	6	11	11	13	24·04
Leicestershire	5	10	11	7	22·27
Lincolnshire	9	9	11	9	20·95
London	4	14	9	21	29·05
Merseyside	5	4	6	7	22·13
Norfolk	8	6	6	14	21·70
North Yorkshire	6	9	9	21	21·81
Northamptonshire	3	8	7	13	21·12
Northumberland	2	6	7	6	19·80
Nottinghamshire	3	8	8	10	21·57
Oxfordshire	6	9	10	23	23·92
Shropshire	5	10	8	15	22·72
Somerset	9	8	8	22	23·29
South Yorkshire	9	2	3	5	19·09
Staffordshire	7	9	9	13	21·02
Suffolk	5	5	9	18	22·15
Surrey	5	7	16	26	29·89
Tyne and Wear	6	6	7	3	19·0
Warwickshire	3	10	3	15	21·9
West Midlands	8	8	14	15	25·6
West Sussex	7	8	5	28	27·2
West Yorkshire	5	8	11	8	19·82
Wiltshire	5	8	3	20	23·25

Note: Rent changes shown for 1987-88 relate to the change in average rents between April 1986 and April 1987, but will include most of the increases for 1987-88. Those for later years are derived from estimates of financial year average rents.

Annual percentage changes in registered rents of unfurnished housing association tenancies

	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	Average annual rent 1990-91 (£)
Avon	8	9	10	12	2,010
Bedfordshire	5	6	8	7	1,615
Berkshire	8	7	8	10	2,133
Buckinghamshire	7	7	8	12	1,645
Cambridgeshire	6	6	7	8	1,437
Cheshire	5	6	7	9	1,359
Cleveland	6	6	7	10	1,639
Cornwall	11	10	12	13	2,099
Cumbria	5	6	6	11	1,099
Derbyshire	9	9	8	9	1,751
Devon	9	10	10	11	2,040
Dorset	7	8	11	13	1,957
Durham	6	6	8	8	1,485
East Sussex	8	8	7	10	1,944
Essex	7	7	8	11	1,838
Gloucestershire	10	9	12	13	1,763
Greater Manchester	7	7	9	9	1,355
Hampshire	8	8	9	10	1,848

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*Average annual rent 1990-91 (£)*
Hereford and Worcester	6	7	9	10	1,669
Hertfordshire	6	9	10	11	1,634
Humberside	7	5	9	10	1,642
Isle of Wight	7	11	9	12	1,849
Kent	7	7	8	11	2,130
Lancashire	5	6	7	7	1,404
Leicestershire	6	7	8	9	1,477
Loncolnshire	6	6	7	7	1,582
London	7	8	9	10	1,716
Merseyside	7	7	7	9	1,195
Norfolk	6	7	8	9	1,776
North Yorkshire	7	7	9	10	1,760
Northamptonshire	6	6	8	8	1,575
Northumberland	6	7	8	9	1,655
Nottinghamshire	7	7	8	10	1,646
Oxfordshire	7	7	8	8	1,821
Shropshire	6	6	11	12	1,690
Somerset	6	7	8	8	1,734
South Yorkshire	7	8	10	10	1,566
Staffordshire	6	10	9	8	1,596
Suffolk	6	8	10	9	1,649
Surrey	7	9	7	11	1,969
Tyne and Wear	7	6	7	9	1,419
Warwickshire	5	6	7	9	1,411
West Midlands	6	7	8	10	1,429
West Sussex	7	7	8	11	1,834
West Yorkshire	7	7	8	11	1,535
Wiltshire	7	9	10	10	1,847

Note: Percentage changes are derived by annualising rent increases on tenancies re-registered (most are subject to re-registration every two years) in the financial year. Those for 1987-88 and 1988-89 are based on re-registrations in 1987 and 1988, respectively.

Small Firms

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many schemes his Department runs to provide help or finance for small firms; and if he will list them.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 18 December 1991]:* The only scheme my Department runs to provide help specifically for small firms is the preferential treatment they receive under the non-domestic rating transitional arrangements. However, small firms may also receive help under the following schemes:

Environmental technology innovation scheme
Urban programme
Inner urban areas Act grants
City action team special budgets.

In addition, schemes operated by bodies sponsored by my Department also help small firms. The following schemes, all operated by the Rural Development Commission, are targeted on small businesses:

Business advice
Loans fund
Marketing initiatives
Support and training.

Small firms may also benefit from these other schemes run by sponsored bodies although they are not specifically aimed at them:

Rural Development Commission schemes for fully funded small workshop unit construction;
partnerships with local authorities to construct small workshop units;
redundant building grants;
rural transport development fund;
English Heritage repair grants for listed buildings.

The Rural Development Commission also provides support for local enterprise agencies which in turn help small businesses.

Agricultural Occupancy

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ease the agricultural occupancy planning conditions attached to a farm dwelling when a farmer has had to go out of farming after a specified number of years.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* Conditions that restrict the occupancy of a dwelling to an agricultural worker seek to keep the dwelling available for the purposes which justified its provision. The Department's model agricultural occupancy condition, in DOE circular 1/85, enables a dwelling to be occupied by either someone "last employed" in agriculture or an agricultural worker in the locality. If circumstances change, an application can be made to the local planning authority for the condition to be lifted.

Drinking Water (Pollution)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he intends to take to prevent the air pollution levels of the past week affecting the drinking water supply drawn from watercourses in the affected areas.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* None. I am advised that the high air pollution levels recently experienced in London should not have had any adverse effect on the quality of drinking water as there was no concurrent rain to wash the pollution into the water supply. The current blustery weather conditions should have dispersed the pollution.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Malta

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had from the Government of Malta about Lockerbie-related issues.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Maltese Government co-operated extensively during the complex and lengthy investigation and were kept fully briefed on the findings of the investigation. We continue to maintain regular contacts with the Maltese Government.

Switzerland

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition in the Palace of Westminster from 13 January 1992 to mark the 700th anniversary of Switzerland.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for this exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall for a week from 13 January 1992.

European Union

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which language common foreign and security policy texts adopted, pursuant to the footnote to article K of the treaty on European union will initially be written before they are translated into all the official Community languages.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The language of initial drafting is likely to depend on the presidency. Current practice in European political co-operation is for texts to be drafted and worked on simultaneously in English and French.

Kuwait

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives are being taken to discover the fate of the remaining Kuwaiti citizens that have not been accounted for since the end of hostilities in the Gulf war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are maintaining pressure on Iraq to fulfil all its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions, including the return of missing Kuwaiti and third country nationals. We fully support Kuwait's efforts through the International Committee of the Red Cross to establish the whereabouts of its missing citizens. We shall continue to raise this question on appropriate occasions at the UN and elsewhere.

Soviet Republics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Governments of the Soviet republics in respect of the application of the principles of human rights to their proposals on citizenship rights.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 31 December we in concert with our EC partners, recognised eight former Soviet republics as independent states, after they had provided satisfactory assurances inter alia on human rights including citizenship rights. We regularly raised human rights issues with the former Soviet authorities. We shall continue to do so with the governments of these newly independent states, making clear that their approach in this respect will influence the development of our bilateral relations.

Maastricht Agreements

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish at an early date a White Paper setting out the text of the contents of the treaty of Maastricht, less the articles which amend articles of the treaty of Rome, together with a second section which clearly shows the deletions, amendments, and proposed standing text of the putative treaty of Rome as it would stand, given full ratification of the agreements reached at Maastricht.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The full text of the treaty on European union, including amendments to the treaty of Rome, will be published as a White Paper after the definitive version has been signed by member states.

China

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the United Kingdom Government has had with the Government of the People's Republic of China concerning a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None recently, but both the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China are members of the conference on disarmament in Geneva, which includes discussions of nuclear testing matters on its agenda. China has made clear that it will undertake no further atmospheric testing of nuclear devices.

EC Jurisdiction

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state the definition of, or criteria determining, those matters falling within the exclusive jurisdiction of the European Community, or list those matters not within that category, stating in either case the relevant bases in treaty articles or protocols.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The EC has exclusive jurisdiction where that is conferred upon it by treaty provision or measures taken under the treaty. Current examples include the CAP, common commercial policy and the external tariff.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 December.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, represented the United Kingdom at the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 December. The Council underlined its commitment to a successful conclusion of the Uruguay round and stressed the importance of opening up world trade, particularly for those countries

introducing market-oriented economic reforms. In a discussion of the draft agreement put forward by Mr. Dunkel, the GATT Director General, the Council decided that the paper contained positive elements, but that its proposals on agriculture required modification. The Council asked the Commission to negotiate the necessary improvements.

The Council also agreed to provide 35 mecu of emergency food aid to Albania. The Commission undertook to put forward proposals on the possible supply of raw materials to Albania.

Councils of Ministers

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Councils of Ministers.

Mr. Hurd: The Foreign Affairs Council met on 10 and 11 January.

The Economic and Finance Council may meet on 13 January. Ministers might consider further food aid to the former Soviet Union.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 27 and 28 January. Ministers will continue to discuss the Commission's common agriculture policy reform proposals and any outstanding agriculture issues arising from the Uruguay round negotiations. Ministers may also discuss meat products.

Republic of Ireland

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request the Government of the Republic of Ireland to establish a system of payments to the United Kingdom Exchequer, or United Kingdom local authorities, in respect of expenditure in support for Irish citizens who are homeless in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

I do not consider that such a request would be appropriate.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Company Receiverships

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has as to the proportion of the total of company receiverships which are initiated by the *(a)* Customs and Excise and *(b)* by the Inland Revenue.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Neither Customs and Excise nor the Inland Revenue initiate the appointment of receivers.

Local Authority Asset Sales

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish details of the assumptions used in assessing the proceeds from local authority asset sales for 1992-93 in table 1.A.13 of the Grey Book, including the expected proceeds from right-to-buy and voluntary transfers; and what allowance has been made in the forecast increase in local authority sales proceeds for 1992-93 for the declining trend in the right-to-buy.

Mr. David Mellor: Table 1.A.13 of the 1991 Autumn Statement, Cm 1729, shows local authority purchases and sales of land and buildings. The figures for local authority asset sales for 1992-93 were rounded to the nearest £1 billion, reflecting their tentative nature. These are broad estimates based, among other things, on the proceeds from such asset sales in previous years, and it would not be appropriate to break down the analysis in detail.

Government Data Network

Mr. Doran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many computers operated by Government Departments are connected to the Government data network; and how many individual files are linked to that network.

Mr. Maples: Access agreements to use the network have been made between Racal Data Networks Limited and 22 Departments or non-departmental Government bodies. These are Inland Revenue, Department of Social Security, Home Office, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, Employment Department, Her Majesty's Treasury, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Department of Energy, General Register Office (Scotland), the Intervention Board Executive Agency, Department of Trade and Industry, Welsh Office, Department of Transport, Ordnance Survey, Department for National Savings, Department of Health, Natural History Museum, Cabinet Office, National Museums of Scotland, Property Holdings and the Paymaster General's Office. Some 2,800 network access points have been installed. Details of computer systems that send and receive data over the Government data network are not held centrally.

Bad Debts

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has of the present amount of indebtedness to the United Kingdom banking sector which is regarded as bad or doubtful; and what information he has of the proportions of bad or doubtful indebtedness which exist in respect of *(a)* United Kingdom based small firms, *(b)* United Kingdom based large companies, *(c)* investment in the USA and *(d)* investment in Latin America, Asia or Africa.

Mr. Maples: The Bank of England publishes information about the provisions made against bad debt by the large United Kingdom banks in its annual report under the Banking Act. The latest published figures are in the bank's report for 1990-91. Separate figures are given for provisions against domestic bad debt, commercial bad debt and problem country debt. However, the breakdown requested is not available.

Voluntary Donations to the Treasury

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, by financial year, *(a)* the number of people who sent voluntary extra donations to the Treasury and *(b)* what the total amount of such contributions were, for each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Maude: The information to ascertain the numbers of people for all these years together is available only at disproportionate cost.

The net amounts of voluntary extra contributions received by the Inland Revenue for each year are as follows:

Year	Amount (£)
31 March 1977	10,623·36
31 March 1978	9,350·22
31 October 1979	11,129·77
31 October 1980	310,988·93
31 October 1981	129,246·98
31 October 1982	41,247·59
31 October 1983	18,140·58
31 October 1984	80,386·81
31 October 1985	39,329·49
31 October 1986	26,926·90
31 October 1987	23,479·48
31 October 1988	105,357·05
31 October 1990	2,587·50
31 October 1991	147,012·95

Figures are not now kept for financial years.

The net amount is arrived at after adjustment, for example for individuals who subsequently claim their previously anonymous payment.

Civil Service (Working Conditions)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent meetings he has had with civil service trade union representatives to discuss hours and conditions of work.

Mr. Maples: I meet civil service trade union representatives from time to time to discuss a variety of issues.

Retail Sales

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of retail sales in *(a)* December 1991 and *(b)* December 1990.

Mr. Maples: The estimate of the volume of retail sales, seasonally adjusted, in December 1990 is 119·7—1985 = 100. The estimate for December 1991 will be published on Monday 20 January.

EC Social Policy

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is envisaged that under the protocol on the social policy agreed at Maastricht the 11 member states who are allowed recourse to the institutions of the EC will have to make a payment to the EC to cover the costs to the EC of such recourse.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Any act adopted by the 11 member states under the protocol on social policy will not be applicable to the United Kingdom; nor will the United Kingdom bear any financial consequences, other than administrative costs for the institutions, arising from such acts.

Soviet Union Debt

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimate of the total value of the extended debt of the Soviet Union owed to banks and other commercial organisations within the EC.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Precise data are not available. The total amount of the former Soviet Union's hard currency debt is in excess of $60 billion, of which some $38 billion is owed to EC creditors. Most of this debt represents guaranteed and non-guaranteed bank loans. German banks are the largest creditors—$19·4 billion according to the Bundesbank—though much of this lending has been guaranteed either by the German Government or by the German export credit agency.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the total external debt of the Soviet Union is owed to banks and commercial organisations in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Germany.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The total claims of domestic German banks on the Soviet Union at the end of June 1991 were DM 35·2 billion—$19·4 billion—according to data provided by the Bundesbank. The total contractual claims of United Kingdom registered banks—including those of United Kingdom subsidiaries of foreign owned banks—were $2·9 billion at the same date. Assuming Soviet external debt to have been in the region of $60 billion in mid-1991—although there are some higher estimates—debt to United Kingdom and German banks would have constituted 4·8 and 32·3 per cent. respectively of total Soviet external debt. In both cases, much of the bank lending was guaranteed by Governments and export credit agencies.

Gross National Products

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the GNP per capita of each of the EC member states, expressed as a percentage of the Community average.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Following are the data for gross domestic product per capita, using purchasing power parities, for EC member states.

GDP Per Capita 1990, Converted at Purchasing Power Parities, EC Average = 100

Country	GDP
Luxembourg	127
Germany	112
Denmark	108
France	108
Italy	106
United Kingdom	104
Netherlands	102
Belgium	101
Spain	77
Ireland	69
Greece	52
Portugal	52

Source: OECD Main Economic Indicators, December 1991

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will list each of those regions of the EC whose GNP per capita is less than 100 per cent. of the Community average.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Data for gross domestic product per capita for EC regions are published by the Central Statistical Office in "Regional Trends 26", 1991 edition.

Gaming Taxes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the levels and amounts of tax from each main form of gaming, betting and lotteries for the current year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the year ending 31 March 1991 receipts from the betting and gaming duties and the rates of duty applied were as follows:

	Revenue (£000)	*Rate of duty*
Off-course betting	479,064	8 per cent. of stake
On-course betting	—	Not taxed
Pool betting	303,944	37½ per cent. of stake
Casino gaming	57,367	Premises licence of £250 plus graduated percentages of gross gaming yield bands, varying between 2½ per cent. and 33⅓ per cent.
Gaming machines	98,631	Machine licence of £150 to £960, dependent on the amount of payout and the cost to play
Bingo	67,432	10 per cent. of stake money paid for cards plus 1/9th of added prize money
Lotteries	—	Not taxed

Most gambling is exempt from VAT, but the tax is chargeable on the net take of gaming machines and on certain fees to participate in bingo. It is not possible to calculate the VAT yield from information provided on VAT returns.

Councillors (Attendance Allowances)

Sir David Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what authority local councillors' attendance allowances are classified as earned income for tax purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Local authority councillors are office holders and therefore are assessable to income tax under the ordinary schedule E charging provisions on any attandance allowances they receive for the performance of approved duties. The charge to tax is imposed by section 19 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

Cigarettes (Taxation)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on the retail prices index of raising additional duty and tax on cigarettes in order to produce £750 million additional annual revenue.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This would raise the retail prices index by 0·3 per cent.

Gaming

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account is taken of *(a)* betting, *(b)* gaming and *(c)* lotteries in the compilation of the retail prices index.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Betting, gaming and lotteries are not covered by the retail prices index.

Soviet Economy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the effects on the Soviet economy of the advice he has given.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The authorities of the former Soviet Union and of the republics have been very keen to discuss their reform plans with the United Kingdom Government and others in the west. During my visit to the Soviet Union last summer, and in the many contracts which I have had in recent months with policy makers, I have urged the adoption of a comprehensive and radical reform programme with the aim of achieving macro-economic stability and establishing a market economy. Other G7 countries and the international financial institutions, in particular the International Monetary Fund, have been providing similar advice.

The United Kingdom set up a 'know-how-fund' for the Soviet Union in 1990 to provide technical assistance and advice. This fund was more than doubled to £50 million last summer. A number of other countries and the European Community are also providing technical assistance, training and advice to the ex-Soviet Union.

The Russian Government have now taken the first major step in the direction of creating a market economy by freeing most prices from 2 January. Many other republics have followed or will follow this move. I have constantly emphasised to the Russian Government, and the Governments of the other republics, the importance of continuing and intensifying their discussions with the IMF on the implementation of these and further reforms. Russia and the Ukraine have now both applied for full IMF membership. Other republics have also applied or are expected to do so soon.

In the short term, I expect that these reforms will lead to higher prices and a fall in output as inflationary pressures are brought out into the open and uneconomic enterprises close. However, I am convinced that in the medium term a successful move to a market economy will create the conditions for a substantial improvement in living standards. The ex-Soviet Union is rich in natural resources and has a well educated workforce. If reform is successful, the prospects for growth are very good.

Alcohol Tax

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the spirits industry about current EC proposals to harmonise tax rates on different types of alcoholic beverages.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the outcome of discussions with the drinks industry over EC excise proposals.

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will press for the inclusion in the current EC excise proposals of a mechanism to prevent further increases in tax discrimination against spirits in each member state.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to press for an EC tax harmonisation programme which reduces differentials between alcoholic beverages.

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he intends to make to the report,

"Competition Between Alcoholic Drinks: an Analysis", commissioned by the Scotch Whisky Association and the Gin and Vodka Association; and what amendments he intends seeking to the European Commission's proposals on excise tax rates.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend met representatives of the spirits industry to discuss EC proposals for excise duty harmonisation on 1 October 1991. We have since received the industry's report on competition between alcoholic drinks. Treasury Ministers fully understand the case the industry has put forward for a "capping" mechanism to prevent any further discrimination against spirits after 1992. We are now considering how best to respond to the current harmonisation proposals when further discussions resume in Brussels.

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the gains or losses from each Budget since 1979 (i) before indexation and (ii) after indexation for those with incomes, *(a)* below £5,000 a year, *(b)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* £15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* £20,000 to £30,000, *(f)* £30,000 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,000 to £70,000, *(h)* £70,000 to £100,000 and *(i)* over £100,000 a year.

Mr. Maude: The gains and losses from each Budget depend on many factors and it would be impracticable to attempt to estimate the effects of all Budget measures since 1979. Information on the effects of specific measures may be found in the press notices issued each Budget day by the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise.

Share Ownership

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the impact of the privatisation and flotation of *(a)* Government-owned companies and *(b)* the Abbey National building society and the Trustee Savings bank, on the overall level of share ownership in the United Kingdom at the latest available date.

Mr. Maude: Share ownership in Great Britain in 1979 is estimated to have been 7 per cent. of the adult population. The latest Treasury-Stock Exchange survey showed that in 1991 share ownership had risen to 25 per cent. of the adult population of Great Britain. Five per cent. of the adult population owned shares in privatisation issues only; 4 per cent. owned Abbey National shares only; and 1 per cent. owned Trustee Savings Bank shares only. Information for the United Kingdom as a whole is not available.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000 and *(c)* £20,000 a year with (1) the current tax allowances and reliefs and (2) limiting all income tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, giving the revenue from each relief separately, the total revenue and the numbers of people affected, for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Francis Maude *[pursuant to his reply, 19 December 1991, c. 221]:* I regret that, due to an administrative error, the complete answer was not given. It should have read as follows:

It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the introduction of the upper limits specified would yield the following:

Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs	*Yield in a full year under the current tax regime* £ million	*Yield following restriction of all reliefs and specified allowances to the basic rate* £ million
£10,000	590	390
£15,000	240	150
£20,000	140	90

The estimated yield from restricting all allowances, except the basic personal allowance, to the basic rate is about £300 million. The estimated yield from restricting all reliefs to the basic rate is £600 million. Of this figure about £250 million results from restricting relief on employee contributions to occupational pensions and about £150 million results from restricting relief on personal pension contributions.

The number of people with total allowances and reliefs in excess of £10,000 is about 635,000. The corresponding figures for £15,000 and £20,000 are about 75,000 and 35,000 respectively.

The estimates of revenue yield do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a limit.

It is not possible to provide corresponding detailed estimates for 1992-93.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fuel Crops

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made in the United Kingdom in growing crops economically for use as fuel or energy; what research facilities his Department is able to provide for this activity; and what studies have been made of the practice in other EC countries.

Mr. Curry: A wide range of crops for use as fuel or energy has been studied as part of the renewable energies programme of the Department of Energy. In recent years this work has concentrated on short rotation coppice wood because this gives good yields of dry biomass. For the same reason, there is interest in high yielding grasses such as miscanthus. At present, the growing of crops for fuel or energy is uncompetitive with more conventional energy sources but this could change in the future. The most promising energy sources appear to be wood and straw through direct burning but the economics are not yet attractive enough to encourage industrial use on any appreciable scale. Liquid fuels such as ethanol from cereals or sugarbeet or biodiesel from oilseed rape are also uncompetitive at the present time.

The Ministry has experimental husbandry farms, within its Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, which is shortly to become an agency, and these would be available for growing energy crops, if it was considered that additional sites were needed to supplement those already in existence.

Other EC countries are also interested in crops for energy purposes, especially in wood and high yielding grasses. Germany and France have shown particular interest in ethanol from sugarbeet or cereals.

An excellent account of the prospects for renewable energies from crops is contained in the evidence given to the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities, Session 1990-91, seventh report "Non-Food Uses of Agricultural Products".

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to monitor the enforcement of the minimum import price structure on the imports of farmed salmon into the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Enforcement of the minimum import prices on consignments of farmed Atlantic salmon entering the Community is the responsibility of national customs authorities. The Commission has responsibility for monitoring that these Community rules are observed. I have written to the Commission emphasising the importance of ensuring that the requirements are strictly adhered to, and will draw any specific evidence of évasion to the Commission's attention.

Food Aid (Eastern Europe)

Sir Michael NcNair-Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to ensure that food held in intervention, which is surplus to the stocks considered necessary by the EC as a proper reserve, is being made available as food aid for the newly independent countries of eastern Europe, including Russia.

Mr. Curry: Decisions on the supply of food aid take account of the needs of the recipient country. Where appropriate, supplies are drawn from intervention stocks, but in other cases they are purchased through the market for cost, availability or other reasons.

Bottled Water

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he intends taking to improve the quality standards of bottled waters.

Mr. Maclean: I expect to make proposals shortly for regulations under the Food Safety Act covering the quality of bottled waters, except for natural mineral waters which are already subject to the Natural Mineral Waters Regulations 1985. My officials are also involved in discussions with Brussels concerning the revision of the natural mineral waters directive.

Food Exhibition

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the role of the United Kingdom Food Processing Industry presented by the Food and Drink Federation to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. I have agreed to open the exhibition on 27 January.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been paid in compensation in respect of cattle slaughtered under the tuberculosis eradication scheme in each year since 1989.

Mr. Maclean: The amount of compensation paid for cattle slaughtered under the tuberculosis eradication programme is as follows:

	£ million
1989	0·58
1990	1·10
1991 (to November)	0·65

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the action taken so far by him to control tuberculosis in deer.

Mr. Maclean: Tuberculosis in deer was made notifiable in June 1989. Slaughter with compensation arrangements were introduced on 1 September 1989 and a voluntary deer health scheme launched in December that year. Research into tuberculosis in deer is being pursued.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to launch a formal review of the evidence relating to bovine tuberculosis in badgers and the badger control strategy.

Mr. Maclean: Badger control strategy is kept under continuous review by the Department, in conjunction with the consultative panel on badgers and tuberculosis.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress made to date on the development of a vaccine against bovine tuberculosis in badgers.

Mr. Maclean: Although research in this country and overseas is continuing, progress towards development of an effective vaccine for badgers is unlikely to be rapid.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate the respects in which the provisions in England and Wales for the disposal of fallen and diseased animals diverge from the standards applying in the EC for animal health and food hygiene.

Mr. Maclean: Directive 90/667/EEC, which applies to England and Wales as to other parts of the Community, requires that animal waste be disposed of by rendering, burning or proper burial, but it also permits under a derogation traditional outlets such as knackers and hunt kennels to take fallen stock.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Christchurch School, Shooters Hill

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list each date on which he received proposals to spend money on capital works at Christchurch Church of England primary school, Shooters Hill since 1979; and what was his decision in each case.

Mr. Fallon: Two repair projects have been approved during the time in question, one in 1984 and one in 1990. Grant aid of £44,879·12 was paid on the former. Work on the more recent project was deferred at the governors request and has yet to take place.

Bids for major capital projects at Christchurch Church of England primary school were received from the Inner London education authority for the 1989-90 financial year, and from Greenwich education authority for 1991-92 and 1992-93. None was successful. Greenwich LEA has only had control of its education capital expenditure since April 1990. Before this date, capital expenditure on school buildings in inner London, including Greenwich, was the responsibility of the ILEA. Detail on particular bids for major improvement works in Greenwich cannot be readily extracted from records on earlier ILEA capital bids.

Resources for minor works at voluntary aided schools are allocated to LEAs for existing schools and it is for LEAs in consultation with voluntary bodies to determine how the funds are distributed between schools. For 1992-93 Greenwich LEA has a minor works allocation of £144,000.

A total of £6,165·30 has been paid in grant-aid for three projects at the school approved since 1988 under the Department's voluntary rationing scheme for capital work costing less than £5,000, or repair work costing less than £10,000.

Chorlton C of E School

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date he received the letter from the hon. Member for Stretford regarding Chorlton Church of England primary school; on what date he came to a decision to use his powers under section 68 of the Education Act 1944; and if he will make a statement on the time taken to reach his decision.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Member's letter about Chorlton CE primary school was received in the Department on 25 July. My right hon. and learned Friend decided to issue a direction to the governors of Chorlton school on 30 September, but delayed its issue until 5 December because it appeared from information provided by Manchester LEA and solicitors acting on behalf of the governing body that the necessary information would be provided without the need for a formal direction.

AIDS Education

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church on the content and place in the curriculum for AIDS education.

Mr. Atkins: Since replying to my hon. Friend's earlier question about HIV/AIDS education—*Official Report* column *417*—my right hon. and learned Friend has received one letter from a representative of the Church of England and, to date, none from the Roman Catholic Church.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will undertake a sample study of AIDS education in those Roman Catholic voluntary -aided secondary schools which implement AIDS education as part of the family life programme taught jointly between the religious education and science departments.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to undertake such a study. It is for individual schools to determine how education about HIV and AIDS should be provided, taking full account of the requirements of the national curriculum, local circumstances, the needs of pupils and the views of parents.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have *(a)* become committed to hold a ballot on grant-maintained status, *(b)* voted yes and (i) had the proposals approved, (ii) had the proposal rejected and (iii) await determination of the proposal and *(c)* voted no; how many in each category were the subject of (1) closure or (2) reorganisation proposals; and whether, for schools in categories *(b)*(ii) and *(c)*, the proposals have been approved or rejected.

Mr. Eggar: To date 446 schools[1] have become committed to hold a ballot on grant-maintained status and (i) 162 schools have received approval for their proposals for grant-maintained status, (ii) 29 have had their proposals rejected and (iii) 62 await determination of their proposals and 60 have yet to publish proposals. Ninety-one schools have voted no to grant-maintained status. There are 41 schools with ballots pending, and one school where the application for grant-maintained status has lapsed.

The most recent information held by the Department on current and subsequent associated closure and reorganisation proposals is as at 31 October 1991. At that date:

(a) Of the 390 schools[2] which had balloted or were committed to balloting on grant-maintained status, 106 were or are named in associated closure or reorganisation proposals[3].

(bi) Of the 130 schools which received approval for their proposals for grant-maintained status, 23 schools were or are named in associated closure or reorganisation proposals;

[1] This figure includes six schools which have balloted twice on grant-maintained status.

[2] This figure includes four schools which have balloted twice on grant-maintained status.

[3] Information differentiating between closure and reorganisation proposals is not readily available.

(bii) Of the 24 schools which had their proposals for grant-maintained status rejected, 22 schools were or are named in associated closure or reorganisation proposals, of which 19 have been approved and three rejected;

(biii) Of the 69 schools which awaited determination on their proposals for grant-maintained status, 23 schools were or are named in associated closure or reorganisation proposals; of the 28 schools who had voted yes but had not published proposals, 10 were or are named in associated closure or reorganisation proposals; and

(c) Of the 70 schools who voted against applying for grant maintained status, 26 schools were or are named in associated closure or reorganisation proposals[4].

(d) Sixty-eight schools had ballots pending, two of which were or are named in associated closure or reorganisation proposals. One application for grant-maintained status had lapsed.

(4) Information on whether these proposals were approved or rejected is not readily available.

St. Thomas More School, London

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has accepted the application for capital works at St. Thomas More RC primary school, London SE9.

Mr. Fallon: Provision for minor improvement/replacement work at existing schools—like St. Thomas More RC primary school—is allocated to local authorities on a formula basis. Greenwch LEA has received a minor works allocation of £144,000 for 1992-93 under the formula. It is up to the LEA, in consultation with voluntary bodies, to decide which projects should receive funding from the formula.

Exam Results

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils obtained five O-level/higher grade GCSE passes which included mathematics, English, a science, a foreign language and history or geography each year since 1973; and what proportion they represent of the cohort.

Mr. Eggar: The numbers of 16-year-old pupils in schools in England who obtained five or more GCSE passess at grades A to C including each of those subjects or combinations of subjects requested, in the academic year 1988-89 was 81,050—13·1 per cent. of all 16-year-olds, and in 1989-90 it was 79,470—13·7 per cent. Information is not available centrally in the form requested for academic years prior to 1988-89.

Teaching

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps Her Majesty's Government intend to take to make the job of teaching more attractive.

Mr. Fallon: The Government's education reforms, including in particular the introduction of the national curriculum and local management of schools, will raise standards in schools and make teaching an increasingly fulfilling and attractive career. The establishment of a pay review body for teachers recognises and enhances the status of the profession. There was a 21 per cent. increase in the numbers entering teacher training in 1991. The changes in initial teacher training which my right hon. and learned Friend has recently proposed will make the profession still more attractive.

Higher Education

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will discuss with institutions of higher education the conduct of their admissions policy on a points basis in relation to A-level grades.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Admissions policies are matters for individual higher education institutions. In deciding whether to admit a student, institutions take a variety of academic, vocational and personal qualifications into account, of which A-level grades often, but by no means always, form an important part. We look at institutions to be flexible in determining entrance requirements and to look at the full range of candidate's achievements.

School Government Regulations

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has completed his assessment after the completion of the consulting period over the proposed amendment to the Education (School Government) Regulations 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Amending regulations to the Education (School Government) Regulations were laid before Parliament on 18 December, and came into force on 8 January. The main aim of the amendments was to ensure that governors were not overstretched. The principal amendments reduce the maximum number of governorships an individual can normally hold from four to two; and reduce from 12 to six months the period after which a governor is disqualified if he fails to attend all meetings within that period without the consent of the governing body.

Parents Charter

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultation was held with parents before the publication of the parents charter.

Mr. Eggar: In recent years the Government have commissioned a number of surveys of parents' knowledge about the education system. These showed that some parents were unaware even of their most basic rights in relation to their children's education, and that the majority would welcome more information about what went on in schools. The parents charter clearly sets out parents' current rights; it also explains the Government's proposals to improve access to information about the quality of education and standards achieved in schools.

Sport Guidance

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by what date he intends to publish guidance to schools to suggest the sort of information they should make readily available to parents concerning opportunities for sport and recreation.

Mr. Atkins: Guidance is likely to be issued towards the end of April 1992.

Teacher Training

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what principal persons or bodies he consulted prior to making his recent decision concerning teacher training; and if he will place copies of these representations or conclusions in the Library, stating for each body or person concerned the extent and period of their experiences of *(a)* class teaching and *(b)* teacher induction;

(2) what consultation he has had with governors, trustees and religious and other non-statutory bodies that have current responsibility for the training of teachers concerning his proposals for teacher training; and what communication he has had with them collectively since assuming office concerning the nature, quality and practicality of teacher training courses;

(3) what communication he has had with principals of colleges of education and departments of education, or

any relevant representative body, concerning the nature, quality and practicality of the courses they provide for the training of teachers; and what consultation he has had with any representative body of heads of secondary schools concerning the new responsibilities he envisages for them in training teachers;

(4) if he will publish a White Paper setting out the general principles of the plans he has for the training of teachers in general, including statistical information related to his timing of the changes; and if the steps he intends taking will effect the courses leading to the postgraduate certificate in education due to take place in 1992-93.

Mr. Fallon: The principal source of advice for the proposals announced by my right hon. and learned Friend in his speech to the north of England education conference was the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education—CATE. A list of CATE members has been placed in the Library. The proposals were also informed by a substantial report by Her Majesty's inspectorate on school-based initial teacher training in England and Wales, which has been published. Copies of this report have been placed in the Library.

The reasons for the proposals, the arrangements for consultation and the timetable for implementation were set out in my right hon. and learned Friend's speech. Copies of the speech have been sent to all higher education institutions in England and Wales which offer courses of initial teacher training and to many other organisations and individuals. A consultation document, setting out proposed new criteria for the approval of secondary postgraduate—PGCE—courses and proposed accreditation arrangements, will be issued soon. The consultation period will last until the end of March.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what effects on the staffing of institutes and colleges of education he expects to arise consequent on his recent proposals for changes in teacher training; what are the numbers of persons currently employed in such institutions in England and Wales *(a)* as professional staff and *(b)* as supporting personnel; and how many of each he expects to be retained if his plans are implemented.

Mr. Fallon: The proposals for the reform of initial teacher training announced by my right hon. and learned Friend in his speech to the north of England education conference would involve a significant transfer in the burden of responsibility for initial teacher training as between higher education institutions and schools. The staffing implications are for institutions themselves to determine.

About 3,000 full-time equivalent staff are currently employed as lecturers and tutors on courses of initial teacher training at higher education institutions in England and Wales. Data on support staff are not held centrally.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those institutions concerned with the training of teachers in England and Wales he has visited, and for what purpose, since assuming office, together with relevant dates and approximate length of visit.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend made half-day visits to the school of education at Nottingham university and the department of education at Loughborough university last year on 2 May and 21 October respectively. On both visits he observed teacher training in practice and spoke with staff, students, local teachers and headteachers. He met staff and students in the school of education at Nene college as part of a general half-day visit to the institution on 3 October. He also made a short visit to Bretton Hall college on 19 July, during which he met staff responsible for teacher training courses at the college.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the name of each teacher training centre or institution, listed under convenient categories in England and Wales, respectively, and for each show the type of course offered for graduate, postgraduate and higher degree qualifications, respectively, together with the approximate numbers of students in each category and the number of academic staff in each institution.

Mr. Fallon: The names of English initial teacher training institutions, and enrolments on their ITT courses for 1989-90 are listed in tables 9 and 9a of the Department of Education's statistical bulletin 17/91—students on initial teacher training courses—published in July 1991. A copy of this is available in the Library.

No figures for numbers of academic staff are available for individual ITT institutions.

Sports Councils

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimates he has assumed for the level of grant-in-aid for the four sports councils and the United Kingdom Sports Commission once this body has been established in arriving at his decision to establish the Commission.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom Sports Commission and the Sports Council for England will be funded from within the provision available for the GB Sports Council. Thereafter, the appropriate provision for each will be settled in the relevant public expenditure round, together with provision for each of the other home country sports councils.

Sports Commission

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his timetable for establishing the United Kingdom Sports Commission; if he will list the organisations and individuals with whom Ministers and officials in his Department have held meetings with regard to establishing the United Kingdom Sports Commission and the dates on which such meetings took place; if he will list the organisations and individuals with whom Ministers in his Department plan to hold further meetings and the dates on which such meetings will take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom Sports Commission will be established as soon as practicable. The decision took account of the GB Sports Council's own proposals for Sports Council restructuring which were discussed with it. There were also consultations with interested Departments. There will be discussions with the GB Sports Council and others as appropriate to take forward the arrangements for establishing the UK Sports Commission.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the sports bodies and organisations to whom he has sent a copy of his consultation letter on the disposal of school playing fields; by what date he requires responses to this letter; and by what date he will announce the conclusions of this consultation exercise.

Mr. Atkins: Copies of the press release on the consultation exercise with the local authority associations —LAAs—have been sent to the Sports Council, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the National Playing Fields Association and the regional councils for sport and recreation. The LAAs have been asked for comments by 28 February and it is hoped to announce the conclusions of the exercise as soon as possible after that date.

Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by what date he intends to publish his document setting out examples of good practice in promoting sporting and recreational opportunities for young people.

Mr. Atkins: This guidance document is one of the proposals in my recent sports policy statement, "Sport and Active Recreation" and I hope to publish it in the autumn.

School Buildings

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the expenditure required to bring the existing school building stock to the standard required by School Building Regulations.

Mr. Fallon: The results of the survey of school buildings —SSB—published by the Department in November 1987 indicated that the cost of bringing school premises up to the accommodation standards defined in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981, and to an acceptable state of repair, for 1991 pupil numbers, was about £2 billion at November 1987 prices. We have no later estimate than this figure, which was based upon returns by LEAs in respect of some 800 primary and secondary schools. Between 1986-87 and 1989-90 LEAs spent over £2 billion on school buildings, a significant proportion of which will have gone on remedying the deficiencies noted in the SSB.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give his estimate of the increase in expenditure on maintenance to school buildings required to deal with the problems identified in the National Audit Office report on property management.

Mr. Fallon: As the NAO report made clear, local authorities are responsible for the maintenance of their school buildings. It is for individual LEAs, not the Government, to decide what to spend from within the resources available to them in order to keep schools in a satisfactory state of repair.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give for each education authority his assumption for the amount required to be spent on school building repairs within the expenditure forecast.

Mr. Fallon: The Government's 1992-93 local authority finance settlement allows for standard spending on education by local authorities collectively to be 7·1 per cent. higher than this year's figure, which in turn allowed for a substantial increase in standard spending over 1990-91. Within this framework it is for individual local authorities to determine how much to spend on education and the pattern of spending within education, in the light of local needs and circumstances. Local authorities' standard spending assessments do not contain a separately identifiable element for school building repairs.

Polytechnics

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 16 December, *Official Report*, columns *31-33*, *(a)* what advice he received from the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council and *(b)* when he last consulted the Standing Conference of Principals on the question of whether to designate any further polytechnics.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The references to polytechnic designations in my right hon. and learned Friend's answer of 16 December took account of responses from the Ploytechnics and Colleges Funding Council and the Standing Conference of Principals, among others, on the Department's consultation paper "Degree Awarding Powers and University Titles" issued on 31 October. Neither body offered advice on whether to designate further ploytechnics.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to provide training and employment for the young unemployed aged 17 years to 25 years in the Heywood and Middleton constituency.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Service and Rochdale training and enterprise council deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes, to help unemployed people, including young unemployed, in Middleton and Heywood as elswhere. Additionally, Rochdale training and enterprise council and the Employment Service are working with others to enhance training provision for certain special groups in the area.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are on YTS in the area of Seaham and Peterlee; and what were the numbers in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson: Provision of training for young people in the Seaham and Peterlee areas is the responsibility of the County Durham training and enterprise council. I have forwarded the hon. Member's inquiry to the TEC chairman. In 1989-90 the youth training scheme was the responsibility of the Department and at March 1990, the latest date that information is available centrally, there were 775 young people on YTS in Seaham and Peterlee.

Windscale Inquiry

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, if he will place in the Library a copy of the study by Lyons (GB) Ltd. of press reporting of the Windscale public inquiry.

Mr Forth: I have arranged for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library.

Euratom

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment against which authority an individual can claim in the event of a claim for compensation arising from the failure to implement EC directive 89/618.

Mr. Forth: The Government do not accept that individual rights to claim compensation arise from the failure to implement the directive before the due date.

In the event of a member of the public seeking to establish an individual right to claim compensation arising from the failure to implement the directive, civil proceedings might be instituted against the Crown under section 17(3) of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. In that case, the appropriate authorised Government Department against which civil proceedings might be instituted would therefore be this Department as it has responsibility for laying before Parliament proposals for the statutory instrument intended to implement the directive.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's timetable for promulgation of the information stipulated by EC directive 89/618.

Mr. Forsyth: The Health and Safety Commission is currently conducting public consultation on proposals to implement EC directive 89/618/Euratom. Comments are required by the end of February 1992. We will bring forward new legislation as soon as comments have been considered and proposals scrutinised by the European Commission under the procedure set down in article 33 of the Euratom treaty.

COSH Regulations

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 associated with building records.

Mr. Forth: None.

Youth Training Schemes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many school leavers go straight into youth training schemes in the Crewe and Nantwich travel-to-work area.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the format requested. At December 1991, 55 per cent. of the total number of school leavers in the South and East Cheshire training and enterprise council area went straight into youth training.

Training Investment

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the amount of investment in training in each European country.

Mr. Jackson: The definition of investment in training varies very considerably from country to country and no comparable figures are available. In Great Britain, current annual investment in training by employers is estimated at over £20 billion.

Bridging Allowance (Coventry)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will produce a table to show, for each of his Department's offices in Coventry, and for the city as a whole, how many young people, and how many of each sex, were receiving bridging allowance; and how many had their allowance terminated in each month since October 1988.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the proportions of female part-time workers on adult rates, in April, with hourly earnings of less than *(a)* £3·80, *(b)* £5·00 and *(c)* £5·20; and if he will provide these figures by standard economic region, for Great Britain, and for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey closest to that requested is given in the table.

Percentage of part-time female employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence, with hourly earnings below the following specified amounts.

	April 1991		
	£ 3·80	£ 4·80	£ 5·40
Greater London	23·5	53·3	65·1
South East	38·1	64·7	74·3
East Anglia	53·7	76·5	83·6
South West	57·4	77·2	84·4
West Midlands	58·5	78·8	84·0
East Midlands	59·2	79·5	86·3
Yorks and Humberside	59·6	79·7	85·4
North West	56·8	79·4	85·2
Northern	63·0	81·5	88·2
Wales	62·7	79·4	85·7
Scotland	54·4	76·6	82·1
Great Britain	52·3	74·7	81·8
	3·80	5·00	5·50
Northern Ireland	60·4	77·8	82·0

Source: New Earnings Survey, Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on Wednesday 18 December.

Mr. Redwood: The principal item for discussion was the European Commission's proposal for a directive on technical standards for satellite broadcasting. After a lengthy debate, member states were able to reach political agreement on a draft directive. A formal common position on the directive should be adopted shortly, after which it will go for a second reading in the European Parliament. The outcome demonstrated considerable European support for the Government's negotiating position which has consistently sought to protect the interests of European service providers and consumers. I believe we have achieved an excellent deal in this respect. We have resisted any damaging obligations on existing satellite broadcasters to adopt the D2-MAC standard, a move which could have threatened their commercial viability. We have also successfully prevented the compulsory inclusion of multiplexed analogue components—MAC—decoders in ordinary television sets and satellite receiving equipment, thereby sparing consumers an excessive cost premium on these products. I think that the greater emphasis the agreement now places on promoting the wide-screen capabilities of MAC is a very positive step for the European satellite broadcasting industry. Yet to be resolved is the separate financial measure which the Commission intends to propose to provide funding for the promotion of the MAC standard. The Government will consider a case for subsidy on its merits when a proper justification for the spend is put forward but we are opposed to the expenditure of the very large sums which have been talked about by the Commission.

Formal common positions were adopted without discussion on the Council decision on the harmonisation in due course of the international telephony access code to 00, the Council directive on the application of open network provision to leased lines and the Council resolution on the further liberalisation of satellite communications.

Industrial Development, Rochdale

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will visit Rochdale borough to meet representatives of industry to discuss matters relating to his Department's activities in industrial development.

Mr. Leigh: I have no present plans to do so, although my officials remain ready to discuss my Department's activities and services with Rochdale borough and other local authorities.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has for boosting manufacturing output in the Rochdale borough.

Mr. Leigh: My Department has a wide range of schemes to help improve manufacturing output and encourage innovation. Firms in Rochdale wishing to take advantage of these schemes should contact DTI's north-west regional office in Manchester.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Testing

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to use section 5(5) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to ensure that projecct licences are not issued for animal tests for skin or eye irritancy where alternative testing methods are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: All applicants for project licences for whatever purposes are required to show that they have given thorough consideration to the possibility of using alternatives to the use of living animals in their proposed programme of work. At present there are no validated and accepted alternative testing methods to existing skin and eye irritancy tests.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any of the project licences currently issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 permit animal testing for skin or eye irritancy for the purpose of developing cosmetics or toiletries.

Mrs. Rumbold: There are currently four project licences in force which authorise the use of living animals in the safety testing of cosmetics or toiletries. All authorise the use of animals in tests to ensure that substances used in cosmetics are not skin irritants and three of them authorise tests to ensure that such substances are not eye irritants.

The definition of cosmetics used in this country follows that used by the European Community and includes such items as shampoos, sunscreens and toothpastes. In view of the purposes of such products, skin and eye irritancy tests are carried out as part of a package of tests required to ensure that substances to be used in cosmetics are safe. Skin and eye irritancy tests will normally only be applied to animals after in vitro pre-screening tests have shown the substance in question to be a non-irritant thus reducing the possibility of adverse reactions to the animals involved.

State-approved Funding

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there are equivalents to the Ryrie rules on state-approved non-Government funding for state-approved causes.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Gaming Polices

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the differences between public policies on *(a)* betting, *(b)* gaming and *(c)* lotteries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Government policy on all gambling, whether betting, gaming or lotteries, reflects two basic principles. The first is that controls are necessary to ensure that it is conducted honestly and fairly. The second principle is that demand for gambling should not be stimulated. These principles are applied in different degrees to different kinds of gambling. The greater the scope for abuse and commercial exploitation the more rigorously they are applied.

Lotteries

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange the publication by 17 January of an interim discussion paper on the technical issues which could be considered relevant to decisions on one or more high-prize lotteries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The House will have an opportunity to consider these issues in debate on 17 January, but we do not intend to issue a discussion document in advance.

Child Crime

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what has been the number of incidents reported to police in each year since 1980 in which it is believed that offences were committed by children believed to be under the minimum age at which they could be either cautioned or prosecuted;

(2) what was the number of incidents in each year since 1980 in which police identified the culprit or culprits as children under the age at which they could be prosecuted.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not collected centrally on the number or type of offences committed by children under the age of 10 years, the minimum age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales.

Gaming Advertisements

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which forms of gaming, betting or lotteries may be advertised on television.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: By virtue of certain statutory controls and the provisions of the Independent Television Commission's code of advertising standards and practice, all advertising of betting and gaming is prohibited on commercial television. Lotteries permitted under the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976 may be advertised on television.

Gambling

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the report on gambling commissioned by the European Commission, in so far as it covers the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As part of an examination of the gambling sector in the context of the single market, a purely factual report entitled, "Gambling in the Single Market—A study of the current legal and market situation", was published by the European Commission in July. We have drawn to the Commission's attention a number of factual inaccuracies in relation to the United Kingdom. In particular, we have pointed out that net consumer spend—estimated at about £3,300 million for the United Kingdom in 1989-90—provides a better guide to gambling expenditure than estimates of the total amount staked which appear in the report. On that basis, the EC gambling industry is much smaller than the report claimed.

Television Licences

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what authority a colour television licence is required for the installation or use of a video cassette recorder in conjunction with a black and white television set.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The requirement for a colour television licence to install or use a video cassette recorder in conjunction with a monochrome television is set out in the Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licence Fees) Regulations 1991 (No. 436) made under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949.

National Lottery

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to the merits and demerits of a national lottery.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 2 December 1991, at column *14*.

Security Service

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the purposes and objectives of the Security Service;

(2) if he will make it his practice to provide information on the annual expenditure by the Security Service;

(3) if he will now make it his practice to disclose the number of people employed by the Security Service.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now make it his practice to provide detailed financial information on the expenditure of the Security Service.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The functions of the Security Service, as described in the Security Service Act 1989, are the protection of national security and the safeguarding of the United Kingdom's economic well being against threats posed by the actions or intentions of persons outside the British islands. I do not intend to depart from the practice adopted by successive Governments of not disclosing information about staffing, financial and other matters closely associated with the Security Service's operations which must necessarily remain secret.

UKIAS

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what dates in 1991 Ministers and/or officials have met representatives of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service; what was discussed; and what further meetings are planned;

(2) what communication has been received from the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service proposals that green form legal aid be withdrawn and UKIAS provide advice and assistance on political asylum, immigration and nationality matters; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what increase in the Home Office grant-in-aid to the United Kingdom Immigrant Advisory Service would be required if it has to become the sole provider of advice and assistance on political asylum, immigration and nationality matters and if green form legal aid was wholly or partially withdrawn; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what departmental grant-in-aid has been given to the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service in each of the past five years; and what grant-in-aid has been agreed for the coming financial year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are frequent discussions between the Home Office and the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. In the past 12 months, these have included the discussions to which I referred in my

reply to the hon. Member's Question on 14 October 1991, at column *25*, about our proposals on green form legal aid, and discussions, which continue, of other matters relevant to the payment of grant-in-aid, including aspects of UKIAS management. The grant paid to UKIAS in the financial years ending 31 March 1988 to 31 March 1991 was £0·961 million, £1·007 million, £1·130 million and £1·351 million respectively. £1·422 million has been paid so far this financial year. Payments for the remainder of this year and for future years will be determined in the light of continuing discussions with UKIAS about the resources needed to enable the organisation to respond to an increased workload.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings or correspondence has been undertaken by him with the Commission for Racial Equality concerning the relations between the Asylum Bill and the Race Relations Act 1976; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality wrote to my right hon. Friend about the Asylum Bill on 3 December and he replied on 10 January. The Government are satisfied that there is no conflict between the Bill and the Race Relations Act 1976.

Sikh Groups (Expenditure)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints have been received by the Charity Commissioners, in each of the last three years, alleging the irregular expenditure of funds by organisations, including religious organisations, registered by the Sikh community living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: Separate records are not maintained about individual complaints which have been received by the Charity Commissioners in respect of any charity, and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations have been carried out on behalf of the Charity Commissioners, in each of the past three years, into complaints of the irregular expenditure of funds by organisations, including religious organisations, registered by the Sikh community living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: The commissioners have used their powers of inquiry in some 17 cases involving allegations of misuse or misappropriation of funds, during the last three years, by charities connected with the Sikh community living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* complaints have been received, in each of the last three years, and *(b)* what investigations have been undertaken by the Metropolitan police into the irregular expenditure of funds by organisations which promote the political, social and economic interests of the British Sikh community.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Indian Terrorism

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British and non-British nationals, in each of the last five years, have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged, *(c)* convicted and *(d)* acquitted over offences relating to the funding of terrorism in India; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: None.

Terrorist Funds

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of current United Kingdom legislation relating to powers to confiscate terrorist funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The financial provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 have given the police further means of obtaining information in the course of their investigations into terrorist crimes. The complexity of such investigations is such that none has yet reached the stage at which charges may be brought, at which point the powers of restraint and forfeiture may be used. Nevertheless, I understand that the police believe that the provisions have already proved valuable in providing documentary evidence of how funds are channelled, and in opening further lines of investigation.

Broadcasting Council for Wales

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations he took into account in his recommendations for the appointment of a new chairperson of the Broadcasting Council of Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The chairmanship of the Broadcasting Council for Wales is one of the duties of the BBC national governor for Wales. In considering recommendations for new appointments to the board, people are sought from a variety of backgrounds whose personal qualities and experience will enable them to contribute to the successful operation of the BBC, and to represent the wider public interest including that of the relevant parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy in the Library of the correspondence between the 11 members of the Broadcasting Council of Wales and himself on Friday 13 December concerning the appointment of Dr. Gwyn Jones to be the next chairman of the BBC Broadcasting Council for Wales.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I do not normally place copies of my correspondence in the Library and I see no reason to do so on this occasion.

Police Manning

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 10 December, *Official Report*, column *394*, 11 December, *Official Report*, column *435*, 12 December, *Official Report*, column *508* and 13 December, *Official Report*, column *584*, when he intends to write to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth on the calculations on which he based police manning levels.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I hope to reply this week.

Homicides, London

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of homicides recorded by the police in the Metropolitan police district in each of the last 10 years; and how many of these were subsequently recorded as murder.

Mr. John Patten: The number of offences initially recorded as homicide by the Metropolitan police, and the number of these subsequently found to be murder is shown in the following table for each year from 1982 to 1990:

Homicide offences in the Metropolitan police district

Year	*Initially recorded homicide offences*	
	Total number	*Subsequently recorded as murder*
1982	196	47
1983	148	39
1984	164	36
1985	191	40
1986	207	50
1987	194	43
1988	160	33
1989	165	46
1990	182	37

The equivalent figures for the year 1991 are not available.

Bomb Warnings

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy for the British Transport police to be made aware of the code words used by the IRA in verifying the authenticity of bomb warning calls in London.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Effective co-operation and liaison exist between the Metropolitan police special branch and the British Transport police on this and other policy issues.

Magistrates Courts, Rochdale

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his proposals for the future organisation of the magistrates courts in the Rochdale metropolitan borough.

Mr. John Patten: Decisions about the provision and usage of courthouses in Rochdale are a matter for the Rochdale magistrates courts committee in consultation with the paying authority. The Government's proposals for the future organisation of the magistrates' courts service in England and Wales as a whole were summarised in the reply given by my right hon. Friend on 18 December to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter).

Police Civilianisation, Hertfordshire

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of policemen in Hertfordshire who would become available for operational duties if the police authority adopted the best practice on civilianisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Of the 819 "key posts" in the Hertfordshire constabulary, 551—or 67·3 per cent.,—have been civilianised. A number of forces have achieved rates at 80 per cent. or more. Although there is not necessarily an exact correlation between the number of posts civilianised and the number of officers thereby released for operational duties, it is reasonable to assume that if Hertfordshire were to civilianise 80 per cent. of "key posts", some 100 further officers could be released for operational duties.

Seaham and Peterlee (Policing)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable on police manning levels in Seaham and Peterlee in the years 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The deployment of police manpower within a force area is a matter for the chief constable. I understand from the chief constable of Durham that the information requested is as follows:

On 31 December	*Establishment strength Seaham*		*Establishment strength Peterlee*	
1989	55	54	114	114
1990	54	52	117	115
[1]1991	53	49	126	126

[1] as at November.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many car thefts there have been in the Seaham and Peterlee area in each year since 1988-89.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Violence Against Police, London

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of offences of violence against the police in the Metropolitan police district in each of the last 10 years where the offence involved serious injury; and what is the clear-up rate.

Mr. John Patten: The available information relates to the number of officers assaulted while on duty and is published annually in the report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. A six-month survey of sentencing for assaults on police officers was conducted from July to December 1991. From this survey it will be possible to tell how many offenders were convicted of injuring a police officer in the Metroplitan police district during that period. The results of the survey will be published as soon as possible.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of the West Midlands as to the progress of the inquiry set up in March 1991 into the identity of the persons responsible for the Birmingham pub bombings; how many officers have been involved in the inquiry; what they have been doing; and whether they have reached a conclusion.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am not able to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member on 18 November 1991 at column *17*.

Crime Levels

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the findings of the most recent British crime survey in establishing the fact about crime increases and the comparison with offences recorded by the police.

Mr. John Patten: The most recent British crime survey was carried out in 1988, covering crime in 1987. Some types of crime are excluded from the survey, such as those where the victim is an organisation or institution, rather than an individual. For those types of crime where comparisons can be made between the survey findings and offences recorded by the police, the increase between 1981 and 1987 was as follows:

	[1]*Per cent.*
As indicated by the British crime survey	30
As indicated by offences recorded by the police	41

[1] Increase in crime between 1981 and 1987.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to indemnifying local authorities which seek to enforce the law on Sunday trading in respect of the perceived risk of damages should they lose the case in the end.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is for local authorities themselves to determine what of their resources to allocate to enforcing the Sunday trading provisions of the Shops Act 1950 as it is in relation to the whole range of their many other responsibilities under the law. We make a substantial contribution to local authority costs generally through the revenue support grant system, and do not propose to increase this contribution specifically for this enforcement.

Breath Tests

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the legislation under which police with adequate identification can request a breath test.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The police powers to require breath tests are contained in the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Under section 163 a police constable in uniform has the power to stop any vehicle; and under section 6 to require a breath test:

(a) where there is reasonable cause to suspect that the driver has alcohol in his body; or
(b) where there is reasonable cause to suspect that the driver has committed a moving traffic offence; or
(c) where there is reasonable cause to believe that the driver has been involved in an accident.

Tobacco

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from what date the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 will be enforced.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Act, apart from section 4, will be brought into force as soon as the guidance circular clarifying the duties of local authorities in enforcing the new law has been finalised following consultations with the interested parties. Section 4, which deals with the display of warning statements in retail premises and on vending machines, will be brought into effect later in the year after separate consultations have been completed.

Grants

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to meet all the proposals put forward by local education authorities for grants under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966.

Mrs. Rumbold: Not all proposals met the new criteria for grants. Those proposals which were eligible for grant exceeded in total the resources available. It will be for the local education authorities concerned to decide which of their eligible proposals should be funded within the total grant allocated to each of them for education purposes.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay in reporting back to local education authorities on the size of grants for 1992 onwards under the new rules for grants under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966.

Mrs. Rumbold: Some 2,100 applications for project funding were received which was in excess of expectations. All applications had to be carefully scrutinised to see if they met the new criteria for funding. Decisions were notified to all applicants on 18 December.

Custodial Sentences

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on plans to keep younger prisoners serving custodial sentences in secure work camps.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have no such plans.

India (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his visit to India.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I made an official visit to India between 2 and 6 January, and to Pakistan on 7 and 8 January.

In India, I visited Delhi, where I had constructive discussions with the Indian Prime Minister, the Indian Home Affairs Minister, and the Indian External Affairs Minister. We discussed in particular the importance of co-operation between the Governments of the United Kingdom and India in combating terrorism. I stressed our commitment to the fight against terrorism, and to co-operation with India in this. I also took the opportunity to express our concern about human rights. I also discussed the desirability of concluding a bilateral agreement to enable co-operation in the tracing, freezing and confiscation of terrorist funds and the proceeds of serious crime, including drug trafficking. In addition, I discussed the suggestion by the Indian Government that the existing extradition arrangements should be replaced by an extradition treaty. I agreed that our experts should again consider this, while having proper regard to the practical and legal requirements.

In Delhi, I gave a speech at the Indian international centre, a copy of which I am placing in the Library. I also visited and formally opened the new high commission immigration building, and held useful discussions with staff working in the immigration section.

In Bombay I met the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, where I discussed immigration and drugs matters. I visited the police headquarters and the immigration section of the high commission, where I had useful discussions with staff and police officers.

In Islamabad, I had meetings with the President, the Interior Minister, and the Minister for Narcotics Control. The main focus of these discussions was the importance of international efforts to combat drug trafficking. I stressed that it was in the interests of both Governments to develop effective programmes to reduce the production of heroin, to break the supply chain and to reduce demand for drugs. I also had useful discussions with staff at the high commission concerned with the control of immigration and narcotics.

PRIME MINISTER

RECHAR

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will institute an official inquiry into the source of the leaked letter from the Secretary of State for the Environment to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales referring to the RECHAR scheme.

The Prime Minister: Where it appears that classified documents may have been leaked, it is for the Secretary of State for the relevant Department concerned, in the first instance, to decide, in consultation with his officials, what inquiries need to be made.

Security Service

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the appointment of the new director of the Security Service.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 16 December 1991 that Mrs. Stella Rimington had been appointed as the new director general of the Security Service, in accordance with the provisions of the Security Service Act 1989.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what changes he intends to make in his policy for providing answers to questions from hon. Members on the Security Service;

(2) if he will make it his practice to give information in reply to parliamentary questions concerning the Security Service;

(3) if he will list changes made since 1987 in practice on providing answers to questions by hon. Members on the security services.

The Prime Minister: The functions of the Security Service and other statutory provisions were debated in Parliament during the passage of the Security Service Act 1989. The Government intend to continue the practice adopted by successive Governments of not disclosing information relating to the operation of the Security Service.

Roman Catholic Church (Recognition)

Sir Hugh Rossi: To ask the Prime Minister whether, following the repeal in part XVI of schedule 1 to the Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1978 of section 24 of the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829, he will now make it the policy of Her Majesty's Government to accord the same degree of official recognition to the territorial sees and titles of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales as is accorded to the unestablished Anglican churches outside England.

The Prime Minister: This suggestion is currently being considered, and I will write to my hon. Friend about it as soon as possible.

Government of London

Mr. Gould: To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to reply to the letter dated 22 October from the hon. Member for Dagenham concerning the government of London.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has replied on my behalf.

Government Achievements

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if, pursuant to his reply, on Her Majesty's Government's achievements, to the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on 16 December, *Official Report*, column *22*, he will set out *(a)* the cost of making this reply and *(b)* the failures of Her Majesty's Government over the same period.

The Prime Minister: My reply of 16 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge demonstrated a consistent record of success and achievement throughout 1991. The cost of that reply, based on the cost of staff and overheads in various departments involved in its compilation, and the printing costs, is estimated at £1,520.

European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister what action he has agreed to or authorised in respect of the annex 1 entitled "Reference in the treaty to European Parties", in the draft treaty on European Union; and when, and under what circumstance, the places and formulation of such reference will be determined.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* It is for the presidency to propose a precise formulation and place in the treaty for such a reference before signature.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will state which body or bodies will define which associations or foundations are deemed charitable, in respect of the declaration on co-operation with charitable associations in pursuing the objectives of either version of article 117 in the draft treaty on European union.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 December 1991]:* Declarations by the inter-governmental conference have political rather than legal force, and the existing arrangements for defining charitable status are not affected. In the case of the United Kingdom, the competent body remains the Charity Commission.

Western Shoshone People

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will obtain for his office's library the 1989 report by the United States Congress Office of Technology Assessment to which reference is made in the letter by Ambassador Renwick to Chief Rowell of the Western Shoshone people.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* I have already done so.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the technical basis for the requirement for the United Kingdom to carry out tests from time to time to ensure the safety of the nuclear deterrent deployment by the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* It has not been the practice of this or previous Governments to give technical details of our nuclear test programme. Testing remains essential to ensure the effectiveness, safety and credibility of our independent nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken to co-ordinate the United Kingdom nuclear weapons deployment and development programme with Her Majesty's Government's commitments under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* For as long as our security depends upon the possession of nuclear weapons, the Government are committed to maintaining a minimum nuclear deterrent. This is entirely consistent with our commitments under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister which Departments, for what purposes, and at what cost, have used the services of Coopers and Lybrand since 1989.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* This information is not held centrally.

Lockerbie

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from Libya about the Lockerbie bombing; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* The Libyans have issued various statements and indirect messages about the Lockerbie bombing. None of these provided a satisfactory response to the requests we made with our United States and French partners on 27 November.

Lt. Col. Partap Singh

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to answer the letter, dated 12 August 1991, from Lt. Col. Partap Singh (retired), president of the Khalsa Raj party; and if he will place a copy of his reply in the Library.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* My office has no record of receiving Lt. Col. Singh's letter.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Population Control

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the amounts of Overseas Development Administration grants to Population Services Family Planning Programme Ltd., Marie Stopes, for each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Chalker: The list of ODA grants to Marie Stopes International is as follows:

Years	*Size of grant*
1981-82	89,916
1982-83	71,424
1983-84	95,397
1984-85	0
1985-86	11,265
1986-87	162,460
1987-88	99,739
1988-89	194,699
1989-90	520,520
1990-91	605,265

These grants do not represent general donations, but are provided in support of specifically agreed projects in developing countries.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the types of oral and injectable contraceptives provided under the United Nations fund for population activities as part of its health and family planning programme for Ghana.

Mrs. Chalker: The UNFPA's programme of contraceptive supply to Ghana provides Microgynon and Micronovum—orals—and Depo-Provera—injectable.

Road-Building Projects (Central African Republic)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Minister for Overseas Development has had from Dr. Alan Tye of the West African Ornithological Society in relation to the Dzanga-Sangha rainforest reserve and the Dzanga-Ndoki national park in the Central African Republic; and what is his policy on Government aid for road-building projects in such areas.

Mrs. Chalker: Dr. Tye has written to me about a rural development project in the Dzanga-Sangha rain forest reserve which was tentatively scheduled for presentation to the August 1991 session of the executive board of the African development bank.

I replied that the project had been withdrawn at the request of executive directors representing several non-regional members of the bank, including United Kingdom, until a comprehensive assessment of its environmental impact has been undertaken.

We would expect environmental and social impact assessments to be undertaken for road projects located in environmentally sensitive areas.

Latvia

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the items of assistance provided by Her Majesty's Government to Latvia since 1 January 1991.

Mrs. Chalker: The following projects have been initiated in the Baltic states, including Latvia, with funding from the know-how fund:

Know how fund
Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia

Small business creation

1. Mitaline Technology (Estonia).
2. Preparation of a training programme for use by Estonian Small Business Association.
3. Estonian Small Business Association.
4. Approved.
5. £4,000.

Financial Services

1. Transcend Technology (Lithuania).
2. To provide assistance to the Association of Light Industry Enterprises of Lithuania to prepare individual state enterprises for privatisation.
3. Association of Light Industries.
4. Approved.
5. £9,800.

Political and Cultural

1. Restructuring MFAs.
2. Senior retired United Kingdom diplomats on short attachments to Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. To advise on restructuring in a democratic society.
3. Ministries of Foreign Affairs.
4. Approved.
5. £15,000.

1. Police Training Missions
2. Senior officers from Strathclyde police on short missions to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to advise on police training needs, restructuring etc.
3. —
4. Approved.
5. £20,000.

1. Low Cost Book Scheme.
2. Subsidies for text books for retailers and individuals in three baltic states.
3. —
4. Approved.
5. £66,000.

1. Short Term Scholarships.
2. One year scholarships for postgraduates and young professionals in the three Baltics. Target areas economics, finance and management.
3. —
4. Approved.
5. £120,000.

1. Bradford Baltic Unit.
2. Attachment of students from the three Baltic states to the Baltic Unit of Bradford University.
3. —.
4. Approved.
5. £70,900.

1. Books for Parliaments.
2. Provision of text books in key areas to libraries of Baltic Parliaments.
3. —.
4. Approved.
5. £15,000.

1. Seminar for Parliamentary Librarians.
2. Training seminar for Parliamentary librarians from the three Baltic States.
3. —.
4. Approved.
5. £8,000.

1. Legal Attachments.
2. Attachments of young lawyers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the Law Society of Scotland and Scottish legal practices.
3. —.
4. Approved.
5. £40,000.

1. Legal Concepts for Translators.
2. Training in legal concepts in English for translators attached to the Office of the Lithuanian Supreme Council.
3. —.
4. Approved.
5. £4,000.

1. TV Training Project.
2. Assisting trainees from the three Baltic states in British TV production procedures.
3. —.
4. Approved.
5. £26,000.

1. Visit of Lithuania Deputy Chief of Protocol.
2. Familiarisation visit.
3.—.
4. Completed.
5. £2,000.

1. Publisher Training.
2. Seminar on publishing and book trade in Lithuania.
3. Open Society Foundation of Lithuania.
4. Approved.
5. £30,000.

Note:
1. = Title of project.
2. = Purpose of project.
3. = Local organisation involved.
4. = Status of project.
5. = Cost of project.

ENERGY

Petroleum Engineering Directorate

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) when work on the independent inquiry into the cost effectiveness of relocating petroleum engineering directorate staff in Aberdeen will begin; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the Treasury has produced a brief for the Government-ordered independent inquiry into the cost effectiveness of relocating civil servants from the petroleum engineering directorate in Aberdeen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has drawn up a shortlist of firms from those which responded to my announcement and press advertisement. Six firms have been sent terms of reference agreed between the Treasury, Scottish Office and my Department, and they have been invited to tender for the review of the case for relocating the petroleum engineering directorate in Aberdeen. I shall announce who is to carry out the review when the consultant has been chosen.

Cold Weather Credits

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to meet representatives of the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no such plans.

Deep-mined Coal

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current level of deep-mined coal production in Britain; and how many people are employed in deep-mined coal production.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In the most recent completed financial year, 1990-91, the British Coal Corporation produced 72·3 million tonnes of coal from deep mines. At the end of that financial year, in March 1991, the corporation had 61,351 industrial employees at its deep mines.

Privately owned mines, with licences to work coal underground, produced 1 million tonnes and employed 1,628 people.

British Coal

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will dismiss the chairman and board members of the British Coal Corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No.

Heating

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of household income is spent on heating by households in each income group.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is not possible to distinguish expenditure on fuel for heating from expenditure on fuel for other household uses. Data on total spending on fuel, light and power by households in 1990 as a proportion of total expenditure, analysed by income group, are:

Gross normal weekly income of household £	[1] *Expenditure* *Per cent.*
Under 60	11·8
60 and under 80	10·8
80 and under 100	9·6
100 and under 125	7·3
125 and under 150	6·5
150 and under 175	6·4
175 and under 225	5·5
225 and under 275	5·2
275 and under 325	4·2
325 and under 375	4·1
375 and under 425	4·0
425 and under 475	3·8
475 and under 550	3·4
550 and under 650	3·3
650 and under 800	3·1
800 or more	2·9
All households	4·5

[1] Expenditure on fuel, light and power as a proportion of total expenditure.

Source: Family Spending, published by HMSO.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to increase funding of the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have nothing further to add to my reply to the hon. Member on 6 December 1991, at column *258*.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to extend the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no plans to extend the energy efficiency measures offered under the home energy efficiency scheme at present.

Electricity Generation

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the cost to the domestic electricity consumer of the requirement for electricity generating companies to purchase their fuel from British Coal; and what is the difference between British Coal prices and the current world price for coal.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There is no requirement for electricity generating companies to purchase their fuel from British Coal. National Power and PowerGen currently have contracts with British Coal, in place until March 1993.

The average British Coal price in 1990-91 was £41·78 per tonne, compared to an average price of power station coal imported into the European Community of approximately £25 per tonne, for the same year.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his policy on the future level of opencast mining in the Northumberland area.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The future level of opencast coal mining in Northumberland will depend on commercial decisions by operators and on the acceptability of new sites to the planning authorities.

EC Energy Policy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is *(a)* the direct and *(b)* the indirect effect of the agreement reached at the recent Joint European Energy and Environment meeting on European Communities energy policy on the United Kingdom (i) nuclear programme and (ii) renewable energy programme.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment explained on 17 December 1991, at columns *104* and *105*, that the agreement reached at the recent joint session of the Energy and Environment Councils was to invite the European Commission to put forward formal proposals for measures to limit carbon dioxide emissions in the Community, including any necessary proposals for Community-wide taxation taking account of further studies and the conclusions of separate discussions by Finance Ministers. No such formal proposals have yet been made by the Commission. It is therefore premature to comment on the effect which any such proposals might have on the United Kingdom's nuclear and renewable energy programmes.

Dounreay Investigation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport West on 16 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *17*, he will set out the nature of the discrepancy under investigation at Dounreay nuclear power development establishment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A report on the discrepancy has not been received to date.

Trawsfynydd

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) when his Department became aware of the decision to downrate by 22 per cent. the Magnox reactor at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, to enable operation to restart; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when his Department became aware of the new pressure temperature management regime at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station; and if he will make a statement on safety.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The reactors at Trawsfynydd were shut down in February 1991 as a precautionary measure, to enable Nuclear Electric to review the situation with regard to the integrity of pressure vessel welds. Both reactors have remained shut down since then.

Discussions are continuing between Nuclear Electric and the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate on Nuclear Electric's safety case for a return to power of the reactors. Changes to the operating regimes of the reactors, which may or may not result in downrating, will form part of those discussions. The details of changes finally agreed prior to any return to operation will be a matter for Nuclear Electric and the NII.

There will be no question of a return to power of the Trawsfynydd reactors unless and until the NII is satisfied that an acceptable safety case has been made.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made in strengthening the powers of inspection exercised by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A number of proposals for strengthening IAEA safeguards have been made by the EC and others. However, no firm decisions have yet been taken on these issues, which will need full reflection by the IAEA board and its member states. The next meeting of the board of governors, in February, will devote much of its time to safeguards issues.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sexual Offences

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what amount of compensation was paid during the most recent year for which figures are available to *(a)* women and *(b)* children as a result of sexual offences.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is provided in the table.

Criminal injuries compensation paid as a result of sexual offences

	(i) 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991 £	*(ii) 1 April 1991 to 17 November 1991* £
Women	583,510	234,089
Minors	327,943	352,122

Gas Pipelines

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which routes for a gas pipeline from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are presently under consideration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The route of any gas pipeline from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will largely be a matter for decision by the private sector interests laying that pipeline.

Water Pollution

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the water courses which contain leachate from dumps containing tarry wastes in the Londonderry area; and whether plant and animal life in such water courses appear to have been affected by such leachate by reference to the plant and animal life present upstream and downstream of the dumps.

Mr. Needham: No significant traces of leachate associated with tarry wastes have been found in water courses within catchments in the Londonderry area; nor is there any evidence of adverse effect on plant and animal life. However, studies of flora and fauna in these water courses are under way and additional monitoring is planned in 1992.

Immigration

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons are estimated in each of the past 10 years to have *(a)* migrated from Great Britain into Northern Ireland and *(b)* emigrated from other countries into Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

Year	*Migrated from Great Britain (a)*	*Emigrated from elsewhere (b)*
1980-81	5,100	2,100
1981-82	4,400	1,600
1982-83	4,800	1,700
1983-84	5,200	2,800
1984-85	6,900	3,100
1985-86	8,000	3,900
1986-87	9,500	3,800
1987-88	9,500	4,200
1988-89	10,200	4,200
1989-90	10,800	4,300

Figures are derived from the mid-year estimates of population which cover the period 1 July in each year to 30 June in the following year.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated capital savings as a result of the present moratorium on new public expenditure on capital projects in Northern Ireland; how much of this saving is required as a result of expenditure on terrorist-related incidents; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is anticipated that the temporary deferment of new capital contracts should provide sufficient resources to offset the imbalance between new demands and easements within the Northern Ireland block amounting to some £30 million. This figure represents the net effect of substantial numbers of adjustments to budgets, both increases and decreases, arising since the start of the financial year, of which security-related costs are only one element. Final decisions on the adjustments required will be taken in the context of the spring supplementary estimates which will be laid before the House in February and the details will be made available then.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate the respects in which the provisions in Northern Ireland for the disposal of fallen and diseased animals diverge from those applying in the European Community for *(a)* animal health and food hygiene and *(b)* the environment, with particular reference to the possible pollution of water resources through on-farm burial; and how it is monitored.

Mr. Hanley: Arrangements in Northern Ireland comply with European Community provisions for disposal of fallen and diseased animals. Meat inspection systems operated by the Department of Agriculture and by environmental health officers aim to eliminate any risk to food hygiene. The Department of the Environment (NI) monitors fresh and marine waters for compliance with EC directives relating to water pollution.

Infant Death

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *50*, what pilot studies his Department is doing to test the feasibility of the proposals for the confidential inquiries into stillbirths and deaths in infancy set out in the report published on 2 July 1991; and whether the results of the pilot studies will be ready in time to be taken into account in finalising plans for the inquiries themselves.

Mr. Hanley: A national advisory body, on which Northern Ireland will be represented, is to be established to guide and oversee the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy. There are no plans for pilot studies to be undertaken in Northern Ireland.

Public Spending Moratorium

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the capital projects planned for this financial year which are now postponed by the recently announced moratorium on public spending, indicating for each project the Department or public body concerned and the value of the contract.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not held centrally.

Housing Estate Heating Systems

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list contract commencement and completion dates and the contract price for installing new heating systems in *(a)* New Mossley housing estate, Newtownabbey and (b). Springfarm housing estate, Antrim.

Mr. Needham: The chief executive of the Housing Executive has advised me that the contract details for installing new heating systems in New Mossley and Springfarm are as follows:

	Start Date	*Completion Date*	*Price* £
Springfarm	March 1991	March 1992	834,316
New Mossley	March 1991	March 1992	1,298,627

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list contract commencement and completion dates and the contract price for replacing defective district heating mains pipework at the New Mossley housing estate in Newtownabbey.

Mr. Needham: The chief executive of the Housing Executive has advised me that the contract details for the replacement of defective district heating mains pipework at New Mossley were as follows:

Start Date	*Completion Date*	*Price* £
July 1985	November 1989	880,627

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the contract commencement and completion dates and the contract price for fitting new card operated district heating meters at *(a)* New Mossley housing estate, Newtownabbey and *(b)* Springfarm housing estate, Antrim.

Mr. Needham: The chief executive of the Housing Executive has advised me that the contract details for fitting new card operated district heating meters in New Mossley and Springfarm estates are as follows:

	Start date	*Completion date*	*Price* £
Springfarm	September 1988	February 1989	428,715
New Mossley	September 1988	February 1989	588,728

Northern Ireland International Airport

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if a pension fund actuarial valuation has been attributed to the employees of Northern Ireland international airport in preparation for privatisation; and if he will give the name of the actuary.

Mr. Needham: No pension fund actuarial valuation has yet been carried out.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assurance he will give to employees of Northern Ireland international airport that their pension rights and expectations will be fully protected after privatisation.

Mr. Needham: Privatisation of Northern Ireland Airports Limited will not affect the pension rights and expectations of existing employees. If a new pension scheme were to be established in place of the existing scheme, it would be on terms that the benefits to be made available would be the same in all substantial respects as those presently enjoyed under current arrangements and any new scheme would receive the assets of the existing scheme.

Buses (Pollution)

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to reduce exhaust pollution from public service vehicles by Ulsterbus and Citybus.

Mr. Needham: I am advised by the managing director of Ulsterbus and Citybus that, to reduce exhaust pollution, the companies' buses are powered by diesel, rather than petrol, engines; new buses are fitted with emission efficient engines, automatic gear boxes and speed limiters; and maintenance schedules include specific measures to reduce exhaust emissions.

Waste Incineration

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the tarry wastes arising from the production of acetylene gas at Maydown, Co. Londonderry, can be disposed of by incineration; and what research he has commissioned into the substances and chemicals which result when they are subjected to high temperatures.

Mr. Needham: I have not commissioned any research into the effects of incinerating these wastes but relevant work has been carried out elsewhere in the United Kingdom and internationally. Essentially, they are not incinerable without considerable pre-treatment. Official

guidance on the topic was published in 1977, in a code of practice entitled "Tarry and distillation wastes and other chemical based residues"—waste management paper No. 13. A copy is in the Library.

A study will commence shortly into the scale and nature of the Tarry waste deposits in the north-west in order to determine the best practicable environmental option for their disposal and, if appropriate, the subsequent decontamination of the land on which they are situated. Should incineration be recommended further research may have to be commissioned to ensure that the full environmental significance of the process is understood.

Teenage Mothers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of illegitimate births born to teenage girls in each year since 1980 in each registry area, giving the age in years of the teenage mothers.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Year 1980

Age of mother	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*
Ards	0	0	0	3	7	5	6
Belfast	1	1	8	23	37	59	56
Castlereagh	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
Down	0	0	1	3	3	7	6
Lisburn	0	0	0	4	4	5	6
North Down	0	0	1	1	2	1	2
Antrim	0	0	1	1	4	7	8
Ballymena	0	0	0	4	3	6	3
Ballymoney	0	1	0	1	4	3	2
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	4	1	3
Coleraine	1	0	1	1	6	8	5
Cookstown	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Larne	0	0	0	1	6	5	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Newtownabbey	0	0	1	2	7	11	9
Armagh	0	0	1	1	2	3	2
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Craigavon	0	0	2	1	4	7	13
Dungannon	0	0	1	0	1	3	6
Newry and Mourne	0	0	2	3	2	7	10
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	4	4	3
Limavady	0	0	2	0	2	0	2
Derry	0	2	1	4	17	23	15
Omagh	0	1	2	2	2	4	3
Strabane	1	0	0	3	3	4	5
Northern Ireland	3	5	25	60	128	174	176

Year 1981

Age of mother	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*
Ards	0	0	0	0	3	2	6
Belfast	0	1	4	22	51	56	48
Castlereagh	0	0	0	1	2	2	4
Down	0	0	0	2	3	5	7
Lisburn	0	1	1	4	4	6	7
North Down	0	0	0	1	3	8	4
Antrim	0	0	0	1	4	5	11
Ballymena	0	0	2	2	8	7	5
Ballymoney	0	0	0	2	4	2	3
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	1	2	8	4
Coleraine	0	0	0	7	10	12	6
Cookstown	0	1	0	3	3	1	1
Larne	0	0	0	3	3	1	8
Magherafelt	0	0	0	1	4	3	3
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Newtownabbey	0	0	2	10	5	8	8
Armagh	0	0	1	2	1	5	1
Banbridge	0	0	0	3	0	3	0
Craigavon	0	0	0	2	9	15	12
Dungannon	0	1	0	3	3	2	5
Newry and Mourne	0	0	2	4	7	7	7
Fermanagh	0	0	1	1	3	4	5
Limavady	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Derry	0	0	0	6	18	17	23
Omagh	0	0	0	0	2	3	4
Strabane	0	0	0	1	1	4	3
Northern Ireland	0	4	13	83	154	189	189

Year 1982

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	0	2	1	5	2
Belfast	0	0	6	20	41	77	54
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	2	3	0
Down	0	0	0	4	6	3	8
Lisburn	0	0	4	2	6	12	8
North Down	0	0	0	1	4	1	1
Antrim	0	0	1	2	2	4	10
Ballymena	0	0	2	5	6	4	13
Ballymoney	0	0	1	1	4	0	2
Carrickfergus	0	0	1	1	2	5	6
Coleraine	0	0	1	1	7	9	9
Cookstown	0	0	0	1	2	4	4
Larne	0	0	0	1	4	3	4
Magherafelt	0	0	1	3	1	3	3
Moyle	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Newtownabbey	0	1	1	2	10	10	11
Armagh	0	0	1	1	3	6	4
Banbridge	0	0	1	0	2	1	3
Craigavon	0	0	0	7	3	16	12
Dungannon	0	0	1	2	3	3	4
Newry and Mourne	0	0	0	1	4	8	10
Fermanagh	0	0	0	4	8	1	6
Limavady	0	1	0	1	2	2	2
Derry	0	0	1	6	16	16	21
Omagh	0	0	0	1	2	5	1
Strabane	0	0	0	4	5	13	8
Northern Ireland	0	2	22	74	147	214	206

Year 1983

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	1	1	4	5	8
Belfast	0	0	5	20	42	83	87
Castlereagh	0	1	0	1	6	6	6
Down	0	1	0	1	7	9	6
Lisburn	0	0	0	4	9	8	9
North Down	0	0	1	2	1	2	6
Antrim	0	0	1	1	2	12	11
Ballymena	0	0	0	3	9	10	10
Ballymoney	0	0	0	2	3	3	6
Carrickfergus	0	0	2	0	4	1	5
Coleraine	0	0	1	4	5	5	9
Cookstown	0	0	0	2	2	5	3
Larne	0	0	0	3	9	8	6
Magherafelt	0	0	1	2	3	7	5
Moyle	0	0	0	0	2	2	0
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	7	7	10	10
Armagh	0	0	1	0	2	1	4
Banbridge	0	0	0	4	3	3	3
Craigavon	0	0	1	3	6	9	9
Dungannon	0	2	0	5	0	4	3
Newry and Mourne	0	0	1	2	8	4	6
Fermanagh	0	1	1	1	7	10	5
Limavady	0	0	0	1	4	1	4
Derry	0	0	5	5	19	29	23
Omagh	2	0	1	1	3	12	4
Strabane	0	0	1	3	10	9	7
Northern Ireland	2	5	23	78	177	258	256

Year 1984

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	0	4	5	5	12
Belfast	0	3	7	18	68	99	114
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	5	5	5
Down	0	0	1	3	4	9	11
Lisburn	0	1	2	8	13	20	9
North Down	0	0	0	4	7	3	4
Antrim	0	0	3	2	8	11	7
Ballymena	0	0	2	3	8	3	9
Ballymoney	0	0	1	1	6	4	3
Carrickfergus	0	1	0	1	4	3	3
Coleraine	1	1	2	6	9	11	10
Cookstown	0	1	0	0	4	1	0

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Larne	0	1	2	3	8	7	6
Magherafelt	0	0	0	1	2	3	1
Moyle	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	4	11	15	17
Armagh	0	1	0	2	1	4	1
Banbridge	1	0	1	1	2	0	2
Craigavon	0	0	0	5	8	10	13
Dungannon	0	2	0	3	2	2	6
Newry and Mourne	0	0	0	2	11	8	17
Fermanagh	0	0	2	2	3	5	6
Limavady	0	0	1	3	6	2	9
Derry	0	0	1	11	10	38	28
Omagh	0	0	1	2	7	7	6
Strabane	0	1	3	3	8	11	10
Northern Ireland	2	12	29	92	222	288	311

Year 1985

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	0	2	8	6	3
Belfast	0	1	5	26	67	119	133
Castlereagh	0	0	1	3	5	2	9
Down	0	0	3	4	8	5	13
Lisburn	0	0	2	5	12	22	11
North Down	0	0	3	5	1	11	12
Antrim	0	0	1	5	4	13	12
Ballymena	0	0	2	6	6	6	10
Ballymoney	0	0	0	1	3	7	5
Carrickfergus	0	0	1	1	1	8	5
Coleraine	0	0	2	3	11	10	16
Cookstown	0	0	0	2	2	4	4
Larne	0	0	0	2	1	3	6
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	8	5	3
Moyle	0	0	1	3	1	4	5
Newtownabbey	0	0	1	4	9	16	15
Armagh	0	1	1	3	4	6	4
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	1	3	5
Craigavon	0	0	1	3	11	14	11
Dungannon	0	2	1	3	7	5	5
Newry and Mourne	0	0	0	4	10	7	10
Fermanagh	0	0	3	0	7	3	10
Limavady	0	0	0	2	4	4	4
Derry	0	1	1	4	25	29	41
Omagh	0	0	1	4	5	5	9
Strabane	0	0	0	2	11	13	9
Northern Ireland	0	5	30	97	232	330	370

Year 1980

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	0	0	14	15	11
Belfast	1	0	7	22	78	114	109
Castlereagh	0	0	0	7	5	8	11
Down	0	1	0	4	12	16	12
Lisburn	0	0	3	11	16	17	23
North Down	0	0	1	2	12	12	3
Antrim	0	0	0	6	10	9	12
Ballymena	0	0	2	2	5	15	12
Ballymoney	0	0	1	0	4	6	3
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	6	4	4	9
Coleraine	0	0	0	5	7	12	16
Cookstown	0	0	0	1	1	2	0
Larne	0	0	2	4	5	7	5
Magherafelt	0	0	0	3	4	4	3
Moyle	0	0	1	1	0	3	4
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	6	17	16	13
Armagh	0	1	0	0	2	4	9
Banbridge	0	0	1	0	5	5	7
Craigavon	0	0	0	6	16	17	19
Dungannon	0	0	0	1	12	10	6
Newry and Mourne	0	0	0	3	12	9	18
Fermanagh	0	0	1	4	7	9	10
Limavady	0	0	1	1	5	7	10
Derry	0	1	2	16	24	43	42
Omagh	0	0	0	4	7	5	8

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Strabane	0	0	2	5	5	9	12
Northern Ireland	1	3	24	120	289	378	387

Year 1987

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	0	2	10	12	8
Belfast	1	1	5	33	84	129	128
Castlereagh	1	1	1	0	4	7	6
Down	0	0	0	5	8	16	20
Lisburn	0	0	1	8	21	18	17
North Down	0	0	0	3	9	8	10
Antrim	0	0	3	3	10	12	5
Ballymena	0	0	1	7	15	13	14
Ballymoney	0	0	0	1	4	4	5
Carrickfergus	0	1	1	4	6	7	5
Coleraine	0	0	2	10	10	10	13
Cookstown	0	0	1	1	5	3	4
Larne	0	0	0	4	5	8	7
Magherafelt	0	1	0	2	1	4	3
Moyle	0	0	1	4	1	2	4
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	9	18	20
Armagh	0	0	1	2	4	6	4
Banbridge	0	0	0	2	4	1	3
Craigavon	0	1	2	7	19	15	28
Dungannon	0	0	2	4	8	5	10
Newry and Mourne	0	1	2	1	10	17	18
Fermanagh	0	0	1	1	5	6	8
Limavady	0	0	0	5	10	13	16
Derry	0	1	2	6	23	34	51
Omagh	0	0	1	2	4	11	7
Strabane	0	0	0	3	12	15	13
Northern Ireland	2	7	27	120	301	394	427

Year 1988

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	1	5	6	11	13
Belfast	0	0	6	36	95	143	146
Castlereagh	0	0	0	3	9	11	4
Down	0	0	3	4	7	8	14
Lisburn	0	0	3	12	20	29	26
North Down	0	0	1	4	1	13	17
Antrim	0	0	0	4	9	15	16
Ballymena	0	0	0	2	18	14	11
Ballymoney	0	0	0	2	5	7	8
Carrickfergus	0	0	1	5	4	8	8
Coleraine	0	0	2	7	6	10	12
Cookstown	0	1	0	3	1	8	5
Larne	0	0	2	2	10	10	7
Magherafelt	0	0	1	1	2	13	5
Moyle	0	0	1	0	2	3	3
Newtownabbey	0	0	1	3	13	15	15
Armagh	0	0	2	3	9	6	8
Banbridge	0	0	0	4	3	2	3
Craigavon	0	0	0	7	13	19	23
Dungannon	0	0	1	3	8	6	5
Newry and Mourne	0	0	0	2	12	22	21
Fermanagh	0	0	3	1	10	16	12
Limavady	0	0	1	1	9	9	8
Derry	0	1	4	7	20	40	44
Omagh	0	2	1	7	8	9	15
Strabane	0	0	1	5	3	15	10
Northern Ireland	0	4	35	133	303	462	459

Year 1989

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	0	7	7	16	12
Belfast	0	1	8	31	75	126	151
Castlereagh	0	0	0	2	4	9	7
Down	0	0	1	4	8	10	19
Lisburn	0	0	3	6	14	23	35

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
North Down	0	0	1	3	5	14	6
Antrim	0	0	1	5	4	15	17
Ballymena	0	0	0	7	5	18	15
Ballymoney	0	0	0	1	4	9	9
Carrickfergus	0	0	2	4	4	8	8
Coleraine	0	2	2	8	16	28	16
Cookstown	0	0	1	3	7	5	9
Larne	0	0	0	1	7	9	13
Magherafelt	0	0	0	3	5	5	1
Moyle	1	0	0	3	4	8	4
Newtownabbey	0	0	1	3	9	18	16
Armagh	0	0	0	2	6	4	12
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	3	5	6
Craigavon	0	0	4	6	15	23	29
Dungannon	0	0	1	4	8	9	8
Newry and Mourne	0	0	2	2	9	12	20
Fermanagh	0	0	1	3	13	12	11
Limavady	0	0	0	5	7	8	9
Derry	0	1	1	10	22	40	48
Omagh	0	0	1	2	5	7	5
Strabane	0	0	0	3	6	17	12
Northern Ireland	1	4	30	128	272	458	498

Year 1990[1]

Age of mother	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Ards	0	0	0	1	11	12	21
Belfast	1	1	13	23	86	128	125
Castlereagh	0	1	0	1	5	7	6
Down	0	0	3	10	14	17	14
Lisburn	0	0	4	5	10	29	38
North Down	0	0	0	1	4	5	11
Antrim	0	0	0	3	6	6	19
Ballymena	0	1	1	1	10	18	16
Ballymoney	0	0	1	4	3	6	7
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	2	3	9	11
Coleraine	0	0	0	5	15	18	23
Cookstown	0	0	0	4	12	9	8
Larne	0	0	0	2	7	4	14
Magherafelt	0	1	0	4	5	8	7
Moyle	0	0	1	1	3	1	6
Newtownabbey	1	0	4	5	16	18	16
Armagh	0	0	0	3	5	12	9
Banbridge	0	0	0	4	3	7	6
Craigavon	0	0	0	7	16	19	25
Dungannon	0	0	1	2	3	9	7
Newry and Mourne	0	0	1	1	13	25	23
Fermanagh	0	1	0	3	10	6	13
Limavady	0	0	0	3	7	10	17
Derry	0	0	1	12	22	40	59
Omagh	0	0	1	2	4	8	11
Strabane	0	0	0	2	4	13	11
Northern Ireland	2	5	31	111	297	444	523

[1] 1990 figures are provisional.
Source: Statistics held by General Register Office.

Local Government Pension Scheme

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the name of the present Northern Ireland local government officers' superannuation scheme pension fund adviser.

Mr. Needham: The Northern Ireland local government officers' superannuation scheme pension fund is managed by two fund managers, Mercury Asset Management and Gartmore pension fund managers. The fund also invests directly in property and forestry and is advised in these respects by Mr. J. W. Burgess FRICS and Tilhill Economic Forestry Limited respectively.

Libyan Arms

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the amount estimated by the Government and the Government of the Irish Republic to be the total provision of Libyan arms and explosives to the IRA; and what amount of the IRA's Libyan arms and explosives cache have, to date, been *(a)* expended and *(b)* captured.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* Substantial quantities of Libyan arms and explosives reached the Provisional IRA in the mid-1980s. Their recovery has been the objective of a sustained programme of intensive searching by the Garda in the Republic of Ireland and by the police and Army in Northern Ireland.

This has had some success, although such arms and weapons continue to be used by PIRA in its terrorist campaigns. For operational reasons it would not be appropriate to give details of the amount of arms and explosives expended and recovered.

TRANSPORT

Traffic (Nottingham)

15. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about traffic in the Greater Nottingham area.

Mr. Chope: I have received a number of representations about transport strategy in Nottingham, including one from my hon. Friend which I discussed with him at a meeting last November.

Road Congestion

16. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the annual cost to British business of road congestion.

Mr. Chope: There are no reliable estimates of the annual cost of road congestion to British business, but the costs are clearly substantial.

Drink Driving

17. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the overall reduction since 1967 in the number of deaths in road crashes when at least one driver or rider was above the legal alcohol limit; and if he will publish the figures for each year.

Mr. Chope: Figures for each year since 1979 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1979	1,790
1980	1,570
1981	1,540
1982	1,670
1983	1,200
1984	1,280
1985	1,130
1986	1,060
1987	980
1988	840
1989	870
1990	800

A13

18. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the division of responsibility between local and central Government on the development of the A13 and its approaches, with respect to the east end of London.

Mr. Chope: My Department has a major programme of works to the A13 trunk road to improve access to east London and docklands. The London Docklands development corporation has a complementary programme to provide new access roads within docklands. I have no plans to change the allocation of responsibility for the A13.

20. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what time scale he envisages work on the Mardyke-Wennington link of the A13 commencing.

Mr. Chope: I hope that the decision of the public inquiry will be announced in February, and subject to the completion of the statutory procedures, some advance work will commence in the autumn of this year.

M66

19. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the M66 from Denton to Middleton to be built and opened.

Mr. Chope: I expect work on the first construction contract at the northern end of the scheme to start towards the end of this year, subject to the successful outcome of the remaining statutory procedures. If all goes well, the new road could be open to traffic by 1997.

Exhaust Emissions

21. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to reduce harmful emissions from vehicle exhausts.

Mr. Chope: The Government are to introduce two new measures prescribing even stricter limits on emissions of gaseous pollutants and particulate matter from motor vehicles. The first will apply to all types of new petrol-engined cars and light vans from 31 December 1992. The second, which applies to new heavy diesels is a two-stage measure commencing on 1 October 1993, with a further reduction on 1 October 1996. These measures set ambitious targets with a challenging but industrially realistic timetable, putting the United Kingdom on a course for substantial longer-term progress in improving the quality of air in our towns and cities.

North Kent Rail Services

22. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on British Rail commuter services on the north Kent line.

Mr. Freeman: The Government are well aware that the quality of service on certain lines, including some of those running through Kent, is below what passengers can reasonably expect. However, an improvement scheme costing over £600 million is underway on Kent link lines. Improvements to Kent link services will be made with the introduction of new Networker trains from this May.

Rail Privatisation

23. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will next meet with the chairman of British Rail in order to discuss privatisation.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend meets the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss a range of issues including privatisation.

Aircraft Noise

24. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses he has received to his Department's latest consultation paper on aircraft noise from small airfields; and when he expects to reach his conclusions thereon.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend had received 391 responses up to 31 December. Careful consideration will be given to the points which have been raised and we aim to reach conclusions during the first half of the year.

Channel Tunnel

25. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the commercial potential of the channel tunnel to the north-west.

Mr. Freeman: The Government have made no specific assessment, but I believe that the opportunities created by the channel tunnel for new rail links with the continent will be very beneficial to the north-west and to other parts of the country.

28. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Eurotunnel consortium management since the beginning of the new year on progress in completing the project and related matters.

Mr. Freeman: I hold discussions with Eurotunnel's management from time to time, but have not done so yet in 1992.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans exist for the Waterloo international terminal after the channel tunnel rail link has been completed;

(2) if he will estimate the amount of rail traffic using the Brockley-Nunhead line after the completion of the alternative route for the channel tunnel rail link;

(3) whether any householders living along the Brockley-Nunhead line have been contacted by British Rail about compensation or compulsory purchase;

(4) what plans there are to create additional tracks cutting into the embankment or gardens on the Brockley-Nunhead line.

Mr. Freeman: The Waterloo international passenger station will continue to take some international passenger trains after the channel tunnel rail link has been completed. One aspect of the current studies to refine the proposals for the new line is to consider how best to provide access from it to Waterloo. No conclusions have as yet been reached. There are no plans for widening the Brockley-Nunhead line and therefore the question of compensation or compulsory purchase does not arise.

Mrs. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans have been made to develop public transport systems which will serve the new Stratford terminal for the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Freeman: There are extensive plans for improvements to public transport infrastructure that will benefit Stratford: the docklands light railway extension, the refurbishment of the Central line, the Jubilee line extension —Stratford to Green Park and beyond via Canary Wharf, London Bridge, Waterloo and Westminster—and the east-west crossrail from Stratford via Farringdon and Paddington to important towns west of London such as Aylesbury and Reading.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation he has had with the chairman of British Rail regarding the future of the channel tunnel rail freight terminal at Old Oak Common following the decision to route the main flow of channel tunnel rail traffic into central London via Stratford and Barking.

Mr. Freeman: Willesden—not Old Oak Common—and Stratford will be the two freight terminals serving London and the south-east when the channel tunnel opens. British Rail is currently considering, in close consultation with the Government, whether the proposed rail link between London and the tunnel should be used for freight. No decision has yet been made.

Bus Deregulation

26. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made in deregulating London buses.

Mr. Freeman: Deregulation of bus services in London is a long-standing Government commitment. Progress towards this objective started in 1985 when London Transport initiated a programme of route tendering. In 1989, London Buses Limited was restructured into 12 smaller bus operating subsidiaries in readiness for the transition to a commercial bus market. Last year, the Government confirmed their intention to proceed with deregulation and privatisation. A Bill will be introduced as soon as possible after the next election. In preparation for that, I have initiated discussions with a number of groups with a direct interest in the future of bus services in London.

Rail Passengers Charter

27. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further plans he has for discussions with the directors of British Rail South East for the implementation of the citizens charter; and if he will make a statement.

29. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in the development by British Rail of a passengers charter to ensure higher standards of service to rail passengers and to reduce train delays and cancellations.

Mr. Freeman: Discussions with British Rail about its passengers charter are well advanced. British Rail will publish its charter soon.

Community Transport

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received recently on community transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have not received any specific representations recently on community transport, but my Department is in close and regular touch with the Community Transport Association whose information and advice service we fund.

London Underground (Escalators and Lifts)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of escalators and lifts that were not working at London Underground stations on 7 January.

Mr. Freeman: On 7 January London Underground recorded that 35 of its 274 escalators were out or service.

Of these, six were withdrawn for replacement, 11 for planned maintenance and 18 as a result of defects. In addition, eight of its 68 lifts were out of service. Of these four are being replaced and four were defective.

King's Cross Underground Station

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the investment programme for London Transport for the period 1991-92 to 1994-95 announced on 6 November was set with London Underground's plans for the construction of a low level interchange at King's Cross underground station in mind; what plans London Underground has to proceed with this construction and against what proposed schedule; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The grant settlement announced on 6 November took into account the totality of London Transport's investment plans. With the exceptions of the Jubilee line extension and east-west crossrail, the settlement did not earmark funds for specific projects. The apportionment of the settlement between the different subsidiaries is a matter for London Transport, and the timing of particular underground schemes is a matter for London Underground Ltd.

Coastguards

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will detail the different geographical areas of responsibility of the various coastguard sector offices following the coastguard sector review.

Mr. McLoughlin: Her Majesty's coastguard coverage of the United Kingdom coastline is divided up into a total of six regions consisting of 21 districts, which are made up of sectors. Following the sector review, these sectors are as follows:

Aberdeen Region
1. Shetland District
   - Sullom Voe
   - Lerwick
2. Aberdeen District
   - Dornoch
   - Inverness
   - Moray West
   - Moray East
   - Peterhead
   - Aberdeen
   - Montrose
3. Pentland District
   - Pentland North
   - Pentland South
   - Thurso
   - Wick
4. Forth District
   - St. Andrews
   - Levan
   - Fisherrow
   - Eyemouth

Yarmouth Region
1. Tyne Tees District
   - Amble
   - Hartlepool
2. Humber District
   - Whitby
   - Scarborough
   - Flamborough
   - Hull
   - Cleethorpes
3. Yarmouth District
   - Hunstanton
   - Great Yarmouth

Dover Region
1. Thames District
   - Sandings
   - Tendring
   - Maldon
   - Southend
   - Medway
2. Dover District
   - East Kent
   - Rother
   - Eastbourne

Falmouth Region
1. Solent District
   - Wight
   - South Downs East
   - South Downs West
   - Chichester
   - Portsmouth
   - Southampton
2. Portland District
   - Poole
   - Swanage
   - Wyke
   - Lyme
3. Brixham District
   - Torbay
   - Kingsbridge
   - Tamar
   - St. Austell
4. Falmouth District
   - Carrick
   - St. Mary's
   - Land's End
   - Cambourne
   - North Cornwall

Swansea Region
1. Swansea District
   - Hartland
   - North Devon
   - Somerset
   - Avon
   - Gwent
   - Ogmore
   - Gower
2. Milford Haven District
   - Carmarthen
   - Milford Haven
   - Preseli
   - Cambrian
3. Holyhead District
   - Tremadoc
   - Dwyfor
   - Anglesey
   - Clwyd
4. Liverpool District
   - Merseyside
   - Fylde
   - South Cumbria
   - Solway
   - Kirkcudbright

Clyde Region
1. Belfast District
   - Belfast South
   - Belfast North
2. Clyde District
   - Galloway
   - Clyde
   - Kintyre
3. Oban District
   - Oban
   - Mull
   - Skye
4. Stornoway District
   - East Minch
   - Uist
   - Harris/Lewis

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the number of coastguard sector officers, the total number of auxiliary coastguards and the number of regular coastguard officers employed *(a)* in 1984 and *(b)* at present.

Mr. McLoughlin: The numbers of coastguard sector officers, auxiliary coastguards, and regular coastguard officers employed in 1984 and at present are as follows. It should be noted that numbers of sector officers employed in 1984 were not compiled separately, but included within the much larger category of coastguard officer grade one, and as such a meaningful comparison with present figures cannot be made.

	1984	*Present*
Coastguard sector officers	N/A	99
Auxiliary coastguards	7,684	4,390
Regular coastguard officers (includes sector officers)	534	491

The reduction in numbers of auxiliary coastguards is largely due to the abolition in 1988 of breeches buoy companies and the introduction of search companies requiring fewer men. Reductions were made by natural wastage.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he intends to take to ensure that an effective coastguard service is maintained; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Her Majesty's coastguard will continue to co-operate maritime search and rescue operations from its 21 modern and well-equipped maritime rescue co-ordination centres, and subcentres, supported by the local sector and auxiliary coastguard organisation around the coast.

Steps are constantly taken to ensure that an efficient and effective coastguard service is maintained through the introduction and use of up-to-date equipment and a modern communications network, in order to meet changing patterns in coastal activity. Such an example is the recently completed sector review, the outcome of which I announced in the House on 3 December 1991. This included inter alia the doubling of the number of pagers and portable radios to improve readiness and response, and formation of 68 new auxiliary coastguard companies at new locations around the coast to provide better coverage and enhance surveillance and intelligence-gathering capabilities.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the areas where there will be a reduction in the number of auxiliary coastguards as a result of the sector review.

Mr. McLoughlin: There is to be a reduction of 566 in the overall number of auxiliary coastguards around the United Kingdom coast. This reflects the transition from manning levels required for operation of breeches buoy equipment—now withdrawn from service—to smaller units dedicated to surveillance and intelligency-gatherinng which is now the primary role for auxiliary coastguards. This reduction in numbers will be spread over four years, and largely achieved by natural wastage.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* give for each office full details of the proposed reduction in the number of coastguard sector offices and *(b)* list the coastguard sector offices whose designation will be suspended as a result of the coastguard sector review.

Mr. McLoughlin: Under the recent coastguard sector review a reduction in the number of sector offices around the coast was proposed and accepted. In the main this will be achieved by the merging of old sectors to form fewer, new, renamed sectors in improved buildings which in some cases will accommodate two sector officers.

In total there is to be a reduction of 38 sector offices around the coast. Within each region these are as follows:

Region	*Present*	*Proposed*	*Change*
Aberden	18	12	−6
Yarmouth	16	7	−9
Dover	12	6	−6
Falmouth	23	16	−7
Swansea	21	19	−2
Clyde	18	10	−8
Totals	108	70	−38

Orange Badge Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he hopes to bring forward regulations amending the orange badge scheme; and when the new arrangements will be brought into force.

Mr. Chope: Amending regulations were placed before Parliament on 11 December 1991. They will come into effect on 2 March 1992.

Motor Cyclists

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost of research carried out by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory on leg protectors for motor cyclists; and what results have been obtained.

Mr. Chope: The cost of the Transport and Road Research Laboratory's research on motor cycle leg protection has averaged some £300,000 per year, in current prices, over the past 10 years. This should be set against the estimated current cost of motor cycling accidents at £654 million per year.

The research shows that properly designed leg protectors could eliminate or reduce the severity of at least 25 per cent. of leg injuries without increasing injuries to other parts of the body or to the head.

Continental Freight

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans exist for the dispersion of freight arriving from the continent to areas outside London.

Mr. Freeman: In general this is a matter for the freight distribution industry.

British Rail has announced plans to develop seven regional rail freight terminals outside London specifically to cater for European freight traffic when the channel tunnel opens next year. The sites chosen by BR are:

Cardiff
Birmingham
Wakefield
Trafford Park, Manchester

Seaforth Docks, Liverpool
Mossend, Lanarkshire
Wilton, Teesside

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department holds on the number or road accidents involving heavy goods vehicles in the last year.

Mr. Chope: The Department collects information only on accidents involving personal injury. In 1990, the last year for which information is available, there were 15,063 injury accidents involving at least one heavy goods vehicle, of which 791 were fatal accidents and 3,387 were serious accidents. More detailed statistics on heavy goods vehicle involvement in road accidents are published in "Road Accidents Great Britain 1990", a copy of which is in the Library.

Train Drivers (Alcohol Limits)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to bring forward proposals to make it a criminal offence to drive a train with a blood alcohol concentration of up to 80 mg/100ml.

Mr. Freeman: We have no current plans to do so. The Transport and Works Bill currently before the House provides for a criminal offence if certain prescribed persons, including train drivers, work on a transport system with blood alcohol concentrations exceeding 80 mg of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood. The proposed limits will be kept under review and the Bill provides for them to be amended by regulations. It will also be an offence under clause 28(1) for a train driver to work when he is unfit through drink, even if he is below the prescribed alcohol limit.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will bring in proposals for train drivers to be temporarily detained if their breath tests are positive.

Mr. Freeman: The provisions in the Transport and Works Bill reflect our view that the decision to reinstate a train driver to duty is best made by the operator rather than the police. There will be no question of operators allowing safety staff to return to duty while they are still under the influence of drink.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline the proposed limits of alcohol for train drivers and those for drivers of motor vehicles.

Mr. Freeman: The alcohol concentration limits are prescribed in clause 39(2) of the Transport and Works Bill and in section 11(2) of the Road Traffic Act 1988, and are both as follows:

(a) 35 microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath,
(b) 80 milligrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood, or
(c) 107 milligrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of urine.

Drivers are also subject to employers' disciplinary codes.

Road Schemes (Environmental Assessment)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will indicate at what stage during the preparation of a road scheme the advice of the Department of the Environment is sought regarding the need for, and the scope of, an environmental assessment; at what stage the decision is taken on whether the EC directive on environmental assessment is applicable; and how the decision on whether the EC directive applies is made public.

Mr. Chope: Environmental appraisal is an essential part of the development of all schemes. Advice is sought from the Department of the Environment, and statutory environmental organisations among others, from the earliest stages of route proposals. That advice is taken into account by the Secretary of State for Transport in making his decision on the need for, and scope of, an environmental statement before publication of draft line orders. A public notice is issued at this point.

Air Fares

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking following the European Commissioner's decision on the cases referred to recently by his Department in respect of the "double disapproval" arrangements on air fares.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Commission has announced that it has taken a decision on certain air fares which we referred to them under the current EC air fares regulation, but the formal decision has not yet been received and we shall need to study it carefully once we have it.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases have been referred to the European Commission by his Department under the "double disapproval" arrangements on air fares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: A total of 106 fares have been referred to the Commission under the current EC air fares regulation.

Folkestone-Honiton Trunk Route

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many separate road schemes are contained within the Folkestone-Honiton trunk route; and whether this route falls within the EC directive on environmental assessment;

(2) if he will make a statement on the strategic impact of the Folkestone-Honiton trunk route.

Mr. Chope: The Folkestone-Honiton route is the only east-west trunk route across the south-east of the country south of the M25, and it forms an important access into the south-west. Traffic levels vary from section to section along the route. Proposals for individual improvement schemes are considered on their merits, and are designed to standards which reflect the forecast traffic flows for the particular sections concerned. The national roads programme currently includes 19 schemes for improvements to sections of the A259 and A27 between Folkestone and the M27 motorway, and another 14 schemes for sections of the A31 and A35 westwards from the M27 to Honiton. I announced on 8 January 1992 the addition to the programme of a scheme to increase the capacity of the M27 between junctions 4 and 12. The needs of the trunk road network are kept under constant review, and schemes may be added to the programme as needs are identified.

Directive 85/337/EEC applies to projects likely to have a significant effect on the environment. All schemes in the national programme are subject to full environmental appraisal. Environmental Statements have been or will be published where the environmental impact is judged to be significant within the terms of the EC directive.

M25 (Upgrading)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the proposed upgrading of the M25, and the provision of a collector-distributor road, will be considered within a single environmental statement.

Mr. Chope: No.

Road Schemes (Environmental Assessment)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the road schemes contained in the current programme for which it has been agreed that the EC directive on environmental assessment applies.

Mr. Chope: All schemes in the national programme are subject to a very full environmental appraisal. An environmental statement will be produced for all schemes where the environmental impact is judged to be significant within the terms of the EC directive.

RENAVAL

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of his decision to proceed with the sale of the Tees and Hartlepool trust port on receipts from the RENAVAL programme.

Mr. McLoughlin: Commissioner Millan announced on 5 April 1991 a RENAVAL programme for the districts of Langbaurgh-on-Tees and Middlesbrough. Applications for grant under this programme include projects in which the Tees and Hartlepool port authority proposed to participate, in anticipation of its being released from the restrictions imposed by its local trust port legislation, and the new company will inherit these proposals.

Speed Limits

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the interim report of the joint study into speed limits will be available; and which environmental bodies will be consulted in connection with this study.

Mr. Chope: The joint working party of officials from the Department and the County Surveyors Society on speed in villages is concerned primarily with developing technical measures for reducing vehicle speeds. It is planned to produce an interim report in April. This study is not a consultation exercise but we shall be consulting shortly on proposed revisions to departmental guidance on setting speed limits. The consultation document will be freely available.

High Speed Rail Network

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland officials have met to consider the proposals for a European high speed rail network prepared by the European Commission working group.

Mr. Freeman: A meeting took place last summer.

Marchioness

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his written answer to the hon. Member for Battersea, 19 December, *Official Report*, column *237*, what form the proposed inquiry into safety of vessels on rivers and inland waterways will take and under what statute; what incidents other than that concerning the Marchioness have been drawn to his attention; what is the name and qualifications of the expert adviser; and what are Mr. John Hayes's qualifications, other than legal, for conducting the inquiry.

Mr. McLoughlin: Mr. Hayes's inquiry is an independent investigation which is not bound by statutory provisions or procedures. The precise conduct and form of the inquiry is a matter for Mr. Hayes, but departmental papers are being made available to him and he will shortly be inviting views from interested parties.

So far, the following accidents on the River Thames have been specifically drawn to Mr. Hayes' attention by the Department:

Collision between	*Date*
Bowtrader and Hurlingham	18 October 1981
Shell Distributor and New Southern Belle	8 June 1983
Bowbelle and Pride of Greenwich	9 June 1983
Shell Distributor and Royalty	1 September 1983
Rosewood and John Marriott	14 September 1986
Vita and Fordson	29 September 1986

The expert adviser will be appointed shortly, and his name and qualifications will be announced at that time. Mr. Hayes will bring to the inquiry the important attributes of an independent mind and a distinguished record as a solicitor in local government.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what distinction he is making on the modified requirements in hull design and construction between vessels operating in tidal waters and those on shallow canals and non-tidal rivers of limited depth and width, consequent on the action he has taken in response to the report of his marine accident investigation branch into the Marchioness disaster.

Mr. McLoughlin: The modified requirements for hull design and construction which are being developed, in consultation with industry, will make a clear distinction between vessels operating in tidal waters, those operating in the sheltered non-tidal reaches of rivers operating on shallow rivers and canals. In general a higher standard of survivability, in the event of hull damage, will be required in tidal waters whilst other requirements will apply to vessels operating in shallow waters such as canals.

M25

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received recently about the M25.

Mr. Chope: We continue to receive many representations about the operation and the proposed widening of the M25.

Trans-Pennine Road Study

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that the Peak park joint planning board does not commence its review of the national park structure plan until the trans-Pennine road study findings are published.

Mr. Chope: I understand the review is already under way. It is for the board to decide what account it needs to take of our trans-Pennine study.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish the findings of the trans-Pennine road study.

Mr. Chope: As soon as possible.

British Rail

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give, both for Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole, the total investment in British Rail originating from *(a)* revenue, *(b)* asset disposals, *(c)* Government grants, *(d)* local authority grants, *(e)* EC grants and *(f)* borrowings.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's funding requirements for investment and losses over the period 1992-93 to 1994-95 are currently forecast at some £6·6 billion. Of this, nearly £4·4 billion—some two thirds—would be met from central Government grants and loans, with the remainder coming from passenger transport executive grants and internal sources. Particular sources of finance are not apportioned between investment and other expenditure.

Bypass Schemes

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will postpone further consideration of the proposed bypass schemes for the A6 at Disley and A628 at Tintwistle until the production of the national park structure plan.

Mr. Chope: No. The Peak Park joint planning board is being consulted as these schemes are developed.

WALES

Public Bodies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those individuals, and emoluments where appropriate, of all those persons whom he has nominated to serve in more than one public body in Wales in the past four years.

Mr. David Hunt: The names of individuals nominated for public appointments are private and confidential. The information requested cannot therefore be given. However, the names of all those who currently hold public appointments for which I am responsible were provided in my answers to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 12 December 1991, and 19 December 1991, at columns *534-39* and *272-82*.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether any financial assistance other than the initial sum of £25,000 was given to Ysbyty Brongluis to assist in drawing up a trust status application and for associated purposes.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is incorrect. To date, no financial assistance has been made available. However, the Welsh Office is prepared to consider on its merits any bid from prospective NHS trusts for a contribution towards the costs of preparing an application for NHS trust status.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether any financial assistance other than the initial sum of £50,000 was given to Pembrokeshire health authority to assist in drawing up a trust application and for associated purposes.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if, pursuant to his reply of 19 December, *Official Report*, columns *266-67*, he will give the cost of the Adams report on the future of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools service in Wales; if he will detail the relevant previous career and consultancy experience of Ms. Adams in the field of education and the inspection thereof; and what was the competitive tendering procedure that led to her selection.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The cost of the report produced as part of my right hon. Friend's review of the role and organisation of HMI in Wales was £7,575. Mrs. Adams has had considerable experience as an administrative civil servant. As a former civil servant she is eligible to be employed without competition. She works for the Welsh Office from time to time on tasks appropriate to her experience when a permanent member of staff is not available.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, what policy considerations led to his decision to restrict the circulation of the contents of the Adams report on the future of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools service in Wales; and if he will now make arrangements for its early publication.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The consultant's report is one element in the much wider consideration my right hon. Friend is giving to the role and organisation of HMI in Wales, alongside other policy initiatives currently being pursued in the education field generally and in the area of inspections in particular. Given this, my right hon. Friend has concluded that it would not be appropriate to publish the report. The report is being taken fully into account in the review of HMI.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of Her Majesty's inspectors currently engaged to report on primary, secondary and further education in Wales; and what changes he proposes in these numbers.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of HMI currently engaged in Wales is 58. Until my right hon. Friend has

completed his consideration of the future role and structure of HMI in Wales, I am not in a position to say whether there will be any change in numbers. We hope to announce our conclusions shortly.

Heart Surgery

Mr Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many heart operations were carried out in each of the last four years in Wales.

Mr Nicholas Bennett: The most comprehensive information available centrally is that derived from hospital activity analysis individual patient records. The figures given in the following table are likely to understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide complete clinical details relating to patient discharges and deaths.

The figures include surgical operations and other procedures on the heart carried out in NHS hospitals in Wales. In particular, contrast radiology is included, where the figures for 1988, 1989 and 1990 are 136, 457 and 1,418 respectively.

The figures for the years 1988 to 1990 are based on OPCS 4th revision codes for surgical operations and procedures and are not strictly comparable to the 1987 figure which is based on the OPCS 3rd revision codes.

	Number of heart operations and procedures
1987	1,254
1988	1,408
1989	1,986
1990	3,083

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the secretary for Wales if he will make a statement concerning heart surgery in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Over £5 million will be made available over the next three years to enable the University hospital of Wales to perform 800 adult open heart operations each year with the associated level of cardiology. A further £2·5 million will be provided for the expansion of the hospital's paediatric cardiac unit which, when complete, will be equipped to undertake the full range of neonatal and infant cardiac surgery. Together, these developments will meet our objective of establishing the University hospital as a centre of excellence in the provision of cardiac services. Additionally, in 1992-93 further central funding of around £1·5 million will be made available to enable health authorities in south Wales to secure additional adult operations from other specialist centres.

I have also announced that an option appraisal will be undertaken to assess how the balance of our target of 1,200 adult open heart operations per annum can best be met.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his target figure for heart operations in Wales; and what measures he is taking to enable more heart operations to take place in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Our target remains to increase capacity for cardiac surgery in south Wales such that 1,200 adult open heart operations are performed each year supported by the appropriate levels of cardiology. On 18 December, I announced a £6·5 million package of measures, centres at the University hospital of Wales, to commence the next phase of that development. Furthermore, an additional £2.5 million is being provided to equip the paediatric cardiac unit at the University hospital over the next three years to undertake the full range of neonatal and paediatric cardiac surgery.

In north Wales, additional central funding has been made available to secure an appropriate level of cardiac services from specialist centres supplementing that already available to purchase services from Mersey regional health authority.

Nebulisers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of the recent letter from the director of the national health service in Wales to chairmen of the nine health authorities concerning charging for nebulisers.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No. It is not appropriate that such letters written by officials should be placed in the Library of the House. However, all health authorities have confirmed that they will be providing equipment in accordance with the requirements of the NHS Act 1977 and have undertaken to investigate all cases where charges are alleged to have been made.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date the board of the Development Board for Rural Wales first considered the payment to Dr Iain Skewis, the former chief executive, in respect of untaken leave; and on what date the payment was made.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that the basis of this payment was agreed in late February 1990 between the chairman of the development board and the then chief executive in the belief that it was covered by the latter's contract of employment and terms of service and did not require consideration by the board. Payment was made in March 1991 following Dr Skewis's retirement, and was reported to the board in connection with the 1990-91 accounts.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he proposes to make to recover the cash loss arising from the irregular payment of £15,563 to Dr Iain Skewis, the previous chief executive of the Development Board for Rural Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: A payment of £15,563 to Dr Skewis in compensation for untaken leave during his 13 years employment with the Development Board for Rural Wales was made by the board without the necessary authority from the Welsh Office and the Treasury. The payment was therefore irregular and the Comptroller and Auditor General has qualified his certificate on the board's accounts for 1991-92 accordingly. The board has been unable to enforce recovery or to obtain voluntary repayment of the sum. The Welsh Office, with Treasury agreement, has authorised the write-off of this expenditure as a cash loss.

Laying Hens

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to improve the welfare of laying hens in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I shall be seeking the adoption of the highest standards practical for all laying hens when the existing Community legislation is reviewed next year. The Farm Animal Wefare Council has recently published a report on the welfare of laying hens in colony systems and this will be circulated for consultation with the industry and other interested parties.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of mortgage repossessions in the valleys communities which have been initiated by lenders of second mortgages which are not building societies or banks.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The data collected on repossessions do not distinguish between first or second mortgages or between building societies and banks or other lenders.

Child Care

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the percentage of children in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each county in Wales for whom child care is provided from public funds between the age of three and school age.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on child care facilities provided or paid for by local authorities is contained in tables 11.1 and 11.2 of "Activities of Social Services Departments: Year ended 31/3/90", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Opera House, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish the report he commissioned in January 1991 on the feasibility of the proposed opera house at the Pierhead, Cardiff, and his response to it.

Mr. David Hunt: I have now received the report of the feasibility study commissioned by the Cardiff Bay development corporation on the proposed opera house in Cardiff bay. It is my intention to publish the report, in due course, after I have completed my consideration of it.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the establishment of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Wales; and if he will make it his policy to preserve Her Majesty's inspectorate at or near its existing establishment.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) on 10 December 1991, at column *405*.

Hospital Construction, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to give approval in principle for the commencement of the new neighbourhood hospital on the site of the former St. David's hospital, Cowbridge road, east Cardiff; and on what date he anticipates that actual construction of the new hospital will start.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: South Glamorgan health authority is responsible for the preparation of an approval in principle submission for this scheme. A decision will be made in accordance with the usual procedures once a satisfactory submission is received. It will be for the health authority in the first instance to asses the priority to be accorded to this scheme in the light of its other bids for major capital.

Beef Exports

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the value of beef exports from Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the value of beef exports is not available separately for Wales. The value of beef exports from the United Kingdom in 1990 was about £233 million.

Hospital Provision (South Glamorgan)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will specify the contents of the strategic review of hospital provision in South Glamorgan to be undertaken in association with Mid Glamorgan health authority and the University of Wales, College of Medicine, its expected date of completion, the consultants appointed and its terms of reference.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The review is a matter for the two health authorities and the University of Wales College of Medicine and requests for futher details should be directed to them.

Hormone Replacement

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list preparations currently in use in hormone replacement treatment in which two or more drugs are currently packaged as one item together with the proportion of prescriptions *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area in Wales which specified (i) both or all the constitutent items and (ii) only one of the constituent items in each of the past five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The preparations currently used in hormone replacement treatment in which two or more drugs are packaged together are as follows:

Cyclo-Progynova
Estrapak 50
Trisequens
Trisequens Forte
Prempak-C
Nuvelle
Syntex Menophase

Information is not available on the proportion of prescriptions on which specify both or one of the drugs involved.

University of Wales college, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects a conclusion to the discussions proceeding with the University of Wales college at Cardiff regarding the college's development proposals referred to in his letter to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West dated 16 December 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: The discussions are primarily a matter for the University of Wales college of Cardiff and the other

principal parties, including South Glamorgan county council, Cardiff Bay development corporation and Tarmac Atlantic Wharf Developments.

Hospitals (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present procedure for giving approval in principle to hospital capital expenditure projects; how it will alter after 1 April; and whether he proposes any transitional arrangements to projects currently in the pipeline.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Under current management arrangements for the NHS in Wales, district health authorities are responsible for the management and control of health building schemes. In exercising this control, they are required to follow Capricode which provides the mandatory procedural framework for processing NHS capital building schemes. Under these procedures any scheme with a works' cost of £4 million and over requires Welsh Office approval in principle before the authority can proceed with its further planning and design. These procedures will continue in force after 1 April 1992.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on how the new capital allocation system for hospital projects in Wales will work from 1 April with particular regard to capital projects connected with hospital closure proposals he has already statutorily approved.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend will be announcing details of both capital and revenue allocations to district health authorities for 1992-93 later this month. At the same time, authorities will receive a paper summarising the new capital allocation and management arrangements on which they have already been consulted. I will ensure that a copy of this paper is placed in the Library of the House when it has issued.

Teachers' Retirement

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many teachers retired from the local education authorities in Wales in 1989; and how many of them took early retirement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A total of 940 full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, and secondary schools in Wales retired between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989. Of these, 706 were below the age of 60. It is not possible without undue cost to determine the exact number that took early retirement.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many replies he received by 1 January to the groundwater consultation exercise following on the Hydrotechnica report on the side-effects of the Cardiff bay barrage; and when he expects Mr. Roy Stoner to complete his report on the groundwater consultation.

Mr. David Hunt: By 1 January 1992 a total of 140 representations to the groundwater consultation exercise had been received. I expect Mr. Stoner to complete his report as soon after the end of the consultation period as is consistent with the proper consideration of all the issues raised.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the items currently in common use by GPs or consultants for which more than one prescription charge is made under current legislation and regulations but which are currently packaged as one item by the manufacturers.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A prescription charge is payable in respect of each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed, unless the patient is exempt. In the case of items supplied in a combination pack, therefore, each separate item carries a separate prescription charge. The fact that for convenience two or more individual preparations may be supplied in one pack does not alter the patient's liability for prescription charges.

Unless a patient is otherwise exempt, or holds a valid pre-payment certificate, the following items in common use attract more than one prescription charge when supplied against a NHS prescription.

Betadine Pessaries with applicator and VC Kit
Betadine Vaginal Gel with applicator and VC Kit
Canesten Duopak
Cyclo-Progynova Combination Pack Tablets
Daktarin Twin Pack
Diprosone Duopack
Ecostatin Twin Pack
Estrapak 50
Flagyl Compak
Gyno-Daktarin Combipack
Gyno-Pevaryl 1 CP Pack
Gyno-Pevaryl 150 Combipack
Lasix + K Combination Pack Tablets
Migraleve Tablets Duo Pack
Migralift Tablets Duo Pack
Napratec Combination Pack
Nuvelle Tablets
Nystan Triple Pack
Pabrinex Intramuscular High Potency
Pabrinex Intramuscular Maintenance
Pabrinex Intravenous High Potency
Parentrovite Intramuscular High Potency
Parentrovite Intramuscular Maintenance
Parentrovite Intravenous High Potency
Pranavite Slim Diet Plan
Prempak-C Combination Pack Tablets 0·625 mg
Prompak-C Combination Pack Tablets 1·25 mg
Syntex Menophase Combination Pack Tablets
Trisequens Combination Pack Tablets
Trisequens Forte Combination Pack Tablets
Uvistat Pro-Ski Pack

Child Support Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his policy for the proposed administrative arrangements for the identification and collection of payments and disbursements via the Child Support Agency in Wales from 1 April.

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

From 1 April 1992, a child support unit will be established to take over the existing administration of child maintenance collections and payments from the Social Security Benefits Agency, prior to the introduction of the Child Support Agency from April 1993. The agency will introduce a new system for the assessment, collection and enforcement of child maintenance to all families for whom maintenance is an issue. Administration of the system will be carried out by staff based in social security offices, who will provide a local service to customers. Work that does not require face to face contact with customers will be carried out in six centres to be based in Belfast, Birkenhead, Dudley, Falkirk, Hastings and Plymouth.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Members

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what preparations have been made for induction courses for new Members after the general election; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: As far as the authorities of the House are concerned, no induction courses for new Members are planned. It is not known what arrangements are being made by individual political parties; and that is a matter for them.

The Administration Committee and the authorities of the House are, however, preparing a handbook giving guidance to new Members on such things as the work and responsibilities of individual departments of the House asnd the general services at Member's disposal. That handbook will be issued to all Members returned after the general election and is designed to allow a section prepared by individual political parties to be included.

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Hoyle: To answer the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 11 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *463*, what was the total cost of the new building in Parliament street; and what was the cost of providing the 32 offices in the Palace.

Mr. MacGregor: The final account for the construction of the new building in Parliament street is still being discussed with the contractor so it is not possible yet to give the total cost. Expenditure to date, however, including furnishings, fittings and consultants fees, charged to the parliamentary works programme is £32·309 million.

Work on the main scheme to provide the additional offices in the Palace—the conversion of the former residences of the Serjeant at Arms, Deputy Serjeant at Arms and the Speaker's Secretary—is not scheduled for completion until later this year. The estimated cost of the scheme, and of the conversion of the two officekeepers' flats, the Clerks' Bedroom on Upper Committee Corridor (North), and former Library accommodation on the North Curtain, again including furniture, fittings and consultants fees, is £2·028 million.

DEFENCE

NAAFI

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *58*, on President of the Service Institute and President of the Regiment Institute shops, what steps he is taking to investigate the selling of goods in PSI and PRI shops in competition with NAAFI.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The decision as to what goods can be sold in President of the Service Institute or President of the Regiment Institute shops rests with commanding officers who are aware that competition with NAAFI is not permitted. There are well-established channels through which NAAFI managers may raise any concerns they may have about the trading activities of PSI or PRI shops.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *58*, relating to NAAFI, if he will list which recommendations have been implemented; what others are being considered; and what is the proposed time scale for implementation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The scrutiny made a number of detailed recommendations concerning the commercial management of NAAFI business. While it has been possible to implement some—for instance, on price lists and discounts—the effect of "Britain's Defence for the Nineties" changes are such that the full effect on NAAFI needs to be analysed before it will be possible to take action on some of the remainder. It is hoped that the position will be clearer later this year. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will then write to the hon. Member.

Army Regiments

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if will list the total service personnel strength of the regiments currently recruited in Scotland and the anticipated full strength numbers of the 10 regiments to be in existence after restructuring on a regimental basis.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

HMS Challenger

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current lay-up costs of HMS Challenger pending its sale.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The identifiable additional costs associated with HMS Challenger's berthing at Portsmouth naval base since her decommissioning are negligible.

Unused Sleeping Accommodation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the sites in Greater London where there is unused sleeping accommodation in the control of his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Spearhead Battalion

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions over the past five years spearhead battalion has been deployed during its tour of duty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The battalion on a spearhead tour of duty has been deployed once in the last five years. Other battalions have also been deployed during this period to meet various short notice requirements when they were considered to be best suited to undertake the task.

Menwith Hill

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution the American Government have made towards the cost in each of the past five years to date of providing (a) external and (b) internal security at Menwith Hill Station, north Yorkshire.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Security at Menwith Hill Station is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence Police, but the majority of the costs are reimbursed by the United States.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who employs the civilian patrolmen deployed at Menwith Hill.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The small number of civilian patrolmen working at Menwith Hill Station are Ministry of Defence employees. They are engaged on general duties, and are not responsible for station security.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many people, in each of the last five years, to date, have been arrested at Menwith Hill and Hunter's Stone Tower for byelaw offences; how many have been reported for summons process; and how many people have been (*a*) convicted and (*b*) had summonses dismissed by the courts;

(2) how many complaints have been lodged, in each at the last five years, to date, against Ministry of Defence police officers serving at Menwith Hill; how many such complaints have been (*a*) rejected and (*b*) upheld; and what disciplinary action was taken in respect of officers against whom complaints were upheld;

(3) who issued instructions not to arrest peace campaigners for breaches of byelaws at Menwith Hill Station; and on what date they were issued.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what powers American military personnel at Menwith Hill are permitted to carry weapons; and in what circumstances such personnel are permitted to fire their weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: United States personnel at Menwith Hill Station do not carry firearms.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proposals he has to improve protection for occupational pensioners against improper use of the assets of the pension funds of which they are beneficiaries;

(2) what proposals he has to improve protection for occupational pensioners against improper use by companies and their directors of the assets of pension funds.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 December 1991 at columns *374-75*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to bring forward legislation to prevent the misuse of occupational pension funds; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 December 1991 at columns *374-75*.

Pension Fund

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what restrictions at present exist on a company's employees acting as trustees of its pension fund; whether he plans any changes; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The trust deed under which an occupational pension scheme is set up will specify who will be the trustees of the scheme and how they will be appointed. There is nothing to prevent employees of the company being included.

Disability

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that claim packs for the disability living allowance will be available in bulk to all agencies who advise persons with a disability.

Mr. Scott: We have arranged that all citizen's advice bureaux will receive stocks of a version of the disability living allowance claim pack. In addition, we intend to arrange distribution of these packs to welfare rights organisations, and other groups advising disabled people, who ask for them.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that reviews will not be made by adjudication officers based on medical evidence obtained over the period 1992 to 1993 arising from the transfer of attendance allowance and mobility allowance claims to disability living allowance claims.

Mr. Scott: The transfer of existing attendance allowance and mobility allowance awards to their equivalent levels in disability living allowance will be automatic, without review. No medical evidence will be sought to confirm the validity of an existing award.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the date of claim for the new disability working allowance will be the date on which the coupon is sent in, or the date of despatch of the claim form.

Mr. Scott: Claim packs for disability working allowance will be widely available in post offices, social security offices, jobcentres and advice centres. Therefore, in common with most other benefits, the date of claim will be the date the claim is recieved in an office of the Department of Social Security or Department of Employment.

Newcastle Office

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently employed in the DSS at Newcastle; and what number are expected to be transferred to other departments.

Miss Widdecombe: At 30 September 1991, the Department and its agencies employed about 14,000 people in the Newcastle area. As part of normal career progression 22 staff transferred to other Government Departments in the period 31 March 1991 to 30 September 1991, and similar numbers can be expected to transfer in the future.

Councillors (Attendance Allowances)

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what authority local concillors' attendance allowances are treated as earned income for benefit purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The definition of "employed earner" in section 2(1)(a) of the Social Security Act 1975 includes a person who is gainfully employed in an elected office with emoluments chargeable to income tax under schedule E.

EC Social Policy

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those items agreed at Maastricht which have implications for policy on or administration of social security.

Mr. Jack: No changes to the treaty of Rome were agreed at Maastricht affecting the European Community's powers in relation to social security. A protocol to article 119 was agreed clarifying the Barber judgment.

Social Fund

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all those offices that have had additional sums allocated to their social fund budgets this financial year; and the dates the new allocations were made.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is available in the Library.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the total numbers who have received cold weather payments; and if he will make a statement on the operation of the automatic scheme.

Mr. Scott: Under the improved arrangements for cold weather payments introduced in November, 1,424,671 people have received cold weather payments so far this winter.

Income Support

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total number of items which can now be directly debited from income support prior to claimants' receipt of the benefit; and if he will list the date of implementation of each item.

Miss Widdecombe: The items which may be deducted at source in prescribed circumstances from income support are as follows:

(a) Housing costs.
(b) Residential care, nursing home and Polish resettlement home fees.
(c) Rent arrears and service charges paid with rent.
(d) Hostel service charges.
(e) Fuel charges (electricity and gas).
(f) Water charges.
(g) Community Charge arrears.
(h) Social Fund loan repayments.
(i) Overpayment recovery.

Not all these deductions can apply in a single case. There are ceilings on the amounts that can be deducted for debts. With the exception of those for social fund and community charge, all deductions listed were carried forward from the supplementary benefit scheme, when it was replaced by income support in April 1988. The social fund scheme was introduced from April 1988, while community charge deductions were introduced firstly in Scotland from April 1989, and England and Wales from April 1990.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list (i) the numbers of claimants of income support, (ii) their partners, and (iii) their dependants for each of the last six months of 1991; and what numbers and percentages were liable to deductions of benefit for *(a)* social fund loan repayments, *(b)* poll tax arrears, *(c)* fuel arrears, *(d)* rent arrears, and *(e)* water charge arrears.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is in the table. Monthly figures and those for partners and dependants could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Support customers with deductions—by number and percentage of total customers

	August 1991		*November 1991*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Total number of Income Support recipients	4,939,936		4,942,479	
Number of Social Fund deductions	523,600	(10·60)	569,000	(11·51)
Direct payments for:				
Community Charge arrears	90,224	(1·83)	129,653	(2·62)
Fuel charges	262,322	(5·31)	263,140	(5·32)
Rent arrears and service charges	100,350	(2·03)	108,663	(2·20)
Water charges	83,964	(1·70)	98,835	(2·00)

Notes:

1. The figures used are based on the DSS Management Information Statistics collected at the end of August and November 1991. These figures are provisional and may be subject to amendment.
2. The social fund figures are based on the number of people making repayments over the whole of August and November and *not* at the end of the statistical month. It is not possible to exclude from the figures repayments made by people not in receipt of income support.
3. The information for rent arrears and service charges, fuel, and water includes cases where a deduction is being made for current charges only.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the official engagements of each Minister in his Department for Wednesday 18 September 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: Those Ministers available on that day each had a number of meetings about a variety of subjects.

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether it is his Department's policy to pass on correspondence received from a member of the public to the hon. Member in whose constituency the person resides.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not our policy to do so. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind, perhaps he would like to write to me.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 16 December, *Official Report*, column *89-90*, if he will give the rates of disablement gratuities and pensions since 1979, at 1991-92 prices.

Mr. Scott: The rates of disablement gratuities and pensions since 1979 at 1991-92 prices are shown in the table.

Column A refers to the equivalent value of benefit at April 1991 prices at the date of annual uprating.

Column B refers to the average real value of benefit at April 1991 prices and calculated over the period between the uprating dates.

For awards from:

	£	*(A) Equivalent value at April 1991* £	*(B) Average real value at April 1991* £
Gratuity			
15 November 1978 — 13 November 1979	1,166·00	3,023·42	2,820·37
14 November 1979 — 25 November 1980	1,391·50	3,073·82	2,842·13
26 November 1980 — 24 November 1981	1,622·50	3,108·14	2,946·53
25 November 1981 — 23 November 1982	1,765·50	3,020·62	2,922·12
24 November 1982 — 22 November 1983	1,958·00	3,152·73	3,094·03
23 November 1983 — 27 November 1984	2,029·50	3,116·84	3,053·78
28 November 1984 — 26 November 1985	2,134·00	3,122·96	3,031·21
27 November 1985 — 29 July 1986	2,282·50	3,167·27	3,136·79
30 July 1986 — 7 April 1987	2,310·00	3,152·93	3,102·54
Weekly Pension			
15 November 1978 — 13 November 1979	3·19	8·27	7·72
14 November 1979 — 25 November 1980	3·80	8·39	7·76
26 November 1980 — 24 November 1981	4·45	8·52	8·08
25 November 1981 — 23 November 1982	4·83	8·26	7·99
24 November 1982 — 22 November 1983	5·36	8·63	8·47
23 November 1983 — 27 November 1984	5·56	8·54	8·37
28 November 1984 — 26 November 1985	5·84	8·55	8·30
27 November 1985 — 29 July 1986	6·25	8·67	8·59
30 July 1986 — 7 April 1987	6·32	8·63	8·49
8 April 1987 — 12 April 1988	6·45	8·43	8·36
13 April 1988 — 11 April 1989	6·72	8·45	8·22
12 April 1989 — 10 April 1990	7·12	8·29	8·08
11 April 1990 — 9 April 1991	7·66	8·15	7·92
10 April 1991 — 7 April 1992	8·49	8·49	—

DNA Testing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any proposals for the use of DNA testing in the identification of responsible fathers for maintenance payments in the work of the Child Support Agency from 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Jack: Under the provisions of the Child Support Act 1991, the resolution of disputes about alleged paternity will remain a matter for the courts when the Child Support Agency comes into operation in 1993.

Family Expenditure

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been in percentage terms, the proportion of the gross income of a family on average earnings of husband, wife, and two children aged five and 10, and living in a council house, for each year since 1979, that was needed for *(a)* rent of the council house, after allowing for housing benefit, *(b)* rates and community charge, allowing for any rate rebate or community charge benefit, *(c)* income tax, *(d)* national insurance contributions and *(e)* water and sewerage rates.

Mr Jack *[holding answer 16 December 1991]:* The figures in the table are for a standard tax benefit model family with children aged four and six. Although they are unlikely to be much—if at all—different, figures for the family type specified could be ascertained only at disproportionate cost.

It is not possible to include figures for water and sewerage charges as some local authorities include sewerage charges in their rates/community charge while others do not.

Date	Average weekly earnings (gross)	Rent	Rates/ CC	Tax	NI	Rent as per cent.	Rates as per cent.	Tax as per cent.	NI as per cent.
November 1979	114·00	6·50	2·80	23·01	7·41	5·70	2·46	20·18	6·50
November 1980	135·00	8·80	3·55	28·13	9·11	6·52	2·63	20·84	6·75
November 1981	149·00	12·10	4·45	32·33	11·55	8·12	2·99	21·70	7·75
November 1982	161·00	14·20	6·40	33·89	14·00	8·82	3·98	21·05	8·70
November 1983	175·00	14·75	6·85	36·38	15·75	8·43	3·91	20·79	9·00
November 1984	187·00	15·60	7·35	37·90	16·83	8·34	3·93	20·27	9·00
November 1985	199·00	16·50	7·95	39·77	17·91	8·29	3·99	19·98	9·00
July 1986	211·00	17·50	8·85	40·81	18·99	8·29	4·19	19·34	9·00
April 1987	224·00	18·35	9·40	40·78	20·16	8·19	4·20	18·21	9·00
April 1988	246·00	19·90	8·20	41·81	22·14	8·09	3·33	17·00	9·00
April 1989	269·00	21·80	9·00	46·22	24·21	8·10	3·35	17·18	9·00
April 1990	296·00	23·43	13·22	51·28	23·42	7·92	4·47	17·32	7·91
April 1991	321·00	26·03	9·40	56·14	25·25	8·11	2·93	17·49	7·87

HEALTH

Health Service Refund Scheme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie his respective policies in respect of the inclusion or otherwise in the health benefits low income scheme of refunds of *(a)* dental charges, *(b)* prescription charges and *(c)* optical charges, other than the hospital eye service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's policy on NHS charges is that those who can afford to contribute towards their treatment costs should do so whilst those who may have difficulty in paying should be protected. Extensive exemption arrangements on grounds of health or status are underpinned by the NHS low income scheme. The review of the administration of the low income scheme has re-examined the existing arrangements for charge remission including the availability of refunds.

Maternity Services

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *102*, what progress his Department is making with improving the quality of the maternity hospital episode system; and whether the information requested will be available in respect of the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92;

(2) whether reliable information about method of onset of labour, method of delivery, use of anaesthetic for labour and delivery, the place of delivery and the person conducting the delivery, will be available for deliveries to residents of NHS regions and districts in the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is too early to make a precise assessment of maternity hospital episode statistics (HES) coverage in 1990-91, but indications are that about 70 per cent. of birth episodes and 60 per cent. of delivery episodes will be covered. Until the data are finalised, processed, and examined in depth, it will not be possible to comment on the quality and completeness of the data in these records, or to tell whether the specific information requested will be available.

The NHS management executive monitors the data provided by regional health authorities and regularly meets with regional directors of information to discuss the quality of the data. The difficulties surrounding the completeness of maternity data have been identified as a priority. This initiative has resulted in real improvements in most regions. Work has now been successfully completed in the area of linking maternity to other systems and an improvement will be evident when 1991-92 data are available.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the numbers of women resident in *(a)* Dacorum local government district and *(b)* St. Albans local government district who gave birth in 1990 in (i) St. Albans City hospital, (ii) Luton and Dunstable hospital, (iii) Queen Elizabeth II hospital, Welwyn Garden City, (iv) Watford General hospital, (v) Royal Buckinghamshire hospital, (vi) RAF Halton maternity unit, (vii) other hospitals, (viii) at home and (ix) elsewhere.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Infant Deaths

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, columns *183-84*, what pilot studies his Department is doing to test the feasibility of the proposals for the confidential inquiries into stillbirths and deaths in infancy set out in the report published on 2 July 1991; and whether the results of the pilot studies will be ready in time to be taken into account in finalising plans for the inquiries themselves.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The working group on confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy, set up by the Chief Medical Officer, gave advice about how the enquiry should proceed. That advice was based on experience gained from numerous locally based enquiries and did not recommend pilot studies.

Link System for the Deaf

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement about the device known as the Link, details of which have been sent to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People;

(2) if he will consult with the organisations of and for the deaf and hard-of-hearing about ways of making the device known as the Link as widely available as possible to people who can benefit from the new aid.

Mr. Dorrell: We are always pleased to learn of new equipment coming on to the market which has the potential to assist people who have disabilities. It would

not, however, be appropriate for the Department to promote this or other individual products. It is open to the manufacturer of the Link device to consult consumer organisations about ways in which to promote it.

Tobacco

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the European Commission's proposal for a total ban on tobacco advertising in the European Community.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government consider the proposed EC directive on tobacco advertising is unnecessary for completion of the single market. It believes the present voluntary agreements with the tobacco industry on advertising and promotion provide an effective system of controls. There are other tobacco related issues in the Community which deserve a higher priority than advertising, in particular the need to cut back support progressively for tobacco growing under the common agricultural policy.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when children's playgrounds will be included in voluntary agreements on tobacco advertising.

Mr. Dorrell: Children's playgrounds were included in the provisions of the voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising and promotion published on 9 September 1991, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the Government's assessment of the effects of the banning of tobacco advertising in Canada.

Mr. Dorrell: The effects of the ban are not clear. Steep rises in the real prices of cigarettes in Canada account for most of the decrease in consumption.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has consulted with the Government of the Netherlands on the report issued regarding their voluntary agreements on the advertising of tobacco.

Mr. Dorrell: No. We have not yet seen a copy of this report.

Organ Transplants

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *408*, about organ transplants, if he will make a statement about the meetings between the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority and members of the medical profession about improving the distribution of organs as effectively and equitably as possible among the health regions.

Mr. Dorrell: The United Kingdom transplant support service authority has set up a number of professional groups to advise it on a number of matters concerned with the transplantation of different organs. The first meetings of some of these advisory groups have already taken place. Advice they gave is being taken into account in running the national organ distribution system.

Community Care

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to set national standards for community care;

(2) if he will extend the principle of the citizens charter to include the setting of national standards for community care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for individual authorities to set standards on the service which should be provided. Extensive national guidance and advice is available to help them do this.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors will be taken into consideration in deciding the level of funding for community care in each local authority area.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It will be for each local authority to decide the appropriate level of funding for community care in its area, taking account of the available resources. The Government will take a view in the next local authority expenditure round of what is appropriate and affordable for the totality of local authority expenditure, having obtained the views of the local authority associations. This will include the sums to be transferred from the social security system to local authorities for community care. The White Paper, "Caring for people", set out the factors which will be taken into account in calculating those sums. Each social services authority receives a standard spending assessment (SSA) for personal social services comprising three separate elements namely services for children, the elderly and other adults. The way in which SSAs are currently calculated, including the factors taken into account, is set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), a copy of which is available in the Library. The Government will shortly be having formal discussions with the local authority associations on whether any changes will be needed to the method of calculation of SSAs to take account of local authorities' new responsibilities for community care.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to make available ring-fenced funds for community care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Presciption Charges

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage change in the level of prescription charges between 1979 and 1991.

Mrs Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on 5 November at column *99*.

Health Authority Membership

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names, occupations and addresses of the chairmen and members of *(a)* the Northern regional health authority, *(b)* Sunderland health authority, *(c)* Hartlepool health authority and *(d)* Durham health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The names of the chairman and members of the Northern regional health authority, and the chairmen of Sunderland, Hartlepool and Durham health authorities, are given in the table. Information concerning district health authority members may be

obtained from the regional health authority. Up-to-date information about the occupations of health authority chairmen and members is not held centrally.

It is not our policy to give the private addresses of members of health authorities.

Northern RHA
Chairman: Mr. P. D. Carr CBE.
Non-executive members: Mr. A. G. Brown, Prof. Rawlins, Mr. P. H. Reay, Mr. B. C. Spoor (and one vacancy);
Executive members: Prof. L. J. Donaldson, Mr. A. Doran, Mr. T. G. Smith.

Sunderland HA
Chairman: Mr. F. S. Cronin.

Hartlepool HA
Chairman: Cllr. Mr. B. Hanson OBE.

Durham HA
Chairman: Prof. J. I. Clarke JP.

Cancer

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will obtain a copy of the report entitled "From the Billboard to the Playground" published by the Cancer Research Campaign on the effect advertising has on children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I understand that a copy of this report was sent to every Member of the House.

Private Medical Insurance

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of the privately insured population who also use national health service facilities for the majority of their hospital stays.

Mr. Dorrell: No such estimate has been made.

Nurses' Grading

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the policies of Her Majesty's Government on regrading for nurses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A new grading structure for clinical nursing and midwifery staff was agreed by the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council (NMNC) in 1988, and staff were regraded on the basis of the new structure. Appeals against regrading decisions are being dealt with under agreed procedures, and the NMNC is currently considering whether any changes can be made to those procedures in order to expedite the hearing of appeals. I understand that the management side of the NMNC has no current plans to propose any changes to the grading structure itself.

Operating Theatre Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the ratio of trained theatre staff to patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is not available centrally in the format requested.

The number of trained theatre staff for whom information is held is shown in the table. The provisional number of in-patient and day cases treated in hospitals in 1990-91 (finished consultant episodes) for all acute specialities was 7,014,000.

Trained Theatre Staff working wholly or partly in Theatres
Hospital Medical and Dental staff at 30 September 1990 (England)

Specialty	*Number*	*WTE*
General Surgery	3,786	3,522·8
Cardio-thoracic Surgery	368	352·5
Otolaryngology	1,135	943·4
Neurosurgery	258	246·2
Opthalmology	1,551	1,155·7
Paediatric Surgery	135	127·6
Plastic Surgery	285	258·8
Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgery	2,444	2,199·2
Urology	537	500·3
Cardiology	560	437·3
Paediatrics	2,603	2,316·2
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	3,409	2,814·9
Anaesthetics	5,047	4,497·4
Radiology	1,663	1,552·0
Radiotherapy	522	451·2
Histopathology	952	839·5
Oral Surgery	1,111	719·9
Total of above specialties	26,366	22,934·9

Hospital Non-Medical staff at 30 September 1990 (1)

	Number	*WTE (2)*
Qualified Nurses	12,410	10,880
Grand Total	38,776	33,814·9

Note: (1) Technical staff (including Operating Assistants (ODAs) and Perfusionists) play an important role in operating theatres but are not identified separately on statistical returns.
(2) All figures are independently rounded to the nearest 10.
Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower.

HIV and AIDS

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions the Chief Medical Officer has given port medical inspectors with regard to incoming foreigners who have, or are suspected of having, HIV or AIDS.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department reissued guidance to port medical inspectors of health in the form of an executive letter (PL/CMO(91)15) in October 1991. A copy of which is available in the Library.

The guidance provides information for port medical inspectors of health on the action to take should the immigration service ask for a report upon a passenger seeking entry to the United Kingdom who has, or is suspected to have, AIDS or other illnesses associated with HIV infection.

The guidance informs port medical inspectors of health that HIV infection (including AIDS) should not in itself be considered justification for a recommendation on public health grounds to refuse leave to enter the United Kingdom. It provides information on how the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Amendment Regulations 1988 apply to HIV and AIDS services. It seeks to ensure that confidentiality is maintained where a passenger with HIV infection is referred to a port medical inspector.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the conclusion of his Department's report on AIDS and life insurance on whether people are

deterred from having an HIV test or counselling by the nature of the questions asked by life insurance companies on proposal forms; what representations he has made to the life insurance companies on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs Virginia Bottomley: The report by the British Market Research Bureau jointly commissioned by the Government and the Association of British Insurers, concluded that thousands and possibly tens of thousands of people were put off taking an HIV test because of the questions on insurance proposal forms. We recognise that the insurance industry requires information for risk assessment, but believe that this can be obtained in ways which do not deter people from seeking testing or help. Discussion of this important matter is continuing with the Association of British Insurers.

Teenage Mothers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year from 1980 to 1990 the number of illegitimate births by year to teenage mothers by age.

Mr. Dorrell: The numbers of births outside marriage to women aged 19 and under in the United Kingdom for the years 1980-1990 were as follows:

	Age of mother at birth					
Year	*15 and under*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*	*Total under 20*
1980	1,418	3,527	7,040	8,553	8,544	29,082
1981	1,276	3,668	6,808	9,056	8,943	29,751
1982	1,306	3,628	7,607	9,719	10,249	32,509
1983	1,397	3,807	7,715	10,212	11,243	34,374
1984	1,469	4,059	8,529	11,156	12,303	37,516
1985	1,544	4,408	9,328	12,719	13,829	41,828
1986	1,517	4,442	9,907	13,840	15,345	45,051
1987	1,458	4,622	10,099	14,906	16,655	47,740
1988	1,444	4,764	11,018	15,355	18,034	50,615
1989	1,472	4,549	10,417	15,435	17,502	49,375
1990	1,454	4,454	10,590	15,295	18,716	50,509

Artificial Sweeteners

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of adverse reactions to the artificial sweetener Aspartame have been reported by Nutrasweet since 1983.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Nutrasweet company has submitted to this Department anecdotal complaints from consumers in the United Kingdom of adverse reactions to the artificial sweetener Aspartame on a quarterly basis since the end of 1988.

Nineteen complaints have been received. The symptoms reported by UK consumers are generally mild in nature and range from sickness and headache to depression, all of which are common in the general population.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the official engagements for each Minister in his Department for Wednesday 18 September 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Two of the Department's Ministers were on holiday that day. The other two had a number of official engagements.

Birth Control

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of the three pilot studies set up in 1986 to evaluate voluntary organisations such as the Brook advisory centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department financed three family planning and pregnancy counselling projects for young people under 25 in three separate health districts. The aim of the projects was to help to reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy among young people. The projects were independently evaluated by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and a report of the findings was published in November 1991. The report titled "Family Planning and Pregnancy Counselling Projects for Young People" provides a valuable contribution to the current family planning debate. Copies are available in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research was instituted by Her Majesty's Government before they introduced hospital trusts and other reforms within the national health service review.

Mr. Dorrell: Since the publication of the White Paper "Working for Patients" in January 1989, there has been considerable work going on throughout the national health service to develop all the proposals contained in it into practical actions. We have always made clear that in implementing the reforms we are aiming for steady incremental progress over a number of years, informed by the lessons of experience.

Accidental Injury

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people die on average, per day, from accidental injury; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1990, the latest year available, there were recorded 9,848 accidental deaths due to injuries in England and Wales (excluding accidental poisoning and surgical and medical misadventures). This represents, on average, 27 deaths per day.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the number of vehicles and staff available for 999 calls in the London ambulance service for the period 1 October to 31 December 1991, per shift.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. James Harris, the chairman of the London ambulance service for details.

Hormone Replacement

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for health if he will list preparations currently in use in hormone replacement treatment in which two or more drugs are currently packaged as one item together with the proportion of prescriptions *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area which specified *(i)* both or all the constituent items and *(ii)* only one of the constituent items in each of the past five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The preparations currently used in hormone replacement treatment in which two or more drugs are packaged as one item are given in the table:

Cyclo-Progynova
Estrapak 50
Trisequens
Trisequens Forte
Prempak-C
Nuvelle
Syntex Menophase

Information on the proportion of prescriptions on which different numbers of ingredients are listed is not available.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the items currently in common use by GPs or consultants for which more than one prescription charge is made under current legislation and regulations but which are currently packaged as one item by the manufacturers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A prescription charge is payable in respect of each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed, unless the patient is exempt. In the case of items supplied in a combination pack, therefore, each separate item carries a separate prescription charge. The fact that for convenience two or more individual preparations may be supplied in one pack does not alter the patient's liability for prescription charges.

Unless the patient is otherwise exempt, or holds a valid prepayment certificate, the following items in common use attract more than one prescription charge when supplied against a NHS prescription:

Betadine Pessaries with Applicator and VC Kit
Betadine Vaginal Gel with Applicator and VC Kit
Canesten Duopak
Cyclo-Progynora Combination Pack Tablets
Daktarin Twin Pack
Diprosone Duopack
Ecostatin Twin Pack
Estrapak 50
Flagyl Compak
Gyno-Daktarin Combipack
Gyno-Pevaryl 1 CP Pack
Gyno-Pavaryl 150 Combipack
Lasix + K Combination Pack Tablets
Migraleve Tablets Duo Pack
Migralift Tablets Duo Pack
Napratec Combination Pack Tablets
Nuvelle Tablets
Nystan Triple Pack
Pabrinex Intramuscular High Potency
Pabrinex Intramuscular Maintenance
Pabrinex Intravenous High Potency
Parentrovite Intramuscular High Potency
Parentrovite Intramuscular Maintenance
Parentrovite Intravenous High Potency
Pranavite Slim Diet Plan
Prempak-C Combination Pack Tablets 0·625 mg
Prempak-C Combination Pack Tablets 1·25 mg
Syntex Menophase Combination Pack Tablets
Trisequens
Uvistat Pro-Ski Pack

Sickle Cell Disease

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training general practitioners receive in the control of pain and the nature of sickle cell crises.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* Responsibility for the curriculum for undergraduate medical education rests with the General Medical Council and the Universities. We would expect haematology, pain control and the role of counselling and screening in genetic disease to be covered during the undergraduate syllabus. General practitioner training is decided by the trainer and trainee on the basis of the needs of the trainee and delivered either through direct tuition from the trainer or from formal vocational training sessions. Advice is readily available to general practitioners from local consultant haematologists who can involve other colleagues with expertise in relevant areas such as pain control. The Standing Medical Advisory Committee working party on sickle cell disease includes a general practitioner and so will be able to consider this aspect of treatment.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on sickle cell and thalassaemia services; and what representations he has received about these services; (2) what action he has taken to ensure that people with sickle cell disease and thalassaemia, and carriers, have access to appropriate services; and what guidance has been issued to district health authorities; (3) if he will adopt the 10-point charter on sickle cell and thalassaemia drafted by sickle cell and thalassaemia organisations with community health councils and other user representatives.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* The Government are fully aware of the importance of sickle cell and thalassaemia services. We aim to ensure that a good standard of service is provided by health authorities and others interested in the support and care of people with these conditions and their families. The deliberations of the working party of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee which will meet in the new year will provide a useful basis for developing service further.

The Department is currently providing section 64 funding to the sickle cell (£35,000) and United Kingdom thalassaemia (£28,000) societies. Funding is to help in the provision of information and education material for sufferers and their families, the health care profession and the wider general public, including teachers and employers of the effect which sickle cell anaemia or thalassaemia can have on the lives of those affected. Funding has also been provided to assist in the production of a video aimed at teaching children about sickle cell disease, and for one on thalassaemia featuring an Asian family and dubbed in various Asian languages. It is hoped that the former will be useful for teachers whilst the Asian language video will be a useful source of information and a teaching aid for people of Asian orgin.

Health authorities are responsible for ensuring that appropriate services are provided to meet the needs of their resident populations, including those with sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia. Evidence from health authorities suggests that genetic screening and counselling facilities are available in those areas where the local population is likely to be susceptible to haemoglobinopathies. Counsellors give advice on services for patients as well as often being the link with local authorities on housing and other problems. The recommendations in the 10-point charter are primarily for consideration by health and local authorities, taking account of advice from health care professionals and other interested bodies.

Regional Health Authorities (Revenue Allocation)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce regional health authorities' revenue allocations for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 19 December 1991, column 262-63]:* Regional health authorities have now been formally notified of their 1992-93 allocations for cash-limited general medical services. The equivalent 1991-92 figures published previously were provisional; the table has now been updated to include final 1991-92 allocations for comparative purposes and is as follows:

GMS cash-limited allocations 1992-93

	Allocation 1991-92[1] £ million	Allocation 1992-93 £ million	Real growth per cent.
Northern	33·268	36·414	4·74
Yorkshire	44·481	47·237	1·62
Trent	55·422	59·193	2·20
East Anglian	32·520	34·427	1·31
North West Thames	44·837	48·657	3·85
North East Thames	44·556	48·688	4·57
South East Thames	47·407	51·144	3·24
South West Thames	36·915	39·865	3·34
Wessex	38·904	41·552	2·21
Oxford	34·349	36·627	2·04
South Western	49·468	52·886	2·31
West Midlands	54·250	59·060	4·18
Mersey	28·566	30·208	1·19
North Western	39·094	42·717	4·56
Total	584·039	628·675	3·01

[1] Figures in this column do not sum to the total because of roundings.

SCOTLAND

Training

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for *(a)* employment training and *(b)* youth training in each of the years since 1988-89, and for 1992-93 and 1993-94 the *(i)* total outturn expenditure of estimated planned expenditure in both cash and real terms and *(ii)* the total number of planned and filled places in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Decisions about the allocation of planned provision for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for 1992-93 and 1993-94 to specific budget blocks have not yet been taken. Figures for 1992-93 will be published in February 1992 in the departmental report for the departments of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Information for previous years is set out in the tables.

Expenditure £ million

	1988-89 Outturn	1989-90 Outturn	1990-91 Provisional Outturn	1991-92 Estimate
Youth Training (cash)	[1]102	[1]100	[1]83	[2]103
Youth Training (1991-92 cash prices)[3]	126	116	89	103
Employment Training (cash)	[1]134	[1]111	[1]106	[2]102
Employment Training (1991-92 cash prices)[3]	166	129	113	102

Youth Training Places	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Total number of planned places[4]	51,976	50,268	38,862	37,469
Total number of filled places[4]	46,417	45,268	34,301	[6]—

Employment Training Places	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92
Total number of planned places[5]	41,473	28,931	25,544	18,555
Total number of filled places[5]	21,215	26,380	22,234	[6]—

[1] These figures are taken from "The Government Expenditure Plans: 1991-92 to 1993-94: Employment Department Group" (Table 6.5).
[2] These figures are taken from Supply Estimates 1991-92 Class XV Scotland Vote 3.
[3] The figures expressed at 1991-92 cash prices are derived by applying the GDP deflator to the figures for previous years.
[4] Youth Training places are calculated on the basis of trainee weeks; the figures shown represent the average number of young people in training per week.
[5] The Employment Training places information provided gives the planned and actual numbers in training at 31 March for each of the financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90, the planned average number in training for 1990-91 and 1991-92 and the actual average number in training for 1990-91.
[6] Not yet available.

Liver Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to commence a liver transplant centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I expect to be able to make an announcement on this subject shortly.

Hospital Beds (Highland Region)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the weekly cost of a bed for care of the elderly in (a) Highland health board as a whole and (b) Skye.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The weekly cost per bed for care of the elderly, excluding the elderly with dementia, in Highland health board's area is £499. The equivalent cost in Skye is £418.

Brittania Life Assurance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance, other facilities and resources were given to Britannia Life Assurance when the company obtained premises within the Inverclyde enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No assistance was offered to Britannia Life Assurance in respect of premises within Inverclyde enterprise zone. However, assistance was previously offered to Crusader Insurance in respect of these premises, under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. My officials are considering carefully the status of this assistance.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advance notice and information he was given by the Britannia Life Assurance concerning the decision to vacate the company's premises in the Inverclyde enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My Department was given less than two days notice by Britannia Life Assurance in advance of that company's announcement.

Poll Tax

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his Department's estimates of how much local authorities have spent on publicity and advertising in connection with the poll tax.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The costs of publicity and advertising are not separately identified in local authorities' returns to the Scottish Office of their expenditure on administering the community charge system.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the respects in which the provisions in Scotland for the disposal of fallen and diseased animals diverge from those applying in the EC for *(a)* animal health and food hygiene and *(b)* the environment with particular reference to the possible pollution of water resources through on-farm burial and how it is monitored.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Directive 90/667/EEC requires the carcases of fallen animals and those killed in the context of disease control measures to be disposed of by rendering, burning or proper burial. By means of a derogation the directive also permits the continuation of the traditional knacker trade until 1995 at least. The same disposal arrangements apply to such carcases in Scotland. Water pollution is monitored by the river purification authorities and it is an offence to dispose of animal carcases in a manner which causes such pollution.

Sheriffs

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were *(a)* the total number of full-time sheriffs and *(b)* the numbers of newly appointed full-time sheriffs in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The full-time shrieval complement and the number of new appointments over the period 1986-1991 are set out in the table:

Year	*Initial complement*	*Final complement*	*New appointments*
1987	90	93	3
1988	93	95	5
1989	95	97	4
1990	97	97	4
1991	97	99	5

Holyrood Palace

Mr. Wilson To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the recent attempted break-in at Holyrood palace; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There has been no recent attempted break-in at the palace of Holyroodhouse. On 28 June 1991 the security system at the palace detected that an intruder had gained access to the palace grounds and I received a full report on the incident at the time from the chief constable of Lothian and Borders police.

Student Statistics

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the Government projections for student numbers in Scotland to the year 2000 based on the assumptions used in paragraph 2.4 of "Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge" (Cm 114).

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 November 1991]:* Information in the exact form requested is not available. Projections for student numbers in higher education in Scotland to the year 2000 are given in the "Statistical Bulletin: Higher Education Projections for Scotland (1991) (No Edn/J1/1991/13)" a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of days in each of the last five years when duties in the sheriff courts in Scotland were carried out by temporary sheriffs; and what plans he has to appoint additional sheriffs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of temporary sheriff days provided in each of the last five years to enable the courts to deal timeously with increasing workloads is given in the table:

	Temporary Sheriff Days Provided
1987	1,982
1988	2,855
1989	4,046
1990	4,236
1991	5,109

The need for additional full-time sheriffs is kept under constant review.

Scottish National Heritage

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which organisations, including voluntary conservation organisations, he consulted before appointing the members of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend sought the views of a wide range of relevant organisations, including national voluntary conservation organisations, before appointing the members of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the cost to Scottish Natural Heritage of establishing its own science division in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Natural Heritage will have a research and advisory services directorate to provide advice based on commissioned and in-house research for the formulation of policy and the management of the natural heritage. The directorate will be formed in part from the merger of the research and development divisions of the Countryside Commission Scotland and the Nature Conservancy Council Scotland; its costs will be met from within the allocated grant-in-aid.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the likely cost of management agreements in respect of sites of special scientific interest in Scotland in 1992-93.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The cost of management agreements will emerge as they are negotiated and concluded by Scottish Natural Heritage. It will be contained within the budget provided through grant in aid by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes to take if the cost of management agreements on sites of special scientific interest exceeds the amount allowed for in the budget of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: Scottish Natural Heritage is required to manage its budget and determine its priorities in paying management agreements on sites of special scientific interest. I do not expect Scottish Natural Heritage to exceed its budget.

Scottish National Liberation Army

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the activities of the Scottish National Liberation Army.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Government deplore any action by any subversive organisation which seeks to undermine the democratic process.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations have been made to the Irish Government in connection with persons purporting to represent the Scottish National Liberation Army.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: There have been no recent representations made to the Irish Government.

School Buildings

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the value of section 94 consents for school buildings in constant and cash price terms since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Local authorities in Scotland receive an allocation of consent to incur capital expenditure on schools, further education colleges and community education buildings. Within their overall level of consent, they are free to determine which educational building projects will proceed. I refer the hon. member to the answer given on 6 December 1991.

Lockerbie Bombing

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the charges against Libyans accused in relation to the Lockerbie bombing were first ready in the Crown Office.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The charges against Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed Al Megrahi and Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah were ready in their final form in the Crown Office on 12 November 1991.

Student Statistics

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the Government projections for student numbers in Scotland to the year 2000 based on the assumptions used in paragraph 2.4 of "Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge" (Cm 114).

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 November 1991]:* Information in the exact form requested is not available. Projections for student numbers in higher education in Scotland to the year 2000 are given in the "Statistical Bulletin: Higher Education Projections for Scotland (1991) (No Edn/J1/1991/13)" a copy of which is available in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 14 January 1992

TRANSPORT

Speed Limits

Mr. Peter Botomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the European Commission added speed limits to the draft directive on speed limiters.

Mr. Chope: The proposal for fitment of speed limiters to certain vehicles (Document 8046/91), including the speeds at which the limiters should be set, was sent by the Commission to the Council on 31 July 1991 and to member states on 11 September 1991.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) on what date the European Commission's speed limit proposal was communicated to *(a)* the Economic and Social Committee, *(b)* trade unions and *(c)* employers for their comments and advice;

(2) when, and by what procedure, the European Parliament considered the European Commission's speed limit proposal.

Mr. Chope: The proposed EC directive on the fitment of speed limiters (Document 8046/91) was communicated to the European Parliament and to the Economic and Social Committee on 22 August 1991. My hon. Friend will note that this was about three weeks earlier than the communication to member states. The European Parliament gave its opinion on 13 December, and the Economic and Social Committee gave its opinion on 27 November. Both supported the principle of the proposal. The proposal was not formally communicated by the Commission to trade unions for comment, but both employers and employees interests are represented in the membership of the Economic and Social Committee.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate has been provided by the European Commission of the benefit in reduced numbers of crashes or reduced severity of injuries of the draft directive involving speed limiters.

Mr. Chope: The Commission proposal on the fitment of speed limiters (Document 8046/91) did not provide estimates of reduced numbers of accidents or severity of injuries.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the environmental benefits of reducing speed limits.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* A reduction in speed limits would produce benefits only if it resulted in lower vehicle speeds. The principal environmental benefit of lower speed is a reduction in emissions. This is true of both motor vehicles and trains.

CrossRail

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when it is proposed to commence construction of CrossRail.

Mr. Rifkind: As announced by the joint London Underground/British Rail CrossRail project team on 23 December, a review carried out by the Department of Transport and the operators recently concluded that the Private parliamentary Bill deposited last November would probably not be passed until late 1994. Construction might then be expected to begin in the financial year 1995-96, subject of course to the provision of resources.

National Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what developments have occurred in the former scheme ports since the abolition of the national dock labour scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since abolition, there has been 50 per cent. net reduction in the number of dockworkers in ex-scheme ports. Non-scheme ports, too, have had to review their working arrangements. Flexible working agreements, and the end of restrictive practices, are reported to have led, in some places, to 50 to 100 per cent. improvement in productivity. Management effort is no longer absorbed in industrial relations problems and it can concentrate on giving a better, cheaper service to customers. The competition among ports to provide faster turnround, at lower rates, benefits the whole economy as it prepares to enter the single European market. Trade has revived in major ports. For example, Hull has reopened its container terminal and the Alexandra dock. Prospects for attracting private capital and new industrial developments have improved, now that ports are free from the restrictions of the scheme. This investment will bring further benefits to the economy.

Ivanhoe Railway Service

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proposed Ivanhoe passenger railway service from Leicester through South Derbyshire to Burton-on-Trent and Derby.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* I am delighted that we are able to give the go-ahead to the Ivanhoe line project, which will mean the restoration of local train services over the lines between Loughborough, Leicester, Burton-on-Trent and Derby, and will involve the opening or reopening of 16 stations.

It will provide an economic boost to the Leicestershire and Derbyshire communities through which the line passes and at the same time it should help ease peak traffic congestion in Leicester.

The resources we are making available to this £16 million project (including a £5 million grant) will allow work to commence in 1992-93, and it is expected to take about three years to complete.

This project is another demonstration of the Government's faith in rail as a means of local transport and is part of a continuing trend in railway development in the United Kingdom.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Sunday Trading

Mr. Michael: To ask the Attorney-General if he will seek powers to challenge the ruling of the courts that any local authority seeking to enforce United Kingdom legislation on Sunday trading will have to give an undertaking to pay the losses of the defendant in the event of that legislation being found to be in contravention of the treaty of Rome.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to seek the powers referred to by the hon. Member. I assume that he is referring to the recent decision of the Court of Appeal in *Kirklees borough council* v *Wickes Building Supplies Ltd* in which it was held that the Council was required to give a cross-undertaking in damages when seeking, by means of an interlocutory injunction, to enforce the Shops Act 1950. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on this decision because it is shortly to be appealed to the House of Lords.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Social Fund Manual

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to review the format of the social fund manual.

Mr. Hanley: A revised social fund manual has just been published. The new manual consists of a series of smaller, easier to use guides and booklets which distinguish clearly between directions-guidance to social fund officers and procedural-administrative instructions. The opportunity has been taken to amend social fund direction 16 in line with Government policy that, as a general rule, students should not be funded through social security benefits. During term-time or vacations full-time students will be eligible for crisis loans in future only to alleviate the consequences of a disaster. Copies of the revised social fund manual have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Business Rates, Southend

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that all outstanding appeals against business rate valuations in Southend will be heard by the end of June 1992.

Mr. Heseltine: Responsibility for business rate appeals rests with valuation and community charge tribunals, which are independent bodies. The Essex (South) tribunal had 8,500 appeals outstanding against the 1990 list as at 30 November. Some 2,000 of these were in respect of properties in Southend. The prioritisation and timing of cases is a matter for the tribunal and I have no formal power to intervene. My Department nevertheless wrote to tribunals in England last June urging them to progress 1990 list appeals as quickly as possible.

Conservation Areas

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he now proposes to revise the guidance given in circular 8/87 regarding demolition of industrial buildings in conservation areas.

Mr. Yeo: Yes. My Department will be consulting local authority associations and other interested parties about a revised version of the circular in the spring.

Coventry Council (Finances)

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage change in the total external support for Coventry city council between financial years 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo: On the basis of the proposals put before the House on 26 November Coventry city council would have an increase in total external support of 6·9 per cent. between 1991-92 and 1992-93. It is intended that the final details for 1992-93 will be announced later this month.

"Age File The Facts"

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain a copy of Anchor's report, "Age File The Facts" for his departmental library.

Mr. Heseltine: The departmental library already has a copy.

Sheltered Housing

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the role of sheltered housing in community care.

Mr. Yeo: Social services authorities will be responsible for community care assessments and are required to consult other agencies, including housing authorities, when drawing up their community care plans to meet the needs of their area. Similarly, housing authorities should consult social services authorities in preparing their own housing investment strategies each year. When making individual assessments for community care, social services authorities will be expected to involve the housing authority whenever an individual's assessment indicates a possible housing need.

Not everyone who is assessed under the new community care arrangements will be in need of housing, there will be a majority who will be able to go on living in their existing homes with suitable domiciliary care or, perhaps, custom adaptations. Indeed the aim of community care is to allow people to stay in their existing homes wherever possible. Local authorities are able to award mandatory disabled facilities grants for essential adaptations where an applicant qualifies for help under the test of resources. Discretionary grants may also be available for other adaptations, including minor works assistance for the elderly.

Where it is not possible for a person to stay in their own home it will be for social services in consultation with housing authorities to decide on the best way of meeting that person's needs. That may be in some form of sheltered housing. Sheltered housing will therefore be one of a range of housing options available.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department intends to issue regulations limiting the size of performance bonds that local authorities can require of contractors, with regard to compulsory competitive tendering; and whether he intends to consult with local authorities before issuing such regulations.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend will consider, in the light of responses to paragraphs 1.21 and 1.29 of the consultation paper "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services", whether, and if so, how, he should use his powers in clause 9 of the Local Government Bill, in relation to performance bonds. He will consult the local authority associations before using these powers.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) for how many services which his Department is currently considering as candidates for compulsory competitive tendering he intends to introduce de minimis provisions; what levels of de minimis will be set; and whether he intends to consult local authorities on this matter;

(2) What advice his Department received with regard to the extension of compulsory competitive tendering on the issue of de minimis from PA Consulting Group; and what criteria will be used to determine de minimis levels.

Mr. Portillo: PA Consulting Group reported to my Department, the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office last year on the feasibility of extending compulsory competitive tendering. That report is not being published.

The question of whether there should be a level of activity below which the requirements for compulsory competitive tendering should not apply, and if so how that level will be defined, will be considered in the light of responses to the consultation document "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services". I would expect to consult the local authority associations before defining any such level.

City of Birmingham (Bankers)

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the tendering procedures adopted by the city of Birmingham in appointing its bankers.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* The tendering procedure adopted by an authority in appointing its bankers is a matter for it and for its auditor. Questions as to compliance with such procedures, which would be contained in the authority's standing orders and financial regulations, are for the authority's monitoring officer, appointed under section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and may be referred to the authority's auditor. Both the monitoring officer and the auditor have statutory responsibilities in relation to the legality and propriety of an authority's decisions.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Remand Prisoners, Durham

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average period of time remand prisoners are held in Durham prison before being brought to trial in the last two years for which figures are available;

(2) how many people are currently held on remand in police cells in the county of Durham.

Mrs. Rumbold: On Friday 10 January, two unconvicted prisoners, both under the age of 21, were held in police cells in the Durham constabulary area.

Information on the average length of time served by prisoners in Durham prison who are remanded in custody is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Prosecution of Juveniles

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was, for each year since 1980, the percentage of cases brought against juveniles in which a conviction was secured;

(2) what has been the number of cases in each year since 1980 in which police identified a juvenile or juveniles as having committed offences but in which *(a)* the case was not brought to court or *(b)* the prosecution withdrew the case or offered no evidence or *(c)* the case was dismissed by the court.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not collected centrally on the number of juvenile offenders identified by the police, for whom no court proceedings were taken. Information in the following tables show (A) the percentage of cases brought against juveniles where a conviction was secured; and (B) the number of juveniles proceeded against at magistrates courts where the case was either dismissed or withdrawn. 1990 data is not yet available.

Table A

Number and percentage of juveniles (persons aged 10 to under 17) prosecuted at magistrates' courts and convicted at all courts of indictable offences 1980-89

England and Wales

Year	*Total proceeded against (= 100 per cent.)*	*Total found guilty (number)*	*Total found guilty [1](per cent.)*
1980	98,000	90,000	92
1981	95,000	87,000	91
1982	90,000	82,000	91
1983	82,000	73,000	90
1984	78,000	70,000	89
1985	71,000	63,000	88
1986	57,000	48,000	84
1987	53,000	42,000	79
1988	48,000	36,000	77
1989	37,000	26,000	72

[1] Percentages based on actual figures.

Table B

Number of juveniles (persons aged 10 to under 17) proceeded against at magistrates' courts for indictable offences where the charges were withdrawn or dismissed 1980-1989
England and Wales

Year	Total proceeded against	Charge withdrawn	Charge dismissed
1980	98,000	2,000	4,000
1981	95,000	3,000	4,000
1982	90,000	3,000	4,000
1983	82,000	3,000	3,000
1984	78,000	4,000	3,000
1985	71,000	4,000	3,000
1986	57,000	5,000	2,000
1987	53,000	6,000	2,000
1988	48,000	6,000	2,000
1989	37,000	5,000	2,000

Magistrates Courts (Delays)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what measures he is taking to reduce delays in proceedings in magistrates courts.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The problem of delays is a complex one which needs to be tackled in a variety of ways and which requires the active co-operation of all criminal justice agencies. Amonst the measures recently taken or now in hand to bring about reduction in delays are

the introduction of powers to enable magistrates courts to remand for up to 28 days, which should reduce unnecessary court hearings and encourage effective case management;

a major programme of training, arranged by the Home Office in conjunction with the magistrates courts service, directed to helping court clerks to develop practical clerking skills and a proactive approach to the management of court business;

the issue in July 1991 of best practice guidance on listing of cases, supplementing earlier guidance on the best use of court clerk time;

the encouragement and monitoring of pre-trial reviews on an experimental basis in selected magistrates' courts;

action to follow up the report of the working group on pre-trial issues, as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General on 11 November, in which the magistrates courts service will be asked to play its full part;

the start of direct data exchange between magistrates courts and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, to be extended in due course to all magistrates courts, which should reduce the time needed to obtain licensing information as well as reducing handling costs;

the development of national targets for improvements in performance, as part of the development of the magistrates courts management information system.

These are all important initiatives which we hope will contribute to speedier and more effective local justice.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Textile Industry

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make an announcement on the RETEX scheme to help areas hit by decline of the textile industries.

Mr. Leigh: On 20 December the European Commission agreed a draft proposal for a RETEX scheme on which it will invite comments from member states and the European Parliament in the coming weeks. I have not yet received the draft proposal. The Government will naturally seek to ensure the maximum effective coverage of United Kingdom textile areas.

National Telephone Codes

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *205*, if he will list those organisations which have expressed concern about the time allowed for the 1994 changes in national telephone codes.

Mr. Redwood: The Director General of Telecommunications, who is responsible for numbering, has not taken a final decision on the transitional period for implementation of the national code change in 1994. I have asked the Director General to write to the hon. Member giving further information concerning the transitional arrangements and any representations he may have received.

Plugs

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will introduce regulations to require the fitting of plugs to all electrical equipment before the point of sale.

Mr. Leigh: As part of a review of the Plugs and Sockets Etc (Safety) Regulations 1987, my Department is currently considering whether legislative controls should be introduced requiring the fitting of plugs to domestic electrical appliances before they are supplied to the consumer.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will institute an inquiry into the profit margins of hearing aid manufacturers; and if he will discuss the prices of non-national health service hearing aids with the organisations of and for disabled people.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* No. It is the responsibility of the Director General of Fair Trading to monitor commercial activities affecting consumers. He may conduct an inquiry to establish whether there are sufficient grounds for formal investigation under competition legislation. If the right hon. Member has information that suggests there are anti-competitive practices, he should bring it to the attention of the Director General.

PRIME MINISTER

Constituencies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards equalising the size of parliamentary constituencies; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: When conducting a review of parliamentary constituencies, the parliamentary boundary commissions are required to give effect to the rules set out in schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, which include a requirement that constituency electorates should be as close as practicable to the electoral quota for that part of the United Kingdom.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Bank of England

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the relevant primary and secondary legislation governing relations with the Bank of England.

Mr. Maples: Principal legislation governing relations between the Treasury and Bank of England includes the Bank Charter Act 1844, the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1866, the Currency and Bank Notes Act 1928, the Bank of England Act 1946, the Currency and Bank Notes Act 1954, the National Loans Act 1968, the Currency Act 1983 and the Banking Act 1987. The Bank of England Charter of 1946 is also of relevance.

I regret that to compile a comprehensive list of relevant legislation in all fields would involve a disproportionate expenditure of time and resources.

Trade Deficit

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom's current trade deficit.

Mr. Mellor: The information may be found in table 1 of the monthly press notice on the current account of the balance of payments, published on 23 December 1991, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

British Telecommunications plc

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on the outcome of the Government's sale of part of its residual shareholding in British Telecommunications plc.

Mr. Maude: As I announced on 9 December at column 299, Her Majesty's Treasury made a total of 1,050 million shares available to applicants in the United Kingdom public offer and 525 million shares to bidders in the international tender offer. In addition, S G Warburg Securities had the option to acquire further shares from Her Majesty's Treasury, up to a maximum of 118·125 million shares, for the purpose of meeting overallotments in the international tender offer.

On 7 January, S G Warburg Securities, as global co-ordinator for the sale, acquired a further 22·5 million shares from Her Majesty's Treasury, pursuant to this option. This brings to 547·5 million the total number of shares sold by Her Majesty's Treasury in the international tender offer and to 1,597·5 million the total size of the BT share sale.

The shares sold in the international tender offer were distributed across the 10 regional syndicates in the following proportions:

	Percentage
United Kingdom	63·6
United States	17·6
Japan	5·3
Switzerland	4·9
Rest of the World	2·6
France	1·5
Germany	1·4
Italy	1·4
Canada	1·1
Benelux	0·6
	100·0

Following the exercise of the option granted to the global co-ordinator, the Government will hold some 1,343·5 million shares in British Telecommunications plc (approximately 22 per cent. of the total currently in issue), before deducting any shares which may be needed to meet share bonus entitlements under the United Kingdom public offer.

Total gross proceeds from the sale of the offered shares amount to £5·43 billion, of which some £1·84 billion are received in this financial year.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has any proposals to raise the advisory cost limit of £250 for answering parliamentary questions.

Mr. Maples: Yes. The advisory limit was last increased in 1988 *Official Report* 14 March 1988 col. *429*. Its purpose is to act as a threshold for disproportionate cost PQs. Any written PQ where the marginal cost of preparing the answer is considered likely to exceed the threshold may be referred to the appropriate Minister and an answer may be refused in whole or in part on the ground of disproportionate cost. Alternatively the Minister may decide that the PQ is to be answered irrespective of cost.

This threshold applies to the marginal cost and not the full cost of a written PQ. For the marginal cost, the divisional costs of preparing the answer are estimated—i.e. the costs in divisions (without taking account of the standing cost of parliamentary branches). The fixed cost of staff accommodation is also excluded from this marginal cost calculation and this also contributes to ease of calculation in Departments.

When the threshold was last increased in 1988, the average marginal cost was £33 and the £250 threshold was a multiple of nearly eight times the average. A survey of costs in 1991 has shown that the average marginal cost of a written PQ is now £50. To reflect this the advisory limit is being raised today to £400 so that the same multiple of eight times the average will apply. There is no advisory cost limit for oral parliamentary questions.

Government Deficit and Debt

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the ratio, expressed as a percentage of *(a)* the actual Government deficit and *(b)* Government debt to the gross domestic product at then market prices in each year since 1970.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* There are a number of different ways of measuring the Government deficit and Government debt.

Presentation of the public sector finances in the United Kingdom is generally in terms of the public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR) and net public sector debt.

PSBR statistics on the basis requested were given in reply to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) on 2 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *38*. Figures for net public sector debt, which are available only from end-March 1975 onwards, are given in the table.

Net public sector debt as percentage of GDP[1]

	Per cent.
1975	61·00
1976	59·00
1977	57·75
1978	54·00
1979	50·75
1980	46·25
1981	47·75
1982	47·25
1983	46·25
1984	46·75
1985	47·00
1986	45·25
1987	42·75
1988	38·25
1989	32·00
1990	27·75
1991	27·25

[1] Stock of debt as at 31 March expressed as a percentage of GDP adjusted for the abolition of domestic rates in the year centred on that date.

Mortgage Rescue Proposals

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will specify the basis of his calculation that his mortgage rescue proposals will protect 40,000 households next year; and what information he has of the number of households facing repossession next year.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* Lenders themselves have estimated that the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on 19 December will prevent about 40,000 repossessions this year. They were previously expecting about 80,000 repossessions in 1992.

WALES

District Health Authorities

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to amalgamate the district health authorities in Wales to enable them to exercise greater purchasing power.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No.

Third Dee Crossing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will meet the Deeside Enterprise Trust to discuss traffic congestion, as it affects Deeside industrial park, and the need for a third Dee crossing;

(2) if he will meet the North Wales Confederation of British Industry to discuss the need for a third Dee crossing;

(3) if he will meet the North Wales Confederation of Engineering and other unions to discuss the need for a third Dee crossing.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 20 December at column *361*. The meeting arranged for 28 January will provide an opportunity to discuss all issues associated with the third Dee crossing scheme.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the figures offered or given by his Department to each hospital, unit or combination of units in Wales towards the cost of drawing up any application for trust status or any other ways of promoting a move to trust status.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A contribution of £50,000 was provided to Pembrokeshire health authority. As to elsewhere in Wales, those units recently invited to prepare applications to become NHS trusts in April 1993 are aware that financial assistance is available to help with the process. Any bids received will be considered on their individual merits.

Child Care

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his target for next year and for each of the next five years as to the percentage of children between the age of three and school age in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each county in Wales for whom he wishes to see child care provision from public funds.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Section 19 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on local social services authorities to review day care services for young children in their areas, including the level of public provision. Each local authority is required to conduct a review and to publish its results within a year of the Act's implementation (14 October 1991). Further reviews are to be undertaken at three-yearly intervals. Guidance to the authorities on the exercise of this review duty is contained in chapter 9 of volume 2 of "The Children Act: Guidance and Regulations—Family Support, Day Care and Educational Provision for Young Children."

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has made of the likely effects on Welsh sheep producers of the MacSharry proposals to reform the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The European Commission's CAP reform proposals would, if implemented as they stand, discriminate against producers in Wales. The proposed headage limits for the sheep annual premium would affect 15 per cent. of sheep in Wales compared with 3 per cent. in the European Community as a whole. I welcome the Commission's acceptance that reform is necessary but this must be on the basis of non-discrimination, budget discipline, control of surpluses and policies which are sensitive to the environment.

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet Mr. MacSharry, the EC Agricultural Commissioner, to discuss reform of the common agricultural policy and its effects on Welsh farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I met Commissioner MacSharry on 22 November when I explained very clearly how the Commission's CAP reform proposals would discriminate against producers in Wales. Mr. MacSharry fully understands my view of the impact of the Commission's proposals.

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many prescriptions have been issued in each of the last five years in each *(a)* county and *(b)* family practitioner committee area in Wales;

(2) what proportion of prescriptions issued in each county in Wales has been presented and made up in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on the number of prescriptions issued is not held centrally. However, the available information, which relates to the number of prescription items dispensed, is given in the following table:

FHSA/County	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Clwyd	3,568,306	3,732,356	3,895,369	4,051,926	4,139,001
Dyfed	2,889,105	3,002,168	3,160,223	3,312,823	3,428,631
Gwent	4,264,573	4,428,795	4,599,406	4,731,033	4,832,110
Gwynedd	2,179,284	2,274,807	2,366,711	2,445,512	2,514,387
Mid Glamorgan	5,755,127	5,969,138	6,183,330	6,293,534	6,409,798
Powys	871,922	912,978	963,371	1,005,597	1,039,585
South Glamorgan	3,434,925	3,584,344	3,725, 450	3,822,914	3,939,695
West Glamorgan	3,667,264	3,792,900	3,943,493	4,014,707	4,072,873

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what proportion of prescriptions in each *(a)* county and *(b)* family practitioner area in Wales the patient has been liable to make full payment in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is given in the following table:

Percentage of prescriptions bearing full charge

FHSA/County	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Clwyd	13·0	12·7	12·4	12·2	11·5
Dyfed	14·7	13·8	13·4	13·1	12·5
Gwent	13·3	12·7	12·5	12·2	11·5
Gwynedd	11·8	11·6	11·2	11·1	10·5
Mid Glamorgan	11·2	10·7	10·5	10·3	9·6
Powys	11·7	11·3	11·1	10·8	10·3
South Glamorgan	14·3	13·6	13·2	12·9	12·3
West Glamorgan	12·6	12·0	11·5	11·3	10·7

BBC Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes there will be in the pay and terms and conditions of employment of Dr. Gwyn Jones as chairman of the Welsh Development Agency subsequent to his appointment as chairman-elect of the BBC Wales board of governors.

Mr. David Hunt *[pursuant to his reply, 20 December 1991, col 360]:* I have considered with Dr. Jones what changes should be made to the terms and conditions of his employment in his capacity of chairman of the Welsh Development Agency (WDA).

Dr. Jones was originally appointed as chairrman of the WDA on the basis of a commitment of two and a half days a week. In June 1989 this was increased to four days a week so that he would be able to oversee the establishment of Welsh Development International and personally lead the drive for inward investment into Wales. Under his leadership, the last two and a half years has been a period of considerable achievement for Wales in inward investment and I congratulate Dr. Jones and his team on this. Dr. Jones has suggested that, as the foundations for continued success are now secure the time is now right for his commitment to the WDA to revert to the original basis of two and a half days a week and for his remuneration to revert from the current level of £64,975 pa to £40,610 pa. I have agreed. Other terms and conditions oif appointment will remain as at present.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Palace of Westminster (Visitors)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council what initiatives he intends to introduce to improve facilities for hon. Members' parties visiting Westminster.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* As I advised the hon. Member on 16 December, *Official Report* column 18, the Catering Sub-Committee is shortly to consider the results of a feasibility study to determine whether reasonable catering facilities for visitors can be provided in accommodation conveniently close to the Palace.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Missions

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley of

6 December, *Official Report*, column *261*, what is the reason in each case for the closure of diplomatic posts; what is the total financial saving; what representations he has received regarding the closure of any of the posts; whether any further consideration has been given to decisions in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All the posts listed in the reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley were closed in order to release resources for redeployment to meet new priorities.

I cannot give a figure for the total financial saving over the 10 years in question. But it would have cost in the region of £12·4 million this year to maintain these posts were they all still open. The savings realised have significantly helped us to maintain a global diplomatic presence, and to open some 10 new posts, despite the significant public expenditure pressures on the diplomatic service over the period. Closing any post is inevitably difficult and is never decided lightly. But it is right that resources should be redeployed to meet new challenges and priorities.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he has offered to the new Soviet commonwealth and to individual-republics in their programmes of dismantling nuclear weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our NATO allies have made it clear that we are ready to respond as fully as possible to requests for practical assistance in ensuring the safe, responsible and reliable control of nuclear weapons and preventing their proliferation.

Belize

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Government of Belize and *(b)* other interested parties regarding the policy surrounding the future of the British military garrison in Belize.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We keep the position of the British garrison in Belize under review and maintain a dialogue with the Government of Belize.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what entitlement to invalid care allowance currently exists for the claimant who provides regular and substantial care to two or more disabled people which does not extend to more than 35 hours for one individual; what proposals he has to review this entitlement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Caring that extends to less than 35 hours a week for one individual does not give entitlement to invalid care allowance. We shall continue to keep in mind the position of those who care for more than one person, each for less than 35 hours, when considering how available resources can best be used to meet the needs of carers.

Pension Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of current gross average earnings is represented in the United Kingdom and each European Community country by *(a)* the basic pension, *(b)* the earnings-related supplement and *(c)* the total state pension, for (i) a single pensioner and (ii) a pensioner with a dependent spouse of pension age, where the pensioner had been on average earnings during his working life.

Mr. Jack: There are no comparable statistics available on gross average earnings in the member states of the European Community. As a consequence, it is not possible to provide the pension comparisons requested. Information on the different EC pension schemes can be found in "Social Protection in The Member States of The Community" published by the European Commission, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on 10 December 1991 at column *377*, he will state whether the entitlement to indefinite payment of mobility allowance, attendance allowance or severe disablement allowance during residence in another member state of the European Community extends to *(a)* children, *(b)* adults who have never been able to work and *(c)* adults who have never been part of the work force; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Scott: The recent European Court of Justice decision in the case of Newton, which related to the exportability of benefits, does not extend to children or to people who have never worked in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on 10 December 1991 at column *377*, he will introduce regulations to enable people to retain entitlement to invalid care allowance during residence in another member state of the European Community for so long as the person they are caring for is entitled to attendance allowance; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Ex-drug Users

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines he has issued to the Benefits Agency regarding the priority to be given to rehabilitating ex-drug users in the allocation of community care grants to the homeless who are allocated unfurnished accommodation.

Mr. Scott: The Secretary of State issues general guidance to social fund officers in the form of the social fund officer's guide, which replaced the social fund manual in December 1991. A copy of this guidance is available in the Library. Area social fund officers (the managers of district DSS offices) also issue guidance which complements that in the social fund officer's guide taking account of local factors.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to the Benefits Agency to ensure that rehabilitated drug users who have been treated at a rehabilitation unit are not excluded from community care grants for the homeless who are offered unfurnished accommodation.

Mr. Scott: The circumstances and priority of each individual application to the fund are carefully considered by social fund officers. No group of people who satisfy the basic community care grant conditions are excluded from the consideration of an award.

Since April 1991 we have allocated additional funds of over £43 million to the discretionary social fund budget. This flexible response shows the Government's commitment to ensuring that the social fund will meet the highest priority needs wherever and whenever they occur.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will issue guidelines to the Benefits Agency to ensure that no changes are made to the priority given to rehabilitating ex-drug offenders in the allocation of community care grants for the homeless when they are offered unfurnished accommodation without prior consultation with the relevant county drug advisory committee and other appropriate agencies.

Mr. Scott: We have already issued guidance to social fund officers on the continuing need for constructive and close liaison with Social Services Departments and other interested bodies. The guidance is contained in the social fund officer's guide, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the success rate of *(a)* applications for community care grants by those leaving homelessness hostels or care and going into unfurnished accommodation and *(b)* subsequent appeals against refusals in each United Kingdom Benefits Agency region.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many prescriptions have been issued in each of the last five years in each *(a)* region, *(b)* district and *(c)* family practitioner committee area;

(2) what proportion of prescriptions issued in each *(a)* region, *(b)* district and *(c)* family practitioner committee area has been presented and made up in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on the number of prescriptions issued is not collected centrally. However, the available information, which relates to the number of prescription items dispensed in each family practitioner committee area, is given in the table:

Family practitioner committee name	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Cleveland	4,144,965	4,366,605	4,471,993	4,575,148	4,704,310
Cumbria	3,124,046	3,239,886	3,331,027	3,416,102	3,537,853
Durham	4,454,260	4,632,051	4,746,262	4,825,238	4,950,368
Northumberland	1,866,466	1,938,669	1,993,478	2,053,546	2,110,955
Gateshead	1,650,998	1,702,112	1,723,024	1,755,997	1,775,934
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,341,646	2,435,168	2,484,027	2,523,352	2,559,600
North Tyneside	1,673,447	1,739,095	1,793,380	1,821,089	1,841,808
South Tyneside	1,279,588	1,334,917	1,381,145	1,416,477	1,465,888
Sunderland	2,608,302	2,702,284	2,815,888	2,861,047	2,911,109
Northern	23,143,718	24,090,787	24,740,224	25,247,996	25,857,825
Humberside	6,059,425	6,312,869	6,563,681	6,684,722	6,799,647
North Yorkshire	3,754,594	3,911,370	4,070,883	4,206,866	4,356,739
Bradford	3,757,392	3,915,035	4,136,673	4,218,947	4,306,996
Calderdale	1,504,550	1,555,321	1,589,495	1,610,379	1,684,172
Kirklees	2,564,626	2,659,268	2,757,984	2,811,905	2,877,835
Leeds	5,493,001	5,643,799	5,844,592	5,966,984	6,046,207
Wakefield	2,456,374	2,557,010	2,659,749	2,719,922	2,805,009
Yorkshire	25,589,962	26,554,672	27,623,057	28,219,725	28,876,605
Derbyshire	5,783,182	6,009,061	6,244,914	6,406,607	6,560,412
Leicestershire	5,583,361	5,824,715	6,017,427	6,085,689	6,207,181
Lincolnshire	3,065,055	3,258,471	3,480,062	3,597,810	3,727,628
Nottinghamshire	6,408,451	6,688,956	6,974,726	7,151,658	7,381,564
Barnsley	1,949,879	2,036,776	2,127,791	2,158,541	2,182,234
Doncaster	2,412,430	2,543,866	2,671,283	2,730,239	2,802,967
Rotherham	1,843,577	1,939,676	1,993,761	2,052,225	2,094,630
Sheffield	4,351,066	4,511,854	4,670,973	4,750,335	4,854,146
Trent	31,397,001	32,813,375	34,180,937	34,932,504	35,810,762
Cambridgeshire	3,045,686	3,219,613	3,336,487	3,408,342	3,583,858
Norfolk	3,511,032	3,687,163	3,870,614	3,983,078	4,178,908
Suffolk	3,116,392	3,255,325	3,377,443	3,419,706	3,553,306

Family practitioner committee name	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
East Anglia	9,673,110	10,162,101	10,584,544	10,811,126	11,316,072
Bedfordshire	3,158,106	3,241,140	3,338,690	3,307,595	3,362,846
Hertfordshire	5,796,340	6,001,601	6,138,657	6,223,554	6,416,418
Barnet	1,922,566	1,977,652	2,018,795	2,020,507	2,070,656
Brent and Harrow	3,064,042	3,138,898	3,211,786	3,211,897	3,272,865
Ealing, Hammersmith and Houslow	4,428,364	4,551,380	4,666,220	4,636,206	4,724,122
Hillingdon	1,575,618	1,632,454	1,683,697	1,678,978	1,714,124
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	2,289,088	2,326,057	2,332,331	2,328,157	2,367,833
North West Thames	22,234,124	22,869,182	23,390,176	23,406,894	23,928,864
Essex	8,922,179	9,301,235	9,648,183	9,729,639	10,059,813
Barking and Havering	2,672,009	2,743,040	2,810,380	2,780,453	2,801,046
Camden and Islington	2,383,359	2,432,223	2,500,214	2,533,761	2,562,905
City and East London	4,740,107	4,882,194	5,028,925	5,046,904	5,197,875
Enfield and Haringey	2,942,757	3,030,488	3,122,151	3,115,785	3,220,649
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	3,329,448	3,416,349	3,517,436	3,526,107	3,592,268
North East Thames	24,989,858	25,805,529	26,627,289	26,732,649	27,434,556
East Sussex	5,190,738	5,370,258	5,539,846	5,647,059	5,787,777
Kent	9,749,436	10,112,607	10,473,361	10,571,318	10,845,489
Bexley and Greenwich	2,798,125	2,908,591	3,021,368	3,055,823	3,115,813
Bromley	1,826,401	1,867,369	1,921,494	1,947,332	2,002,312
Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark	4,812,242	4,976,931	5,117,628	5,134,866	5,240,558
South East Thames	24,376,942	25,235,758	26,073,697	26,356,398	26,991,949
Surrey	5,875,861	6,001,672	6,148,999	6,217,406	6,348,610
West Sussex	4,590,848	4,726,252	4,877,523	4,936,130	5,048,700
Croydon	2,034,796	2,055,621	2,091,985	2,090,451	2,127,793
Kingston and Richmond	1,968,008	2,015,418	2,053,251	2,057,472	2,078,266
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	4,009,349	4,065,819	4,117,266	4,107,280	4,202,733
South West Thames	18,478,862	18,864,782	19,289,024	19,408,739	19,806,102
Dorset	4,525,155	4,685,446	4,868,645	4,992,297	5,170,818
Hampshire	9,499,014	9,872,078	10,290,118	10,466,262	10,799,074
Wiltshire	3,008,272	3,141,942	3,267,030	3,328,863	3,415,938
Isle of Wight	916,002	945,087	987,895	997,319	1,019,820
Wessex	17,948,443	18,644,553	19,413,688	19,784,741	20,405,650
Berkshire	4,181,480	4,265,453	4,410,176	4,444,494	4,594,558
Buckinghamshire	3,302,241	3,454,410	3,558,450	3,614,297	3,713,468
Northamptonshire	3,223,831	3,368,337	3,491,114	3,551,395	3,631,358
Oxfordshire	2,463,031	2,577,342	2,681,741	2,711,636	2,801,954
Oxford	13,170,583	13,665,542	14,141,481	14,321,822	14,741,338
Avon	5,847,051	6,028,367	6,237,886	6,309,468	6,466,380
Cornwall	2,690,005	2,799,921	2,939,187	3,035,050	3,151,895
Devon	6,822,875	7,064,588	7,314,134	7,512,263	7,792,928
Gloucestershire	2,760,546	2,868,145	2,977,509	3,043,634	3,135,574
Somerset	2,604,560	2,712,661	2,830,933	2,910,176	2,978,335
South Western	20,725,037	21,473,682	22,299,649	22,810,591	23,525,112
Hereford and Worcester	3,717,999	3,892,642	4,020,928	4,071,426	4,174,223
Shropshire	2,334,642	2,449,139	2,554,580	2,573,840	2,608,489
Staffordshire	6,766,596	7,109,289	7,368,040	7,464,050	7,656,453
Warwickshire	2,914,718	3,040,840	3,164,912	3,196,001	3,260,316
Birmingham	8,675,699	9,021,127	9,169,069	9,184,294	9,349,830
Coventry	2,492,283	2,623,554	2,698,367	2,703,646	2,712,591
Dudley	2,048,786	2,140,744	2,228,303	2,294,169	2,330,390
Sandwell	2,658,880	2,783,957	2,824,966	2,835,700	2,845,582
Solihull	1,339,612	1,416,652	1,470,484	1,489,509	1,516,948
Walsall	2,282,791	2,411,855	2,474,375	2,508,838	2,530,159
Wolverhampton	2,105,762	2,199,871	2,271,975	2,252,872	2,260,337
West Midlands	37,337,768	39,069,670	40,245,969	40,574,345	41,245,318

Family practitioner committee name	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Cheshire	6,647,036	6,963,275	7,181,824	7,347,467	7,550,720
Liverpool	4,713,287	4,950,361	5,062,609	5,176,887	5,237,237
St. Helens and Knowsley	2,940,148	3,127,422	3,273,044	3,459,262	3,565,418
Sefton	2,476,341	2,619,761	2,728,506	2,856,470	2,931,784
Wirrall	2,828,674	2,989,933	3,108,948	3,214,740	3,306,170
Mersey	19,605,486	20,650,752	21,354,931	22,054,826	22,583,329
Lancashire	11,679,710	12,252,861	12,598,874	12,903,812	13,146,694
Bolton	2,051,459	2,107,670	2,189,251	2,244,321	2,308,317
Bury	1,556,523	1,607,813	1,666,628	1,691,638	1,730,962
Manchester	4,137,871	4,286,833	4,397,116	4,425,770	4,469,847
Oldham	1,850,941	1,941,125	2,009,543	2,065,234	2,124,595
Rochdale	1,764,038	1,844,374	1,946,469	1,978,637	2,058,036
Salford	2,320,124	2,389,446	2,464,433	2,477,094	2,513,219
Stockport	2,191,910	2,296,053	2,380,888	2,404,459	2,462,905
Tameside	1,733,619	1,826,836	1,921,474	1,980,517	2,016,614
Trafford	1,982,803	2,072,155	2,136,444	2,166,003	2,217,819
Wigan	2,609,950	2,737,135	2,860,696	2,885,454	2,918,058
North Western	33,878,948	35,362,301	36,571,816	37,222,939	37,967,068
England	322,550,836	335,282,684	346,536,502	351,885,295	360,500,548

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what proportion of prescriptions in each *(a)* county and *(b)* family practitioner committee area the patient has been liable to make full payment in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information relating to England is retained only for three years. The available data, which relates to the percentage of prescription items in each regional health authority for which the patient has been liable to make full payment, is given in the table.

Regional Health Authority	1988	1989	1990
Northern	14·8	14·4	13·8
Yorkshire	15·7	15·4	14·7
Trent	16·5	16·1	15·3
East Anglia	19·4	19·2	18·2
North West Thames	21·4	20·9	19·9
North East Thames	18·5	18·0	16·9
South East Thames	17·9	17·6	16·8
South West Thames	21·1	20·7	19·9
Wessex	18·9	18·7	17·9
Oxford	23·2	23·0	22·0
South Western	17·7	17·5	16·7
West Midlands	16·1	15·9	15·2
Mersey	13·3	13·0	12·2
North Western	14·4	14·2	13·4
England	17·3	17·0	16·1

Consultants (Job Description)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he intends to evaluate the success of the introduction of job descriptions for all consultants from 1 April 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Hospital consultants are required to have job plans (formerly referred to as job descriptions) setting out their main duties and work programmes, including their fixed commitments, in the NHS, in order to make clear what is expected of them. General managers are responsible for ensuring that job plans are agreed, reviewed annually, and implemented.

Medical Audit

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria his Department will use to determine the success of its investment in medical audit.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Investment in medical audit was initially to ensure that the necessary infrastructure would be in place to enable all doctors in the hospital and community health service to participate in medical audit from 1 April 1991 and all general practitioners from 1 April 1992.

All regions and districts have established medical audit committees and all family health services authorities have set up medical audit advisory groups as required by the Department.

The NHS management executive has a duty to ensure that the special funds for medical audit are being spent for the intended purpose. It is discharging this duty by requiring annual reports from the regions, supplemented by visits to all regions by senior management executive staff specifically to review expenditure and progress in medical audit in the primary and secondary care sectors. As far as evaluating value for money is concerned, the Department is examining this complex issue as part of its developing strategy. The criteria have been set out in health circulars and executive letters to the service.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the sharing of the results of medical audit between clinicians and managers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Medical audit committees are required to provide regular reports to both medical staff and management on the general results of audit which have been carried out. These may, for example, include:

- a broad outline of the aggregate results together with any national, regional or other comparison available;
- an account of any problems encountered in data retrieval or analysis;
- an indication of what action is being taken or is recommended.

With the separation of the purchaser-provider functions medical audit has become a provider unit based activity and it is to unit managers that regular reports of the general result of audit are addressed.

GPs' Contracts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for health what discussions his Department is undertaking with the General Medical Service Committee concerning the contract for general practitioners; what is the timetable for these discussions; and which issues are being discussed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is a continuing programme of discussions between the Department and the General Medical Services Committee dealing, as necessary, with the possible development of aspects of the GPs' contract. Current issues include the further development of the health promotion elements of the contract in the context of the Department's health strategy. The Department and the GMSC are also committed to discussions on the way the GP remuneration arrangements support the contract with a view to submitting evidence to the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body in autumn 1992.

London Ambulance Service

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* for each division of the London ambulance service and *(b)* for each financial quarter of 1990-91 and for the first three quarters of 1991-92 (i) the percentage of emergencies reached within seven minutes of calls and (ii) the percentage of emergencies reached within 14 minutes of calls.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* The available information is given in the table. From 8 January 1991 new technology installed at a cost of £1·5 million has been available to improve the average response times of emergency ambulance vehicles in London.

London ambulance service
Average response times for emergency vehicles

	North West		*North East*		*South East*		*South West*		*Training*		*LAS total*	
	Per cent. within		*Per cent. within*		*Per cent. within*		*Per cent. within*		*Per cent. within*		*Per cent. within*	
	7 min.	*14 min.*	*7 min.*	*14 min.*	*7 min.*	*14 min.*	*7 min.*	*14 min.*	*7 min.*	*14 min.*	*7 min.*	*14 min.*
April—December 1990												
April—June 1990	13	77	9	72	15	78	15	80	15	85	13	77
July—September 1990	12	77	9	71	12	76	16	81	19	80	12	76
October—December 1990	12	76	8	74	12	74	14	81	20	76	12	76
January—April 1991 (Changed basis for calculating response times)[1,2]												
January—March 1991	8	66	5	64	6	61	11	70	14	76	8	66
April 1991	7	63	5	64	8	69	8	79	6	66	7	68

[1] Up to January 1991, response times were measured from the end of the initial telephone call. Since February they have been calculated from the moment the telephone is answered in accordance with national standards.
[2] Response times were based upon a sample 3 per cent. up to April 1991 compared with 100 per cent. from May, when the sampling was changed to comply with national standards.

London ambulance service
Average response times for emergency vehicles

	North West		*North East*		*South*		*LAS total*	
	Per cent. within		*Per cent. within*		*Per cent. within*		*Per cent. within*	
	8 min.	*14 min.*	*8 min.*	*14 min.*	*8 min.*	*14 min.*	*8 min.*	*14 min.*
May—September 1991[3,4]								
May—June 1991	18	73	14	66	23	78	19	72
July—September 1991	15	67	13	61	21	75	17	68

[3] From May 1991 the Orcon standard based on 50 per cent. within 7 minutes changed to 50 per cent. within 8 minutes. (The Orcon report was published in November 1990 and this contained the suggested response times quoted above).
[4] In April 1991 the southern and the training division were combined.

DEFENCE

Live Ammunition Dumping

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy to discontinue the dumping of live ammunition at sea;

(2) if he has made any estimate of the environmental consequences of the dumping of live ammunition at sea;

(3) if he has made any estimate of the difference in cost between dumping live ammunition at sea and decommissioning it with the resultant opportunity to recycle scrap metals;

(4) what deadline he has set for the discontinuance of the practice of dumping live ammunition at sea.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: MOD will terminate all sea dumping of redundant ammunition and explosive stocks by 1 January 1993 in line with the Government's general policy, as agreed internationally, that waste should be disposed of on land, where this is safe and practicable, in preference to dumping at sea. Sea dumping of live ammunition is undertaken when demilitarisation on land is impracticable, either because it would pose unacceptable safety risks because of capacity constraints on alternative, environmentally acceptable, land based disposal methods, rather than for reasons of cost. Dumping is carried out in a strictly controlled manner to ensure that it does not cause damage to the marine environment, or interfere with fishing, or other legitimate uses of the sea. Detonators and explosives which contain toxic chemicals are not disposed

of in this way and all material is packaged to ensure that it sinks to the sea bed. There is no evidence to suggest that controlled dumping of conventional ammunition and explosives in this manner constitutes a risk to the marine environment.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (Parental Involvement)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much Government aid is specifically targeted to increase the involvement of parents in school work and promote teachers' consultation with parents.

Mr. Eggar: The Government are working actively to increase parental involvement in school education. The parents charter makes proposals for improving information for parents, and a new guide for parents—"Your Child and the National Curriculum"—urges parents to take an active interest in their children's education and talk to teachers about their children's progress.

It is not possible to give figures on financial aid from central Government for the generality of school education: Government assistance for the provision of local authority services is channelled through revenue support grant, which is not hypothecated to individual services. In relation to specific Government grants, there are particular initiatives within inner cities programmes that are designed to strengthen home-school links and stimulate parental involvement.

Student Teachers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what numbers of student teachers *(a)* were in the course of and *(b)* completed their professional training, respectively, in training institutions in each of the last five years; what ratio of student teachers to nominated practising teachers he expects to require, authorise and pay for when students are on school practice, in accordance with his recent proposals; and by what means he expects to provide experienced replacement teachers for the time spent by the nominated teachers in their additional responsibilities.

Mr. Fallon: Information about the numbers of students enrolled on and completing courses of initial teacher training in each of the last five years is not immediately available. I shall send this information to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

The proposals so far announced by my right hon. and learned Friend relate to secondary postgraduate (PGCE) courses. The ratio of student teachers on such courses to teacher tutors in schools will be determined locally by higher education institutions and their partner schools.

Higher education institutions will be expected to reimburse their partner schools for extra costs resulting from their enhanced role in initial teacher training. The resources available to initial teacher training should increase as the number of student teachers rises and there will have to be a significant shift of funds to schools, within these rising resources, as the changes take effect. Meanwhile, the higher education funding councils have agreed to make extra funds available, from within the resources already allocated to them, to those institutions which provide secondary PGCE courses. My right hon. and learned Friend will be making an extra £3 million available to the funding councils to supplement their allocations to these institutions. The funding councils have been invited to issue guidance to institutions on the procedure for bidding and the basis on which bids will be considered.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Matthew Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to make available a further evaluation report on aid and trade provision projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Evaluation Department of the Overseas Development Administration has carried out a study which synthesises the experience of eight evaluations of ATP projects, approved between 1978 and 1985, and evaluated between 1986 and 1990. It draws most from three evaluations conducted as a series in 1990. I have placed copies of the report "ATP Synthesis Evaluation Study" (November 1991) in the Library of the House.

While ATP procedures have been strengthened since the projects were approved, the findings and lessons of the study will be an important input to the inter-departmental review of ATP which is currently taking place.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by local authority area in Scotland the proportions of local authority finance derived from central Government, business rates and poll tax from 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The proportion of total income derived from central Government grants, non-domestic rates income and community charge income for each local authority for 1991-92 are given in the table.

Percentage

	(1) Central Government grants 1991-92	*(2) Non-domestic rate income 1991-92*	*(3) Community charge income 1991-92*
Borders	77·4	12·1	10·5
Central	60·8	23·8	15·4
Dumfries and Galloway	75·5	13·3	11·2
Fife	58·1	25·6	16·3
Grampian	66·5	21·9	11·6
Highland	70·7	19·4	9·9
Lothian	50·0	26·5	23·5
Strathclyde	65·7	21·1	13·3
Tayside	67·5	17·5	15·0
Berwickshire	72·2	19·4	8·4
Ettrick and Lauderdale	56·9	27·4	15·8
Roxburgh	64·8	21·5	13·6
Tweeddale	68·7	19·1	12·2
Clackmannan	34·5	32·7	32·8
Falkirk	35·6	51·6	12·8
Stirling	25·3	44·9	29·8
Annandale and Eskdale	49·9	23·6	26·5

	(1) Central Government grants 1991-92	(2) Non-domestic rate income 1991-92	(3) Community charge income 1991-92
Nithsdale	45·9	29·8	24·3
Stewartry	63·8	19·0	17·2
Wigtown	65·2	14·3	20·4
Dunfermline	30·1	45·8	24·1
Kirkcaldy	30·6	43·6	25·9
North East Fife	49·6	23·1	27·2
Aberdeen City	28·2	41·3	30·5
Banff and Buchan	41·2	36·6	22·1
Gordon	68·0	16·7	15·3
Kincardine and Deeside	72·8	22·2	4·9
Moray	58·2	30·5	11·2
Badenoch and Strathspey	57·0	33·8	9·2
Caithness	65·7	29·2	5·0
Inverness	44·5	50·2	5·3
Lochaber	43·2	39·4	17·4
Nairn	76·3	16·2	7·5
Ross and Cromarty	54·4	30·2	15·3
Skye and Lochalsh	77·6	15·1	7·2
Sutherland	74·9	14·2	10·9
East Lothian	32·7	40·0	27·3
Edinburgh City	31·3	35·8	32·9
Midlothian	52·2	21·7	26·1
West Lothian	49·4	32·7	17·9
Argyll and Bute	50·8	26·2	23·0
Bearsden and Milngavie	57·4	15·3	27·2
Clydebank	43·7	27·2	29·1
Clydesdale	49·0	21·3	29·8
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	43·5	35·4	21·1
Cumnock and Doon Valley	56·8	22·3	20·9
Cunninghame	19·6	49·0	31·5
Dumbarton	27·5	30·8	41·7
East Kilbride	26·8	31·2	42·0
Eastwood	71·2	14·1	14·6
Glasgow City	33·7	43·9	22·4
Hamilton	42·8	26·5	30·7
Inverclyde	52·5	23·8	23·7
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	45·2	29·4	25·4
Kyle and Carrick	33·1	30·1	36·8
Monklands	50·1	22·6	27·3
Motherwell	47·5	29·9	22·6
Renfrew	37·9	29·7	32·3
Strathkelvin	52·3	17·0	30·7
Angus	56·8	25·5	17·7
Dundee City	40·7	33·3	26·0
Perth and Kinross	48·9	31·5	19·6
Orkney	77·9	21·2	0·9
Shetland	64·7	34·9	0·4
Western Isles	90·6	7·8	1·5

Notes:

1. Central Government grants shown in column 1 consist of revenue support grant, specific grants and community charge grant.
2. The community charge income proportions are calculated from provisional outturn amounts taken from the provisional outturn/budget estimate returns made to the Scottish Office by local authorities, less an assumed reduction in charge income as a result of the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991.
3. The non-domestic rate income proportions are calculated from estimates made by the Scottish Office in November 1990.

Home Insulation

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on home insulation in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Full details of the extent of home insulation in Scotland are not at present available but as part of the national house condition survey at present underway information is being gathered on whether walls, tanks, pipes and lofts in property of all tenures are satisfactorily insulated. The results of the survey are due for publication in the summer of 1993.

EMPLOYMENT

Minimum Wages

16. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he made of the job implications of a statutory minimum wages policy prior to the Maastricht summit.

Mr. Forth: A minimum wage set at the final level proposed by the Labour party of two thirds male median earnings could destroy over a million jobs if pay differentials were half restored. If differentials were fully restored up to two million jobs could be lost.

EC Social Charter

17. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what regulations he proposes to introduce to implement the employment provisions of the EC social charter.

Mr. Howard: The social charter, signed by the 11 other member states, was a political declaration and has no legal effect. Where legislation is required to implement directives agreed under the social action programme, this will be introduced within the timetable for implementation set out in each proposal.

26. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the discussions on the social charter in Maastricht on 10 December.

Mr. Howard: The Maastricht treaty on European union confirms that the social provisions chapter within the existing treaty of Rome will be retained. There will be no extensions of the Community's present powers in employment and social affairs, and no increase in the use within the Council of Ministers of qualified majority voting.

That is the outcome for which the Government argued throughout the negotiations. It leaves the leading responsibility for employment and social policies where it belongs, firmly in the hands of national Parliaments, and is good news for British jobs and for the competitiveness of our industry.

Should other member states wish to go further than provided for in the treaty, they can do so by way of the separate protocol and agreement on social affairs.

Trade Union Training Centres

18. **Ms. Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will next meet the TUC to discuss trade union unemployed workers' training centres.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the TUC on 18 December last year. He has no plans at present to meet the TUC to discuss the matter in question.

EC Working Time Directive

19. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from British industry concerning the proposed European working time directive.

Mr. Howard: British industry is virtually unanimous in its opposition to the proposals. I fully agree with the Confederation of British Industry that the directive would be a needless strain on our competitiveness, and a threat to jobs and earnings.

Training

20. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to improve the provision of training for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise council and local enterprise company operating agreements require "suitable high quality training to be made available for all trainees who have disabilities or other significant personal disadvantages which give rise to special training needs." Each TEC and LEC must show in its corporate and business plans how it intends to meet the training needs of individuals and the local labour market. These plans form the basis of TEC contracts with the Department, and LECs with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

25. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he plans next to meet the CBI to discuss its members' contribution to training.

Mr. Howard: I have regular contact with representatives of the CBI on a range of issues. I have at present no plans for a meeting on the particular subject mentioned by my hon. Friend.

Industrial Action

21. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many working days were lost due to industrial action in *(a)* January 1979, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* the latest 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. Howard: There were 0·8 million working days lost in the 12 months to October 1991, the latest available period, and 1·9 million working days lost in 1990 as a whole. These compare with 3 million working days lost in the single month of January 1979.

Unemployment

22. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what additional action he plans to take to assist those who are unemployed and aged over 50 years.

Mr. Jackson: We have already announced plans to offer help back to work for nearly a million unemployed people in 1992-93 through our employment and training programmes. This includes increased opportunities through employment action, our new temporary work programme, and extra support for jobclubs and the job interview guarantee. All these programmes are open to people aged over 50.

23. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next intends to meet the TUC to discuss unemployment.

Mr. Howard: I have discussed various matters with the TUC on a number of occasions including at the National Economic Development Council. The next meeting of the Council will be on 1 April.

Manufacturing Industry, Sheffield

24. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest estimates of the prospects for full-time jobs, involving at least a 35-hour week, for both male and female in manufacturing industry in Sheffield for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Jackson: The Department, as was the practice under previous Governments, does not publish detailed forecasts of employment nor comment on the forecasts of others.

Age Discrimination

27. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had on the subject of age discrimination by employers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have met many of the voluntary sector organisations which speak out against age discrimination by employers, and have received representations from others. We continue to urge employers to abandon arbitrary age limits in recruitment as inefficient and wasteful, and to treat everyone on their merits.

Tourism

28. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in tourism in *(a)* 1981 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. Forth: There were an estimated 1·2 million employees in employment in tourism-related industries in June 1981, and 1·4 million in June 1991. In addition, there were around 163,000 self employed in tourism-related industries in 1981 and around 190,000 in 1991.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to visit Southport to discuss the tourist industry.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans. However, my noble Friend Viscount Ullswater, who has ministerial responsibility for tourism matters, hopes to be visiting Southport next March.

Youth Training

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently undertaking a youth training course in the Greater London area; at what cost to public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Figures are not available for the Greater London area. In November, the latest date for which information is available, there were 15,800 young people in youth training in the London region (of which Greater London is a part).

The programme budget for youth training in the London region for 1991-92 is £492,000.

Unemployment, Greater London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of people registered as unemployed in the Greater London area and the number of job vacancies for the area at jobcentres on 7 January 1992.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available data relate to 14 November 1991 for unemployed claimants and 6 November 1991 for unfilled vacancies at jobcentres. On these respective dates there were on a seasonally adjusted basis, 378,000 unemployed claimants and 6,200 unfilled jobcentre vacancies, in the Greater London region.

Figures for January will be released on 13 February.

Maastricht

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what implications the outcome of the negotiations over the social chapter at Maastricht have for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The treaty on European union agreed at the European Council at Maastricht confirms that the existing social provisions chapter within the present treaty (articles 117-122) will be retained without change. The outcome of the negotiations on the social chapter provides the necessary basis for the development of a sensible Community social dimension and the United Kingdom will continue to participate fully in all relevant discussions.

That is the outcome for which the Government argued throughout the negotiations. It leaves the leading responsibility for employment and social policies where it belongs, firmly in the hands of national Parliaments, and is good news for British jobs and for the competitiveness of our industry.

Should other member states wish to go further than provided for in the treaty, they can do so by way of the separate protocol and agreement on social affairs.

Job Release Scheme

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will announce the results of the review of the rates of allowance payable under the job release scheme.

Mr. Jackson: Although the job release scheme closed to new applicants on 31 January 1988, the allowance will continue to be paid to participants for up to five years. Following our annual review, the allowances payable from 6 April 1992 under the job release scheme will be as follows:

Those who are married with a dependent wife whose net income from all sources does not exceed £17 a week: £94·45 taxable. Those who do not have a dependent wife or whose wife's income exceeds £17 a week: £77·80 taxable. The spouses earnings limit which affects whether the higher or lower rate is paid has been raised to £17 from £16.

Employee Participation

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he intends to seek the views of business on the new European Commission proposal for a recommendation concerning the promotion of employee participation in profits and enterprise results including equity participation.

Mr. Forth: Yes. A public consultation document on this subject has recently been issued by the Department. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 15 January 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Takeover Panel

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he will bring forward legislation to remove liability of the takeover panel and its members in defamation proceedings arising from the publication of its bona fide reports.

The Attorney-General: No such legislation is contemplated.

European Court of Justice

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to expedite a decision by the European Court of Justice on the cases referred to it by the House of Lords in May 1991.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the second answer that I gave the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 13 January 1992, at column *417*.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Attorney-General if he has submitted evidence on behalf of the Government to the European Court of Justice on the cases referred to it by the House of Lords in May 1991; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the third answer that I gave the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 13 January 1992, at column *417*.

Shops Act 1950

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make it his policy to take steps to give local authorities crown immunity in order to enable them to discharge their responsibilities under section 47 of the Shops Act 1950.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to take the action suggested by the hon. Member. The question whether local authorities should be obliged to give cross-undertakings in damages when seeking, by means of an interlocutory injunction, to enforce the Shops Act 1950 was recently considered by the Court of Appeal in Kirklees borough council *v.* Wickes Building Supplies Ltd. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on this decision because it is shortly to be appealed to the House of Lords.

TRANSPORT

Tyres

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications for road safety of the new regulations on tyre tread introduced on 1 January.

Mr. Chope: The new tyre tread regulations requiring a tread depth of 1·6 mm over three quarters of the width for passenger cars, light vans and light trailers should improve the general condition of tyres and hence have a beneficial effect on road safety.

A36 Bypass, West Wellow

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he will publish the collated results of the consultation survey carried out by MRM Consultants into people's preference for the route of the A36 bypass of West Wellow;

(2) when he expects to announce the preferred route for the A36 bypass of West Wellow.

Mr. Chope: I hope to make a further announcement about the A36 West Wellow bypass later this year. The results of the poublic consultation will be announced at that stage.

High-speed Rail Network

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether Her Majesty's Government has responded to the proposals for a European high-speed rail network prepared by the EC working group; when they will be considered by the Transport Council in the European Community; whether the Government approve the proposals for the Belfast/Dublin/Holyhead/Crewe routes; and what are the longer-term implications for the Belfast/Larne/Stranraer/Carlisle routes.

Mr. Freeman: The proposals of the EC working group were interim ones. The group is doing further studies which are now expected to be ready by the end of this year. I am sending the right hon. Gentleman a copy of the joint statement made on this subject on 2 December 1991 by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and and Scotland.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether London boroughs will be required to subject their new services under the Road Traffic Act 1991 to compulsory competitive tendering from the inception of these services in 1992;

(2) what is the proposed date of the application of compulsory competitive tendering to the new responsibilities of local authorities under the Road Traffic Act 1991.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer Tuesday 14 January 1992]:* It is the Government's intention that local authorities should be required to subject their new services under the Road Traffic Act 1991 to compulsory competitive tendering. This proposal is included in the consultation paper "Competing for Quality". No decisions on timing can be taken until consultation has been completed.

ENERGY

Land Restoration (UKAEA)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what guidance is given in the most recent programme letters to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's

various business groups in regard to the choice of contractors for independent evaluation of land restoration at each of the nuclear establishments operated by the authority.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The relevant programme letters between the Department of Energy and AEA Technology assume that AEA nuclear sites will ultimately be cleared to a "green-field" state allowing unrestricted use without prior knowledge of previous use of the site. The extent to which independent evaluation may be required of the work needed to achieve this condition will be assessed at the appropriate time.

Nuclear-generated Electricity

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what policy statements have been made by Her Majesty's Government since 1987 concerning the identification by electricity companies in bills sent to consumers of the element that comprises costs from nuclear-generated electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's policy is that the costs of nuclear electricity generation, and of the requirement on the regional electricity companies to contract for non-fossil generating capacity, should be fully transparent. These objectives are achieved through, respectively, the published accounts of Nuclear Electric and the duty on the Director General of Electricity Supply to publish the rate of the fossil fuel levy. However, how the regional electricity companies structure their bills is a matter for them.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has assessed the possibility of the United Kingdom nuclear reprocessors, British Nuclear Fuels plc and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority taking thermal oxide irradiated reactor fuel from countries of eastern Europe for safe management following the collapse of the organisation of the civil nuclear industry of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom nuclear industry is offering a variety of services, on commercial terms, to potential customers both in eastern Europe and elsewhere. Any contract offered for reprocessing spent fuel would need to include options for the return of wastes.

Safeguards Agreement

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has received from the International Atomic Energy Agency on the comprehensive safeguards agreement establishing a joint Brazilian-Argentinian agency for accounting and control of nuclear materials.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: On 7 December 1991, the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency approved the text of a safeguards agreement for the accounting of nuclear material between Argentina, Brazil, and the IAEA. On 13 December, the agreement was signed at the IAEA in Vienna by President Menem of Argentina and President Collor of Brazil. The agency has publicly reported these events.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Chief Officers

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions govern the amount of the salary of chief officers of local authorities; and what information he has on the level of pay rises for chief officers for the forthcoming year.

Mr. Key: There are no statutory provisions governing the pay of local authority employees. In the case of most authorities, the pay of chief officers is related to a national pay spine determined by the joint negotiating committee (JNC) for chief officers of local authorities, although authorities decide for themselves the point within this context at which their chief officers' pay is set. About two dozen authorities have opted out of these national negotiations and set the pay of their chief officers locally. Salaries within the scope of the JNC were increased by 6·4 per cent. from 1 July 1991.

Fallen Animals

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the respects in which the provisions in England and Wales for the disposal of fallen and diseased animals diverge from the standards applying in the EC for the environment with particular reference to the possible pollution of water resources through on-farm burial and how it is monitored.

Mr. Baldry: The disposal of fallen and diseased animals from premises used for agriculture is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The disposal of such animals from other premises must comply with the provisions in the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990. These Acts meet the requirements of EC legislation on the disposal of waste. The National Rivers Authority is a statutory consultee for waste disposal licensing and is also responsible for monitoring water pollution in England and Wales in order to ensure compliance with EC legislation.

River Pollution, Rochdale

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority regarding the level of pollution in the rivers and brooks in the Rochdale borough.

Mr. Baldry: The National Rivers Authority (NRA) has the duty to monitor pollution of watercourses and has wide powers to review discharge consents, and to prosecute those that breach their consents, or discharge pollutants without consent. It is the NRA that is responsible for taking action in individual cases. There have been no consultations with the chairman of the NRA on this case.

Community Charge

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance was given to councils to exempt from paying the community charge residents in residential care homes, nursing homes, mental nursing homes or hostels and sheltered dwellings.

Mr. Key: Paragraph 9 of schedule 1 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988 provides that a person is an exempt individual on a particular day if at any time on the day he has his sole or main residence in a residential care home, nursing home, mental nursing home or hostel and is receiving care or treatment—or both—in the home or hostel. There is no exemption for residents of sheltered dwellings. A practice note prepared jointly between the Department of the Environment and the local authority associations convering the subject of exemptions was distributed to all local authorities in May 1989. A copy was placed in the Library of the House.

Emergency Equipment

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, when implementing the EEC construction products directive interpretation document TC 2/020 "Safety in Case of Fire", he will require the independent certification of emergency equipment including emergency lighting and fire alarms to the appropriate European standard.

Mr. Yeo: The EC construction products directive, 89/106/EEC, has been implemented in the United Kingdom by means of the Construction Products Regulations 1991 (S.I. 1991, No. 1620). These regulations came into force on 27 December last year.

The subordinate requirements for the certification of those construction products within the scope of the directive will be established at EC level. The decisions on this will be taken by the European Commission and the Standing Committee of Member States' representatives set up under article 19 of the directive.

The Department recognises the vital health and safety significance of construction products used to secure protection in case of fire. The line taken in EC negotiations on certification requirements will be determined in the light of negotiations with appropriate United Kingdom trade, professional and regulatory authorities.

Construction Industry

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet representatives of the construction industry to discuss the effects of the recession in industry.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Ministers are engaged in a continuing round of discussions with representatives of the construction industry.

Gulf (Ecological Restoration)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom contribution to ecological restoration in the Gulf region in regard to *(a)* dugong habitats, *(b)* coral reef protection, *(c)* capping of oil wells, *(d)* oil pollution of the Kuwaiti desert, and *(e)* removal of Iraqi mines.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom was the first and largest contributor to the International Maritime Organisation's special trust fund to assist environmental recovery in the Gulf. Our £1 million contribution has been successfully used with those of others to clean up some of the Gulf's most sensitive habitats, including salt marsh and mangrove. I understand that no floating oil remains at sea. A United Kingdom expert, flown out with Government assistance to survey important Kuwaiti coral islands, found little evidence of damage.

All oil well fires are now out, some capped by a British group of companies which is continuing work on the reconstruction and repair of pipelines in the Sabriyah and Bahra fields. Other British consortia are bidding for recovery work to clear inland lakes of oil and the Natural Environment Research Council is helping to advise the Gulf states on pollution monitoring. Royal Ordnance plc is carrying out minefield clearance operations in Kuwait.

UN Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial or logistical support Her Majesty's Government have given to the organisers of the '92 global forum to be held in conjunction with the Earth summit at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June in the current year.

Mr. Baldry: The Government are contributing to international funding to enable government experts and representatives of non-governmental organisations from developing countries to attend UNCED and its preparatory committees. It is also providing financial support to British NGOs to enable them to contribute to United Kingdom preparations. It is the Government's priority to concentrate effort on ensuring the widest possible participation of governments and NGOs in the United Nations conference itself rather than the other events that are being held in parallel in Rio de Janeiro.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if has has any plans to meet *(a)* the British chambers of commerce and *(b)* non-governmental organisations in regard to plans for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside has held a number of meetings with environment and development non-governmental organisations and with representatives of the business community, including the United Kingdom section of the International Chamber of Commerce, on British preparations for UNCED. Further meetings are planned between now and the conference itself.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what preparations or proposals his Department has made for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress made to date in preparing proposals and reaching agreement on international environmental protection protocols and conventions for the Earth summit at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June.

Mr. Baldry: The Department of the Environment is responsible for co-ordinating the United Kingdom's preparations for UNCED in close consultation with other Government Departments and the non-governmental community. A number of wide-ranging British proposals

have been put forward in the preparatory committees and in the parallel negotiations for conventions on climate change and biological diversity which we hope will be signed in Rio de Janeiro in June. A booklet on the United Kingdom's overall approach to UNCED has been prepared by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what draft guidance notes have been issued for consultation, pursuant to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to date this year; and what further notes are expected to be issued this year.

Mr. Baldry: Consultation has already been undertaken in respect of all 50 process guidance notes for local authority air pollution control under part I of the Act which were published in February and July 1991. The following 27 such guidance notes have also been issued in draft for consultation:

PG1/10 — waste derived fuel combustion processes less than 3MW.
PG6/10 — coating manufacturing.
PG6/11 — manufacture of printing ink.
PG6/16 — printworks.
PG6/17 — printing of flexible packaging.
PG6/18 — paper coating.
PG6/19 — fish meal and fish oil.
PG6/20 — paint application in vehicle manufacturing.
PG6/21 — hide and skin processes.
PG6/22 — leather finishing.
PG6/23 — coating of metal and plastic.
PG6/24 — pet food manufacturing.
PG6/25 — vegetable oil extraction and fat and oil refining.
PG6/26 — animal feed compounding.
PG6/27 — vegetable matter drying.
PG6/28 — rubber processes.
PG6/29 — di-isocyanate processes.
PG6/30 — composting.
PG6/31 — powder coating (including sheradizing).
PG6/32 — adhesive coating.
PG6/33 — wood coating.
PG6/34 — respraying of road vehicles.
PG6/35 — metal and other thermal spraying processes.
PG6/36 — tobacco processing.
PG6/37 — knackers yards.
PG6/38 — blood processing.
PG6/39 — animal by-product dealers.

A further draft note on reheat and heat treatment furnaces (PG1/11) is expected to be issued this year.

Consultation was also undertaken on the six guidance notes published during 1991 by the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The following draft guidance notes have so far been issued by him for consultation:

IPR1/2 — gas turbines.
IPR1/3 — compression ignition engines 50MW(th) and over.
IPR1/4 — waste oil burners 3MW(th) and over.
IPR1/5 — refuse derived fuel burners.
IPR1/6 — tyre burners.
IPR1/7 — poultry litter burners.
IPR1/8 — straw and wood burners.
IPR1/9 — carbonisation and associated processes—coke ovens.
IPR1/10 — carbonisation processes—smokeless fuel plants.
IPR1/11 — gasification of solid and liquid feedstocks.
IPR1/12 — refining of natural gas.
IPR1/13 — refining of natural gas at liquefied natural gas sites.
IPR1/14 — the odorising of natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas.
IPR1/15 — crude oil refineries.
IPR1/16 — on-shore oil production.
IPR3/1 — cement manufacture and associated processes.
IPR3/2 — lime manufacture and associated processes.
IPR3/3 — processes involving asbestos.
IPR3/4 — glass and non-asbestos mineral fibres.
IPR3/5 — glass frit and enamel frit.
IPR3/6 — ceramic processes.
IPR5/1 — merchant and in-house chemical waste incineration.
IPR5/2 — clinical waste incineration.
IPR5/3 — municipal waste incineration.
IPR5/4 — animal carcase incineration.
IPR5/5 — burning out of metal containers.
IPR5/6 — making solid fuel from waste.
IPR5/7 — cleaning and regeneration of activated carbon.
IPR5/8 — recovery of organic solvents by distillation.
IPR5/9 — regeneration of ion exchange resins.
IPR5/10 — recovery of waste oil by distillation.
IPR5/11 — sewage sludge incineration.

The chief inspector is expected to issue further draft guidance notes for consultation this year as follows:

IPR4/1 — petrochemical.
IPR4/2 — production and use of amines, nitriles, isocyanates and pyridines.
IPR4/3 — production or use of aldehydes acids, anhydrides and phenols.
IPR4/4 — production or use of organic sulphur compounds; production, use or recovery of carbon disulphide.
IPR4/5 — batch manufacture of organic chemicals in multipurpose plant.
IPR4/6 — production and polymerisation of organic monomers.
IPR4/7 — manufacture of organo-metallic compounds.
IPR4/8 — pesticide processes.
IPR4/9 — pharmaceutical processes.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations his Department has had with UK Nirex Ltd. between the initial announcement of the low and intermediate level nuclear waste repository plans and the public announcement of substantial revisions in the plans.

Mr. Baldry: None. It is for Nirex to bring forward plans for the deep disposal facility for low and intermediate-level radioactive waste.

Defective Housing

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the payment of loan charge contributions to local authorities in England and Wales in respect of defective housing expenditure.

Sir George Young: It has recently come to light that the statutory basis for making defective housing loan charge contributions to local authorities, originally contained in section 569 of the Housing Act 1985, was inadvertently repealed when making provision for the commutation of loan charge contributions through section 157 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. We have always made it clear to local authorities that they should expect to receive these payments until commutation took place. Local authorities' total audited final claims in respect of 1991-92 are likely to amount to almost £21 million.

To ensure that local authorities do not incur financial loss, it has been agreed with the Treasury that although payments in respect of 1991-92 claims cannot be made

under the 1989 legislation, local authorities will be recompensed the full amounts that would have been due to them by means of ex-gratia payments.

We shall be seeking legislation at the earliest possible opportunity in order to restore the original statutory position, and allow the commutation of defective housing payments including sums by way of loan charges to go ahead as quickly as possible.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his timetable for establishing a local government commission.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* The commission will be formally established at an appropriate point following parliamentary approval of the relevant provisions of the Local Government Bill.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Oil Revenues

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total amount of money received from North sea oil revenues.

Mr. Maples: Total revenues to the Exchequer from the North sea since 1969-70 have been £72 billion. At 1991-92 prices—by reference to movements in the gross domestic product market prices implied deflator—revenues have been £112 billion.

Manufactured Exports

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give figures for the change in the volume of manufactured exports over the last 48 months.

Mr. Mellor: On a balance of payments basis, the volume of United Kingdom exports of manufactures is estimated to have risen by 26 per cent. between November 1987 and November 1991.

Note 1: Standard International Trade Classification (Rev. 3) Sections 5 to 8.

VAT

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the calculations for United Kingdom payments to the own resources element of funding of the European Community value added tax-related payments for 1991 and give *(a)* the expected total yield of value added tax for the 12 months of 1991, *(b)* the amount payable to the European Community consequent on the calculation and *(c)* the sum *(b)* as a percentage of the sum *(a)*.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* Final accounting data for the calendar year 1991 have not yet been produced but payments have been made monthly based on estimates. Using current estimates the United Kingdom's net VAT yield and VAT-based contribution to the European Community are calculated to be:

(a) net VAT yield for the calendar year 1991—£35,796 million;

(b) amount paid to the European Community, net of the United Kingdom abatement—£771 million;

(c) net contribution as a proportion of VAT receipts —2·2 per cent.

The 1991 United Kingdom abatement, referred to above and made under the terms of article 4 of Council decision 88/376 dated 24 June 1988, amounts to £2,497 million.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection (Voters)

Sir Anthony Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *570*, what progress has been made in removing or mitigating the effects of the draft European directive on data protection on canvassing voters' intentions.

Mrs. Rumbold: The draft directive is still under consideration in the official working group in Brussels. I understand that the Commission will produce a redraft in the light of the opinion of the European Parliament. The opinion is not expected before next month.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward a measure to amend schedule 4 to the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to include offences under section 47 of the Shops Act 1950.

Mrs. Rumbold: I would refer my hon. Friend to my reply on 16 December 1991, *Official Report*, columns *10-11*, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton).

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will arrange for the Benefits Agency to amend the statement in leaflet FB31 that social fund payments do not usually have to be paid back.

Mr. Scott: The wording of leaflets is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

PRIME MINISTER

Foreign Investment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy in regard to selective intervention in circumstances of inward economic investment by foreign companies in *(a)* the regions of England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland, respectively.

The Prime Minister: Regional selective assistance (RSA) is available to encourage inward investment in the assisted areas of England, Wales and Scotland. Investors with a choice of location are offered the same level of RSA to go to assisted areas of equal status. A similar scheme operates in Northern Ireland but higher levels of assistance are available and may be offered.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what correspondence his office had with Mr. W. R. Burton on nuclear waste disposal over the past three years.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

World Commission on Environment and Development

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what plans Her Majesty's Government have to contribute new proposals to the World Commission on Environment and Development when it reconvenes in London on 21 to 24 April.

The Prime Minister: I am delighted that the World commission will reconvene in London in April. The purpose of the meeting is to enable the commissioners to make their independent assessment of the prospects for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The commissioners are not seeking proposals from Governments but, in view of the importance of the event, Her Majesty's Government are giving financial and other support to the organisers, the Centre for our Common Future.

UN Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what resources have been committed by Her Majesty's Government to ensuring wide public distribution of preparatory committee reports and decisions for the Earth summit at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June.

The Prime Minister: The Government have provided reports on decisions so far taken at UNCED preparatory committees to a wide range of interested organisations and individuals through the United Kingdom committee for UNEP.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what information he has received on the international meeting of non-governmental organisations held in Paris in December to formulate agreed proposals to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June.

The Prime Minister: It is important that the views of the non-governmental community should be taken fully into account in preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. I understand that agreement was not reached on all items addressed by the Paris meeting in December but that a partial set of proposals will be forwarded to the UNCED secretariat. These will be discussed at a meeting today between officials of the Department of the Environment and the British representatives of non-governmental organisations who attended the Paris meeting.

"Women and the Environment"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will obtain for his Office's library a copy of the recently published "Women and the Environment" compiled by Annabel Rodda.

The Prime Minister: I have already done so.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Medical Reports

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the guidance given by his Department to medical practitioners providing medical reports under regulation 10 to the Education (Teachers) Regulations 1989; and whether the teacher has the right to access to the report before it is sent to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Fallon: Guidance to local education authorities and others on the suspension or termination of a teacher's employment on medical grounds is contained in circular 1/88 "Physical and Mental Fitness to Teach of Teachers and of Entrants to Teacher Training". Copies are available in the Library.

Whenever the Secretary of State requests a medical report to consider a person's exclusion from teaching on medical grounds, individual guidance is given about the nature of the report required. The teacher may have access to the report before the Secretary of State determines his or her case, except where the medical practitioners concerned consider that disclosure might not be in the teacher's best interests. The teacher also has the right to submit a separate report from a medical practitioner of his or her own choosing.

The Secretary of State has no power to require a medical report for the purpose of considering barring a person from teaching or related employment on the grounds of misconduct. However, he may, in appropriate cases, suggest that it would be helpful for the teacher to provide one. In all cases, the teacher's written consent to the report's being seen by the Secretary of State is obtained before the report is commissioned.

Reading Tests

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he made to ensure that the standards of testing by local authorities for seven-year-old readers was of a nationally consistent standard; and if he will state the names of any local authorities not sending in returns.

Mr. Eggar: The teachers who carried out the reading tests used standard materials and marking schemes, and used books chosen from a national list.

Each local education authority was required to secure consistency between its assessment standards and national standards, and training was provided for LEA assessment staff.

Tower Hamlets and Lambeth LEAs did not submit their schools' returns by the due date.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will tabulate in respect of each local education authority making returns of their assessments tests for seven-year-old readers, the number of schools making or not making returns, respectively, and the appropriate number and percentage within each authority contributing to the test results.

Mr. Eggar: The tables published by my right hon. and learned Friend on 19 December were based on the usable returns from the following percentages of maintained primary schools with seven-year-olds in each LEA.

The tables excluded Tower Hamlets and Lambeth, as they had not submitted sufficient returns. Action has been taken to obtain this outstanding data.

LEA ranking—proportion of returns from maintained schools with 7 year olds used to compile the 19 December LEA tables

	Percentage returns used
Avon	100
Barking	100
Berkshire	100
Bexley	100
Bury	100
Cleveland	100
Coventry	100
Croydon	100
Enfield	100
Essex	100
Hackney	100
Hammersmith	100
Haringey	100
Havering	100
Kensington and Chelsea	100
Kingston upon Thames	100
Merton	100
Northamptonshire	100
Stockport	100
Sutton	100
Calderdale	99
Devon	99
Hereford and Worcester	99
Humberside	99
Lincolnshire	99
Sunderland	99
Tameside	99
Wakefield	99
Walsall	99
West Sussex	99
Bradford	98
Bromley	98
Cambridgeshire	98
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	98
Dudley	98
North Yorkshire	98
Northumberland	98
Rotherham	98
Solihull	98
South Tyneside	98
Suffolk	98
Warwickshire	98
Newcastle upon Tyne	97
Wolverhampton	97
Westminster	97
Gateshead	97
Trafford	97
Wirral	97
Surrey	97
Manchester	96
Shropshire	96
Somerset	96
Redbridge	95
Sefton	95
Waltham Forest	95
Kent	94
St. Helens	94
Staffordshire	94
Barnet	93
Gloucestershire	93
Leeds	93
Rochdale	93
Wiltshire	93
Barnsley	92
Brent	92
Camden	92
Cheshire	92
Cumbria	92
Doncaster	92
Knowsley	92
Sandwell	92
Durham	91
Harrow	91
Hertfordshire	91
Lancashire	91
Bedfordshire	90
Derbyshire	89
Isle of Wight	89
Lewisham	89
Oldham	89
Nottinghamshire	88
Richmond upon Thames	88
Wandsworth	88
Sheffield	87
Dorset	85
Hampshire	82
Leicestershire	81
Hillingdon	78
Ealing	77
Greenwich	75
Wigan	75
North Tyneside	73
Birmingham	72
Bolton	70
Oxfordshire	70
Liverpool	70
East Sussex	66
Islington	65
Kirklees	65
Salford	65
Southwark	60
Buckinghamshire	59
Norfolk	59
Hounslow	58
Newham	55

Universities

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the outcome of his consultations about university titles.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department and the Welsh Office are today writing to higher education institutions in the following terms:

University title beyond the present Polytechnics

1. The Education Department's paper, "Degree Awarding Powers and University Titles" consulted on the Government's proposals concerning:

(a) criteria for the extension of degree awarding powers beyond the present polytechnics:

(b) arrangements for the Secretary of State to secure advice on whether institutions meet those criteria; and

(c) criteria for extending the university title beyond the present polytechnics.

2. My letter of 16 December 1991 set out the Government's conclusions on the first two issues. This letter sets out the Secretary of State's decisions on the extension of the university title in the light of comments received on the consultation paper.

3. The Government's proposal was that the criteria for extending the university title beyond the present polytechnics should be that an institution would normally have:

(a) at least 300 full-time equivalent higher education students in a majority of the PCFC's nine academic programmes (or the Scottish equivalent);

(b) a higher education enrolment of at least 4,000 full-time equivalent students:

(c) at least 3,000 full-time higher education students on degree level courses;

(d) power to award its own taught course and research degrees.

4. Three of the four criteria have been widely welcomed. Some concern was expressed that criterion *(c)* would act as a

disincentive to institutions expanding part-time provision at degree level. The Secretary of State accepts this point. He has decided that the criteria which shall apply are those in paragraph 3 above except that criterion *(c)* shall read:

(c) at least 3,000 full-time equivalent higher education students on degree level courses.

5. As explained in my letter of 16 December 1991, during the period up to the formal dissolution of the CNAA, the Government will look to the Council to advise on whether institutions validated by it meet the degree awarding criteria. The Government will, in parallel, appoint Ad Hoc Committees to look similarly at institutions which are validated by universities. The Secretary of State will announce later in the year the arrangements which will apply after the dissolution of the CNAA.

6. The procedures by which an institution may change its title will vary between institutions. However, any institution which the Secretary of State by order specifies as competent to grant its own degree-awarding powers for taught-courses and research and which meets the remaining university title criteria will be able to seek the consent of the Privy Council to a "university" title. The Privy Council will write soon to all Colleges of Higher Education explaining the procedures and the timing of applications.

7. A related issue to that of "university" title is that of the use of the title, "university college". This was not covered in the consultation paper because the Secretary of State did not see any cause to review the prevailing policy which was that an institution using a "university college" title should be a constituent part of a collegiate university. However, a number of respondents to the consultation paper commented to the effect that the "university college" title should be more widely available, possibly extending to all institutions of higher education which did not meet the university criteria.

8. The Secretary of State has considered the points made on this matter and has concluded that there should be no change in the current policy. Extending the availability of "university college" to independent institutions which are not part of a university would cause confusion with established "university colleges". The Secretary of State believes nevertheless that Colleges of Higher Education which do not qualify for a university title will be able to maintain their successes over recent years.

Republic of Ireland (Education)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has about *(a)* the number of students from the United Kingdom receiving higher education in the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* the number of students from the Republic of Ireland receiving higher education in the United Kingdom; whether the United Kingdom Government pay for the fees for the Irish students in the United Kingdom; and whether the Republic of Ireland authorities pay the fees for United Kingdom students in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information is not collected centrally on the number of United Kingdom-domiciled students attending courses of higher education in the Irish Republic. However, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, there were 814 United Kingdom students in full-time higher education in the Irish Republic in the academic year 1988-89. In the academic year 1990-91 there were 4,823 students from the Irish Republic on higher education courses in the United Kingdom. Under article 7 of the treaty of Rome, nationals of other EC states are entitled to have access to higher education on the same terms as apply to nationals of the host state. Accordingly, Irish students who attend higher education courses at United Kingdom institutions, and who fulfil broadly the same eligibility conditions as those applied to United Kingdom students, may qualify for an award which covers the cost of tuition fees up to a prescribed maximum level. The Irish Government have similar obligations under the EC treaty.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Russian Federation (Treaties)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current status of (i) the 1963 partial test ban treaty and (ii) the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty in the light of the dissolution of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The rights and obligations of the Soviet Union as a party to the 1963 partial test ban treaty have been inherited by the Russian federation, which has continuity of statehood with the former Soviet Union. The United Kingdom is not a party to the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty, but we would assume that the same considerations apply.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what agreement has been reached with the new Government of the Russian federation to establish Russia as a third depositary state for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in place of the disbanded Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. The rights and responsibilities of a depositary Government of the non-proliferation treaty have been inherited by the Russian federation which has continuity of statehood with the former Soviet Union.

East Timor

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review Her Majesty's Government's policy in relation to the supply of all arms and provision of military training to Indonesia in light of the report of the massacre in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government's policy on the supply of arms and the provision of military training is kept under constant review. All applications to export defence equipment are carefully scrutinised on a case-by-case basis.

Verification

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution was made by United Kingdom experts to the United Nations study, "Verification in all its Aspects; a Study on the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Verification", documents A/451372, presented to the General Assembly in August 1990; and what subsequent developments there have been arising from the report that affected United Kingdom policy on international verification.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A consultant from the Verification Technology Information Centre (VERTIC) was appointed to the United Nations Secretary-General's governmental experts' study on the role of the United Nations in the field of verification. The United Kingdom made a significant contribution to the successful outcome of the study.

The experts' report was considered at the United Nations General Assembly's 45th session. Resolution

45/63, adopted without vote, requested member states to give active consideration to the experts' proposals and asked the United Nations Secretary-General to report the outcome at the Assembly's 47th session in 1992.

Iraq (UN Contingent)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial resources the United Kingdom has committed to the United Nations guards contingent in Iraq; and what proportion of the total budget for the contingent is contributed by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom initially committed $6,000,000 in cash and kind to the United nations guards contingent in Iraq. On 17 December 1991 it pledged a further $1,000,000. This constitutes approximately 14 per cent. of the total budget so far committed for the contingent.

Gulf War (Radioactivity)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response was made by Her Majesty's ambassador to the United Nations to the plea by Iraq's Foreign Minister to the United Nations on 21 November 1991, that it establish a team of United Nations experts to determine the level and possible danger of radioactive depleted uranium shells used by allied forces in Desert Storm and Operation Granby in 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the next Foreign Affairs Council meeting the issue of weapons usable enriched uranium and plutonium seized by customs authorities in Italy, originating in the former Soviet Union; and if he will instruct the United Kingdom ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency to urge an immediate agency investigation into the clandestine commerce in weapons-usable nuclear materials.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We view all reports of clandestine traffic in nuclear materials with great concern and are active in seeking to prevent such trafficking. In doing so, we naturally consult with our partners and with the IAEA where appropriate. We have discussed the present case with the Italian authorities.

UN Missions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of recent decisions taken at the United Nations General Assembly's fifth committee on budgetary affairs in regard to *(a)* the United Nation's advance mission to Cambodia and *(b)* the United Nation's Iraq-Kuwait observation mission; and what contribution the United Kingdom has made in respect of these missions.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: At its 46th regular session, the United Nations General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary), to appropriate and assess the sum of $13,967,300 to finance the United Nations advance mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) for a six-month period beginning November 1991 and the sum of $33·6 million to finance the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait observer mission (UNIKOM) for the period 9 October 1991 to 8 April 1992. Both recommendations were accepted by the General Assembly.

The United Kingdom-assessed share, at the special peacekeeping scale of the cost of both these missions is 6·1 per cent. There are 20 United Kingdom observers serving with UNIKOM and three with UNAMIC.

Somalia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Somalia.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government are deeply concerned by the continuing instability in Somalia. We have called on the parties to halt the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas in Mogadishu and to allow secure distribution of humanitarian relief supplies. We continue to support international initiatives to bring about a ceasefire. We deplore the refusal of some Somali leaders to accept mediation.

On 8 January I announced a further £2·2 million food aid, raising the total humanitarian aid to Somalia since January 1991 to £7·42 million, including our share of EC assistance.

WALES

Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he sent a letter to the hon. Member for Gower informing him that his Minister of State was to visit Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr, sited in the village of Gowerton, Swansea.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It is standard practice for my private office to notify right hon. and hon. Members, in writing and in advance, of my official visits to their constituencies. I regret that owing to an oversight, no letter was sent on this occasion.

A44

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to improve the A44 trunk road between Gelli Isaf and Dyffryn Castell hotel, Ponterwyd, during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Consideration is being given to undertaking an improvement scheme on this stretch of road during the next five years.

Chernobyl

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farms were initially put on the restricted list following the radioactive fallout contamination from the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986; if he will list the number of farms and their respective acreage taken off the list in each subsequent year; and what steps he is taking to restore to full usage the remaining farms.

Mr. David Hunt: Restrictions were first introduced in Wales in June 1986 and affected about 5,100 holdings and

approximately 1,013,000 acres of land. During 1986 and 1987 some 4,684 holdings and approximately 804,000 acres were derestricted, with a further nine holdings and approximately 4,000 acres derestricted in 1991.

The extent of the restrictions depends on the levels of radioactivity found in sheep grazing the area. Monitoring results from sheep leaving the restricted area, under the mark and release scheme, and results from regular monitoring of sheep at selected sites throughout the restricted area are continually assessed. This information assists in the identification of suitable locations for intensive monitoring to assess the prospects for derestriction. As a result of these procedures I was able to lift restrictions on nine holdings in 1991. Work, including research and development, will continue to be carried out to achieve further derestrictions as soon as it can be shown that it is safe to do so. Meanwhile, the "mark and release" arrangements are designed to ensure that normal sheep farming practices within the restricted area continue with the minimum of disruption consistent with the protection of the foodchain.

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) for what reason it is his Department's policy that separate charges are made when a doctor in Wales prescribes a course of treatment which involves two active ingredients when the ingredients are packaged as a single entity by the manufacturers;

(2) for what reason it is his Department's policy that a single charge is made when a doctor in Wales prescribes a course of treatment which involves two active ingredients when the ingredients are formulated together in a single package.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliance) Regulations 1989 provide that a prescription charge is payable in respect of each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed unless the patient is exempt. Where two or more ingredients are supplied in a single tablet or capsule, a single charge is made. If, for the convenience of the patient and to improve compliance, two or more kinds of tablet or capsule are supplied in one package, each carries a separate prescription charge.

The Government are concerned to ensure that patient's liability to meet prescription charges is applied in an equitable manner. It would not be appropriate to allow manufacturers' packaging arrangements, which provide a benefit to some patients, also to determine the number of charges a patient may have to pay.

Education Funding Councils

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce the names of the chairmen and chief executive of both the further and higher education funding councils for Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Subject to the Further and Higher Education Bill receiving Royal Assent, I intend to appoint Mr. Malcolm Wallace to be chairman of the Further Education Funding Council and Sir Idris Pearce to be chairman of the Higher Education Council. Both will be employed as chairmen designate on preparatory work.

I have also decided after consulting the chairmen designate, that the councils should be serviced by a single secretariat. This should make close working arrangements between the two bodies very much easier. The important post of chief executive of the two councils will be filled by Professor John Andrews.

Tourism

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that the Wales tourist board should be able to carry on activities outside the United Kingdom in order to promote Welsh tourism.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government remain concerned that Wales should continue to receive the economic benefits which accrue from a strong and broadly based tourism industry. We have considered carefully that many representations which have been made suggesting that powers should be granted to the Wales tourist board to undertake activities outside the United Kingdom in order to promote tourism in Wales.

The industry is expected to continue to expand rapidly worldwide, and there will undoubtedly be increasing competition for overseas visitors. The Government therefore support the intentions of the Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Wales) Bill—which was introduced by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan)—to grant powers to the Wales tourist board corresponding to those enjoyed by the Scottish tourist board under the Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Scotland) Act 1984. The Government are also prepared to offer drafting assistance if necessary.

I have accepted the Wales tourist board's assurance that it would not exercise such powers unless it had undertaken full consultation with and obtained the agreement of the British Tourist Authority before embarking upon any overseas marketing activity, and that it would not seek a direct overseas presence by opening separate offices in overseas markets. My consent will only be given on this basis.

Home Repossessions

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homeowners in Cardiganshire have suffered repossession of their homes due to mortgage arrears in each year since 1980 until the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

The figures for the number of repossessions are not collected. The only information available on mortgage possessions is the number of actions entered and orders made in each county court. Two county courts deal with Cardiganshire cases—Aberystwyth and Carmarthen—and information is available, as set out below, for Aberystwyth county court for each year from 1987 to 1990 and the first 11 months of 1991.

Not all these orders will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession. Carmarthen county court deals with a wider area than just Cardiganshire and it is not possible to separate these cases.

Mortgage possession actions entered and orders made in Aberystwyth county court

	Actions entered	*Orders made*
1987	37	22
1988	40	26
1989	35	19

	Actions entered	Orders made
1990	52	30
[1]1991	70	46

[1] January to November.

EMPLOYMENT

Hairdressers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that employers comply with Government guidelines relating to minimum wages for hairdressers and trainee hairdressers.

Mr. Forth: Hairdressers are covered by the Hairdressing Undertakings Wages Council (Great Britain), and workers aged 21 years and over must be paid at least the statutory minimum remuneration agreed by that Council. The wages inspectorate provides information about the requirements of the Wages Act 1986 and checks that establishments comply with the law. A leaflet on the wages council system is freely available to all inquirers.

New Businesses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new businesses are estimated to have been started since May 1979; how many were started in the previous five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Between the end of 1979 and the end of 1990, there were an estimated 2,147,000 new registrations for VAT and 1,727,000 deregistrations—a net increase of 420,000. During the previous five years, between the end of 1974 and the end of 1979, there were an estimated 809,000 new registrations and 724,000 deregistrations—a net increase of 85,000.

The available indicators for 1991 show that there continue to be more businesses starting up than closing down. For example, there have been over 1,000 starts a week under enterprise allowance alone.

Wages Councils

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on progress in his policy to abolish wages councils.

Mr. Forth: The wages councils have no permanent place in the labour market and their operation remains under review.

Tourism

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce powers for the English tourist board to promote England as a tourist destination overseas.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is informing the House separately of the Government's views on whether powers should be granted to the Wales tourist board, corresponding to those enjoyed by the Scottish tourist board under the Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Scotland) Act 1984. The Government are also considering whether, at an appropriate time, the English tourist board should be granted similar powers. I therefore intend shortly to arrange for representatives of the tourism industry to be consulted on this question.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

United Nations (Distribution)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific proposals his Department has for the wide distribution of handtools to agrarian developing economies via the United Nations agencies and institutions.

Mrs. Chalker: We have no such plans. Except in cases of humanitarian need where we occasionally provide handtools via the United Nations system to aid post-disaster recovery, we do not consider the wide distribution of handtools to agrarian developing economies to be sound development policy. This process can distort and damage manufacturing sectors in these economies. We prefer instead to stimulate the local production of such tools.

UN Research Institute for Social Development

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Overseas Development Administration gives to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development to distribute its publications in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Chalker: The ODA currently gives no assistance to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

Aid Programme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the new agenda for Africa in the 1990s adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1991; and what are the implications of this agenda for Her Majesty's Government's overseas aid programme.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Nation's new agenda for the development of Africa in the 1990s encourages African countries to make further progress on economic reform; improve the quality of their public expenditure programmes; and pay particular attention to human resource development and capacity building. It stresses the link between economic and social development and good governance.

These are already the aims of our bilateral assistance programmes to African countries. Almost 50 per cent. of our bilateral aid goes to Africa. We have also taken the lead in promoting international consensus and action on debt relief for the poorest, most heavily indebted countries undertaking economic reforms, many of which are in Africa.

Natural Resources Institute

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what activities have been undertaken by the Natural Resources Institute since its last annual report.

Mrs. Chalker: I have placed in the Library of the House copies of the Natural Resources Institute's report on operational programmes 1989-91 and the annual report and accounts 1990-91. These reports give details of work undertaken by NRI in support of the renewable natural resources sector in developing countries, and of the institute's performance in its first year as a "next steps" agency.

HEALTH

Access to Equipment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West dated 24 October 1991, regarding the enforcement of the right of free access to equipment, including nebulisers.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be responding to the hon. Member's letter of 24 October shortly. The individual cases to which he refers are being investigated by South Glamorgan health authority whose policy and practice in the supply of equipment such as nebulisers complies with the requirements of the National Health Service Act 1977.

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason it is his Department's policy that separate charges are made when a doctor prescribes a course of treatment which involves two active ingredients when the ingredients are packaged as a single entity by the manufacturers;

(2) for what reason it is his Department's policy that a single charge is made when a doctor prescribes a course of treatment which involves two active ingredients when the ingredients are formulated together in a single package.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 1989 provide that a prescription charge is payable in respect of each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed, unless the patient is exempt. Where two or more ingredients are supplied in a single tablet or capsule, a single charge is made. If, for the convenience of the patient and to improve compliance, two or more kinds of tablet or capsule are supplied in one package, each carries a separate prescription charge.

The Government are concerned to ensure that patients' liability to meet prescription charges is applied in an equitable manner. It would not be appropriate to allow manufacturers' packaging arrangements, which provide a benefit to some patients, also to determine the number of charges a patient may have to pay.

Haemoglobinopathies

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee working party on the clinical and service aspects of haemoglobinopathies; when the working party will report; and what are its terms of reference.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* The membership of the working party is as follows:

Professor A. G. Johnson, Chairman
Dr. E. Anionwu
Professor A. J. Bellingham,
Dr. M. Brozovic
Dr. I Cox
Professor C. J. Dickinson
Dr. R. MacFaul
Dr. B. Modell
Professor A. Spence

The working party is due to hold its first meeting in the new year. Broadly, it will address issues of current good practice, screening, counselling and information for patients in respect of sickle cell disease and make recommendations to the medical profession. Terms of reference and the timescale for reporting to SMAC are currently under discussion.

NHS Budget

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing the amount and proportion of the national health service budget spent on acute hospital care, chronic and long-term hospital care, health promotion advice and services and primary health care in each of the years from 1985-86 to 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* Information is not collected centrally in precisely the form requested, but the available figures are given in the table.

£ million

	1978-79	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*[1]1991-92*
Expenditure on Acute Services[2]								
Inpatient care	1,621	3,372	3,589	3,885	4,372	4,736	—	—
Outpatient care	431	998	1,065	1,147	1,249	1,376	—	—
Total	2,052	4,370	4,654	5,032	5,621	6,112	—	—
As a percentage of expenditure on the HCHS[3]	46·4	45·5	45·1	44·6	44·8	45·0		
Expenditure on geriatric services and services for people with mental illness and learning disabilities								
Inpatient care								
Geriatric		835	902	981	1,062	1,087	—	—
Mental Illness		937	998	1,146	1,262	1,323	—	—
Learning disability		477	496	527	586	620	—	—
Outpatient care								
Geriatric		7	8	26	24	25	—	—
Mental illness		68	71	67	68	74	—	—
Learning disability		1	1	3	3	2	—	—

	1978-79	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	[1]1991-92
Total		2,325	2,476	2,750	3,005	3,131	—	—
As a percentage of expenditure on the HCHS[3]		24·2	24·0	24·4	23·9	23·1		
Health promotion and advice services[4, 5]								
Health visiting		149	164	188	221	—	—	—
Professional advice and support		—	—	—	173	200	—	—
Health promotion		—	—	—	62	72	—	—
Total		149	164	188	221/235	272	—	—
As a percentage of expenditure on the HCHS[3]		1·5	1·6	1·7	1·8/1·9	2·0		
Primary care services:								
Hospital and Community Health Services[5]								
District nursing		293	332	402	490	—	—	—
General community patient care		—	—	—	558	581	—	—
Community mental illness		—	—	—	120	154	—	—
Community learning disability		—	—	—	60	77	—	—
Total		3	332	402	490/738	812	—	—
As a percentage of expenditure on the HCHS[3]		3·0	3·2	3·6	3·9/5·9	6·0		
Family Health Services [6]								
Non-cash limited[7]		3,376	3,631	4,019	4,554	4,811	5,304	5,804
GMS cash limited[8]		162	175	201	232	302	464	592
Total		3,538	3,806	4,220	4,786	5,113	5,768	6,396
As a percentage of total NHS expenditure		23·7	23·7	23·9	24·4	24·2	24·4	24·0

[1] Estimated outturn

[2] Expenditure on hospital care is classified by specialty according to the consultant responsible for the care of the patient. Acute services are defined as all specialities except maternity, mental illness and learning disability (mental handicap). Expenditure on the latter three specialities cannot be broken down between short episodes and long stay.

[3] Figures shown are drawn from the Programme Budget. Disaggregated figures are not yet available for years after 1989-90. The HCHS current expenditure covered by the Programme Budget represents around 64 per cent. of total NHS expenditure.

[4] Health promotion and advice form part of many programmes of care, particularly in primary care and community health services and the expenditure shown above under this heading reflects only part of the total expenditure in this area.

[5] From 1988-89, the classification of expenditure on community health services has changed, and it is not possible to provide figures on a consistent basis with those for earlier years. In particular, expenditure on "health visiting" recorded under either "immunisation", "surveillance" or professional advice and support. Expenditure on "district nursing" is now recorded under "general community patient care", which also includes expenditure on paramedical services. Figures for 1988-89 have been provided on both old and new bases, for comparison with earlier and later years.

[6] Expenditure on Family Health Services (excluding administration) provided by family doctors, dentists, community pharmacists and opticians.

[7] 1991-92 figure includes provision of £141 million for drug costs of GP fundholders which is incorporated in the cash limited Class XIII Vote 1.

[8] GP practice expenses cash limited from April 1990.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Policy

13. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet representatives of the west midlands regional CBI to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lilley: I shall be visiting a number of companies in the west midlands in March.

25. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lilley: From time to time I have met representatives of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, or of individual chambers, to discuss industrial policy.

International Competitiveness

14. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from business men about the importance of maintaining for the international competitiveness of British industry a low regulatory burden.

Mr. Redwood: I regularly receive representations from business on the importance of minimising regulatory burdens on business. In the Government's approach to national regulation and in negotiations on proposals for new EC regulations, the potential costs of compliance and impact on the competitiveness of United Kingdom industry are fully taken into account.

The most recent record of progress under the Deregulation Initiative, "Cutting Red Tape for Business", was published on 13 May 1991 and a copy placed in the Library.

Direct Mail

20. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received about the regulation of direct mail.

Mr. Leigh: I receive a small but steady flow of complaints from individuals and hon. Members about direct mail.

Vehicle Transfer Agencies

21. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take steps to outlaw vehicle transfer agencies; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The existing law, in particular the Consumer Credit Act 1974, contains provisions regulating the activities of vehicle transfer agencies. I welcome the action which the Director General of Fair Trading is taking under those provisions.

Motor Industry

22. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet representatives of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders to discuss the effects of the recession on the motor industry.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend met representatives of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders on 11 November to discuss various motor industry issues. While no further meeting is planned for the immediate future, the Department maintains regular contact with the SMMT at all levels.

27. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has recently received from the engineering industry about the state of the motor car industry.

Mr. Leigh: The Secretary of State has regular contacts with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, which represents component manufacturers as well as vehicle builders, and with individual companies. These contacts, together with those of other DTI Ministers and officials in the DTI's vehicles task force and regional offices, enable him to keep up-to-date on issues affecting the motor car industry.

Maastricht

23. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations he has carried out amongst the leaders of British industry on their attitude to the Maastricht negotiations; what were the responses he received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The director general of the CBI congratulated the Prime Minister and his colleagues on having

"achieved exactly what business needs"

from Maastricht. The Government, too, believe that British industry will be well served by the agreement reached at Maastricht.

Investment Location

24. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from business men concerning the impact of the regulatory environment on decisions about location of investment.

Mr. Redwood: None, Sir. However, my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau reports that foreign potential investors have often commented favourably on the United Kingdom's regulatory environment. That is why we are the preferred location in the Economic Community for investment from Japan and the United States.

Eastern Europe

26. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the present availability of export assistance to United Kingdom companies trading with eastern Europe.

Mr. Sainsbury: A range of services is available under the enterprise initiative including support for outward missions and participation in overseas trade fairs, the provision of general information on overseas markets and answers to specific questions about market opportunities. The services are available through the country sections of my Department or our network of regional offices.

Export Credits Guarantee Department credit insurance cover for medium-term business—ie on credit term of two years or more—is available for Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Short-term cover is now provided by the private sector.

Aircraft Industry

28. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the balance of trade in aircraft and aircraft components for the most recent two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Leigh: The latest available figures are for the 12-month period ending September 1991 for which the United Kingdom had a positive trade balance in aircraft and aircraft components of £2·8 billion, compared with £1·7 billion for the previous 12 months ending September 1990.

Plugs and Sockets

29. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any proposals to amend the Plugs and Sockets Etc. (Safety) Regulations 1987.

Mr. Leigh: My Department is currently considering a number of amendments to the Plugs and Sockets Etc. (Safety) Regulations 1987 as part of a general review.

Mining Exports

30. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the mining engineering industry to discuss export prospects.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have had no request for such a meeting.

My officials are, however, in frequent contact with the industry and its trade association on this subject.

Aerospace Industry

31. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will meet the British representatives of General Electric to discuss the aerospace industry.

Mr. Leigh: I have no plans to meet the British representatives of General Electric.

Kuwait

32. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on trade between the United Kingdom and Kuwait since the end of the Gulf war.

Mr. Sainsbury: United Kingdom exports began to recover almost immediately after the end of the war so that by the third quarter of 1991 the value of exports was at the 1989—pre-war—level of approximately £56 million per quarter. Imports from Kuwait are recovering more slowly.

US Investment

33. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's share of investment from the United States into the European Community.

Mr. Leigh: The UK has maintained its successful track record as the preferred location within the European Community for inward investment from the USA. Britain's share of United States investment in the EC stood at 37·5 per cent. at the end of 1990.

Manufacturing Trade Deficit

34. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has recently received about the manufacturing trade deficit.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have received no representations recently on the manufacturing trade deficit. However, I frequently meet representatives from the CBI and industry and a wide variety of subjects are discussed.

Exports and Inward Investment

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support his Department gives to consulate staff in non-EC countries in identifying export opportunities for United Kingdom firms and inward investment opportunities.

Mr. Sainsbury: Commercial staff in Foreign and Commonwealth Office overseas posts provide a wide range of information, advice, and assistance to UK exporters and to potential investors in the UK. They are assisted by the joint directorate and the Invest in Britain Bureau.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Internal Market Council held in Brussels on Thursday 19 December.

Mr. Redwood: I attended the Internal Market Council on 19 December 1991. Political agreements were reached on public procurement (services), the third non-life insurance directive and the second diplomas directive. Common positions were reached on the three remaining vehicle type approval measures, pharmaceutical patent protection and homeopathic medicines. Also, final agreement was reached on insurance accounts, insurance committees, and common positions on sweeteners, two and three-wheeled vehicles and hot water boilers.

The council also held policy discussions on food irradiation and the Berne and Paris conventions along with brief progress reports on border controls, the future medicinal systems, the CE mark and data protection. The council also agree to reject a request for talks on Commission staff pay.

Employee Inventions

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for adjudication have been made to the Comptroller of Patents seeking awards for employee inventions as provided in section 40 of the Patents Act 1977 in each year since 1978; in how many of those cases an award was made; and what was the average value of the awards made in each year.

Mr. Leigh: The number of applications under section 40 to the comptroller since 1978 has been 16—one in 1984, one in 1985, five in 1986, one in 1987, four in 1989, two in 1990 and two in 1991. Of these, eight were withdrawn before hearing, three were heard but no award made, and the remaining five are still in the evidence stage. One of the applicants heard but rejected is under appeal to the Patents Court.

Protein Engineering

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many research projects are being funded under the protein engineering link programme in universities and polytechnics; what is their total value; how many universities and polytechnics have research projects funded under the protein engineering link programme; and if he will list them.

Mr. Leigh: There are eight projects with university involvement within the link protein engineering programme; no polytechnics are as yet involved. The total value of these projects amounts to over £3 million—50 per cent. from the Government grant and the rest from industry. The seven universities involved are Bath, Cambridge—two projects—Leeds, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield and Sussex.

Takeover Panel

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will indemnify the takeover panel against possible liability for defamation arising from the preparation and publication of its pending report on the takeover of House of Fraser; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I am not responsible for the takeover panel and the question of indemnification in respect of any of its business does not therefore arise.

Textiles and Clothing

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in those parts of the general agreement on tariffs and trade Uruguay round negotiations relating to textiles and clothing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The draft Final Act on the Uruguay round which the GATT director-general recently circulated provides, in relation to textiles, for the

multi-fibre arrangement to be phased out over 10 years from 1993. It explicitly links this to strengthened GATT rules and disciplines and market access.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what business incentives are available to support private sector nuclear waste and safety consultants to obtain work through the public civil nuclear authorities operating in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: My Department offers no incentives to consultants to help them obtain work of this kind.

Environmental Investment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what invitations Ministers or officials of his Department have received to participate in the Club de Bruxelles forum on environmental investment priorities in Europe on 6 February.

Mr. Leigh: Officials of my Department recently received details of this event but have yet to decide whether or not they will attend it.

Manufacturing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to combat short-termism and its effects on the manufacturing sector of industry.

Mr. Redwood: In recent years there have been many good examples of major long term manufacturing investments in the United Kingdom. The key to this is encouraging competitiveness.

NORTHERN IRELAND

BSE

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cattle were destroyed as a result of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in each of the months of October, November and December 1991; whether the problem of BSE is now in decline; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The answer is:

Month	*Total number destroyed*
October	21
November	32
December	18
Total	71

There are 1,533,226 cattle in Northern Ireland, and a total of 308 confirmed cases of BSE have been reported to date.

Braniel Estate, Castlereagh

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many housing allocations were made in the Braniel estate, Castlereagh, in each of the months of October, November and December 1991; and how many of these allocations in each of the three months were to *(a)* homeless persons and *(b)* single-parent families.

Mr. Hanley: These are matters for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I am advised by its chief executive that the information requested is as follows:

	October 1991	*November 1991*	*December 1991*
Total allocations	7	6	3
Homeless	[1]4	[1]2	—
Single parent	1	1	1

[1] Includes single-parent allocation.

Newtownards (Housing)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applicants there are on the waiting list for homes in Newtownards; how many are categorised as primary cases; how many homes are presently under construction in Newtownards; and how many new homes will be commenced in 1992 in Newtownards.

Mr. Hanley: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, whose chief executive has advised that at 31 December there were 856 applicants on the executive's waiting list for the Ards borough council area, of whom 131 were in the priority category. Separate information for the town of Newtownards is not available. There are 66 Housing Executive dwellings under construction in Newtownards and the executive proposes to start building 62 new houses in the town in 1992-93.

"Angel Dust"

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of "angel dust" were detected in animals in each of the months of October, November and December 1991; and how many prosecutions are now pending.

Mr. Hanley: Clenbuterol, commonly referred to as "angel dust", was detected in the following numbers of animals during the periods in question:

	Number of cases detected
October	9
November	2
December	5

Excluding the above, four prosecutions are pending in respect of offences committed prior to October 1991.

SCOTLAND

Appointments

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the paid appointments within his patronage, *(b)* the annual remuneration paid to each one and *(c)* the total remuneration costs.

Mr. Lang: Table 1 shows the annual remuneration at 1 July 1991 to my appointees in paid appointments.

Table 2 provides the same information in respect of appointments made jointly with other Ministers. The respective totals, excluding those appointees paid on a fee basis, are £1,458,172 and £603,689.

Table 1
Paid appointments for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible as at 1 July 1991

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1991 £
Argyll and Clyde Health Board	
Chairman	17,375
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board	
Chairman	14,565
Borders Health Board	
Chairman	11,740
Caledonian Macbrayne	
Chairman	16,050
7 Members	4,815
Central Scotland Woodlands Ltd.	
Chairman	Fee paid
Commission for Local Authority accounts in Scotland	
Chairman	9,130
Deputy Chairman	5,790
8 Members	2,800
Counsel to Secretary of State on private legislation procedure	
1 Member	15,374
1 Member	10,005
Countryside Commission for Scotland	
Chairman	15,401
Deputy Chairman	6,438
Crofters Commission	
Chairman	40,027
6 Members	10,203
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	
Chairman	19,765
Deputy Chairman	8,980
8 Members	4,050
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board	
Chairman	11,740
East Kilbride Development Corporation	
Chairman	19,765
Deputy Chairman	8,980
7 Members	4,050
Fife Health Board	
Chairman	14,565
Forth Valley Health Board	
Chairman	14,565
Glenrothes Development Corporation	
Chairman	19,765
Deputy Chairman	8,980
7 Members	4,050
Grampian Health Board	
Chairman	19,810
Greater Glasgow Health Board	
Chairman	24,680
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	
Chairman	61,390
9 Members	6,450
Highland Health Board	
Chairman	14,565
Horse Race Betting Levy Appeal Tribunal for Scotland	
2 Members	171 per day
Irvine Development Corporation	
Chairman	19,765
Deputy Chairman	8,980
7 Members	4,050
Lanarkshire Health Board	
Chairman	17,375
Livingston Development Corporation	
Chairman	19,765
Deputy Chairman	8,980
7 Members	4,050
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland	
Chairman	5,092
Vice Chairman	12,075
3 Members	1,708
Lothian Health Board	
Chairman	22,245
Orkney Health Board	
Chairman	7,070
Preliminary Review Committee for Life Sentence Prisoners	
3 Members	varied daily fees paid
Red Deer Commission	
Chairman	16,482
Rent Assessment Panel for Scotland	
President	12,981
Vice President	8,184
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board	
Chairman	158 per day
3 Members	101 per day
Scottish Dental Practice Board	
Chairman	39,402
Scottish Enterprise	
Chairman	43,000
Deputy Chairman	9,000
9 Members	6,000
Scottish Homes	
Chairman	31,350
Deputy Chairman	15,150
7 Members	5,790
Scottish Legal Aid Board	
Chairman	17,332
11 Members	8,528
2 Members	5,685
Scottish Seed Potato Development Council	
Chairman	7,650
Scottish Tourist Board	
Chairman	31,670
6 Members	5,790
Scottish Transport Group	
Chairman	69,132
1 Member	7,280
2 Members	5,546

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1991 £
Shetland Health Board	
Chairman	7,070
State Hospital Management Committee	
Chairman	12,980
Tayside Health Board	
Chairman	19,810
Western Isles Health Board	
Chairman	7,070

Table 2
Paid appointments made jointly by Secretary of State for Scotland and other Ministers as at 1 July 1991

	Annual salary as at 1 July 1991 £
Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards	
Chairman	23,500
Deputy Chairman	9,249
Agricultural Training Board	
Chairman	7,155
Deputy Chairman	6,560
British Wool Marketing Board	
3 Members	5,925
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board	
Chairman	23,100
Director General of Electricity Supply	81,700
Food from Britain	
Chairman	30,000
Deputy Chairman	4,400
12 Members	1,804
Home Grown Cereals Authority	
Chairman	16,765
Deputy Chairman	5,790
19 Members	2,890
Horticultural Development Council	
Chairman	22,950
Deputy Chairman	4,160
20 Members	25 per day
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce	
Chairman	6,055
Meat and Livestock Commission	
Chairman	49,350
Deputy Chairman	24,390
1 Member	11,770
10 Members	5,790
National Radiological Protection Board	
Chairman	9,970
12 Members	72 per day
Sea Fish Industry Authority	
Chairman	25,745
Deputy Chairman	12,027
10 Members	5,650
United Kingdom Seeds Executive	
Chairman	8,800
4 Members	2,880

Hospital Beds (Highland Region)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many unoccupied beds in private nursing homes are being paid for by Highland health board; and at what cost.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand that Highland health board has concluded that the negotiation of a contract with a private nursing home in Portree would be a more cost-effective way of providing better care for the elderly in a more central location in Skye. The closure of Gesto hospital is now the subject of public consultation. If meanwhile the board judges it right to reserve accommodation to ensure that its plans can be implemented, that is a matter for it. I will approve the closure of Gesto hospital only if it is clear that the alternative accommodation offers a better service to patients.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the implications, in terms of compensation, of a decision by Her Majesty's Government not to proceed with the proposed Skye toll bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As is normal commercial practice, termination by one party which constituted a breach of contract could entitle the other party to claim compensation.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the implications for the toll period of any increase in the cost of the proposed Skye toll bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Depending on the circumstances, an increase in costs required by the Secretary of State may result in an increase in the toll period. The length of such an extension would depend on the scale of extra costs and the forecast traffic volumes.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the principal terms, including those relating to compensation, of the contract entered into by the Scottish Office in relation to the proposed Skye bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As is normal commercial practice, the financial details of the contracts are confidential. However, the other principal terms of the contract are set out in the assignation statement published with the draft toll order.

There is provision in the contracts for compensation in the event of default by either party at all stages in both the construction and operation of the crossing.

House Repossessions

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many home owners in Scotland have suffered repossession of their homes due to mortgage arrears in each year since 1979 until the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: This information is not available in the form requested. The Council of Mortgage Lenders publishes statistics in its regular newsletters on various aspects of mortgage lending by building societies but this is on a

Great Britain basis and no corresponding information is available for Scotland only. No information about other mortgage lenders is held centrally.

Ayr Hospital

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last visited the new Ayr hospital; whether he informed the hon. Member for the constituency which includes the new hospital in advance of his visit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Member is aware I last visited the new Ayr hospital on 6 January. I have since written to him on the matter.

Dundee Institute of Technology

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the implications for Dundee institute of technology of the Government's proposed reforms of higher education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), confirming the criteria for the extension of university title to institutions other than polytechnics.

This decision means that Dundee institute of technology does not at present meet the criteria for the right to use the university title. The institute will benefit from my right hon. Friend's announcement of 30 December under which it will acquire degree-awarding powers for both taught and research degrees in recognition of the very high academic standards it has attained. Clearly, the institute will wish to consider how best to build on its record of achievement. The institute can look forward to the opportunity presented by the establishment of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to compete for funds on exactly the same basis as all Scottish higher education establishments.

The institute recently submitted proposals to the Secretary of State to merge with Highland, Western Isles and Fife colleges of nursing and midwifery. I wrote to Dr. Cuming, the principal of the institute, on 12 December asking him to review an expanded range of options for its future development. In that letter, I made it clear that, before I could give a considered response to the proposals involving the nursing colleges, I would want to view them in the context of the institute's assessment of the merits and practicality of collaboration with other providers of higher education in the Dundee area. So far as the specific option submitted to my right hon. Friend was concerned, if this were to be pursued I made it clear that I would in due course require to see a more fully argued case which addressed the detailed criteria set out in annex B of the report on mergers by the Scottish committee of the Universities Funding Council published on 25 November.

Universities

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria he will apply in advising the Privy Council on applications for the use of the university title by higher education institutions other than the present polytechnics and universities.

Mr. Lang: My Department has today written to those representative bodies to which copies of our consultation paper on this matter were issued on 31 October. Copies have also been sent to all Members presently serving on the First Scottish Standing Committee considering the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill. Given the public interest in this matter the full text of the letter is reproduced below.

"University title

1. The Consultation Paper "Degree Awarding Powers and University Title" issued by the Education Departments on 31 October 1991 consulted on the Government's proposals concerning:

1.1 criteria for the extension of degree awarding powers beyond the present polytechnics;

1.2 arrangements for the Secretary of State to secure advice on whether institutions meet those criteria; and

1.3 criteria for extending the university title beyond the present polytechnics.

2. The Government's conclusions on the first 2 issues have already been set out in our letter of 30 December 1991. This letter sets out the Government's conclusions on the criteria for extending the university title beyond the present polytechnics.

Criteria for University Title

3. Following a generally favourable response to the criteria set out in its consultation paper, the Government has decided that the criteria on which the Secretary of State will base his advice to the Privy Council on any application for use of the university title will be substantially as set out in the consultation paper. The criteria will be that an institution should have:—

(a) at least 300 full-time equivalent higher education students in a majority of the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council's 9 academic programmes;

(b) a higher education enrollment of at least 4,000 full-time equivalent students;

(c) at least 3,000 full-time equivalent higher education students on degree level courses;

(d) power to award its own taught course and research degrees.

4. The only change in the above criteria, compared with those in the consultation paper, is that the third criterion is now cast by reference to full-time equivalent student numbers rather than full-time student numbers. In view of the importance of increasing access to higher education through more flexible course structures and, in particular, part-time provision the Government concluded in the light of comments received that this change was desirable. Assessment of the number of full-time equivalent higher education students on degree level courses in an institution will be made by reference to the proportion of students leaving an institution with a full first degree or higher qualification, or a qualification which is equivalent to a full first degree or higher qualification, in the latest academic session for which figures are available.

5. Some institutions asked which students might be included for the purposes of those criteria which include reference to student numbers. The Government does not intend that account should be taken, in assessing applications from individual institutions, of students in associated institutions.

6. The Privy Council Office will write soon to Colleges of Higher Education explaining the procedures and the timing of applications. We are writing in similar terms to all representative organisations which responded to the Consultation Paper of 31 October 1991".

Revaluation

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he intends to make for 1992-93 to continue phasing in the effects of the 1990 revaluation.

Mr. Lang: We are committed to limiting annual increases in non-domestic rate bills resulting from revaluation to a maximum of 20 per cent. in real terms, to 15 per cent. for those ratepayers occupying properties with

rateable values of less than £10,000, and to 10 per cent. in the case of part-residential properties with rateable values of less than £10,000.

In order to maintain the level of non-domestic rate income this year, we arranged to limit decreases in non-domestic rate bills resulting from revaluation to 11·5 per cent. in real terms, and to 16·5 per cent. for those ratepayers occupying properties with rateable values of less than £10,000. The limits for those who benefited from the revaluation will reduce by a further 11·5 per cent. and 16·5 per cent. in real terms in 1992-93.

These changes will be set out in regulations which I shall lay before Parliament in the near future. The regulations will prescribe the multipliers to be applied to the rateable values of properties in the valuation roll on 31 March 1990 to determine the upper and lower notional rateable values for the purpose of calculating non-domestic rate bills for 1992-93. The multipliers for the upper limits will be 2·323 for properties with rateable values as at 1 April 1990 of £10,000 or more, 2·045 for those with rateable values of less than £10,000 and 1·871 for part-residential properties with values of less than £10,000. The multipliers for the lower limits will be 0·931 for properties with rateable values as at 1 April 1990 of £10,000 or more and 0·782 for those properties with values of less than £10,000.

DEFENCE

"The Campus Connection"

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain a copy of "The Campus Connection" for his departmental library.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The MOD library added a copy of the CND publication "The Campus Connection" to its loan stock on 11 November 1991.

Ms. Lindis Percy

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department is claiming against Ms. Lindis Percy in respect of police costs as part of the proceedings to prevent Ms. Percy from entering Menwith hill; how the amount has been calculated; and under what powers the claim is being made against Ms. Percy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence is claiming common law damages from Ms. Lindis Percy, based on the cost of MOD police man hours devoted to dealing with Ms. Percy's persistent trespasses at Menwith hill station. This cost has reached some £11,600 by 21 August 1991.

Defence Arrangements (CIS)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the leadership of the new Commonwealth of Independent States has communicated with NATO Defence Ministers regarding decisions taken at its planning meeting on new collective independent conventional and nuclear defence arrangements in Minsk at the end of December 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No formal notification of the outcome of the meeting was sent to NATO Defence Ministers. The outcome was, however, widely reported in the media, and the Government have followed developments closely.

Mayak (Radioactive Pollution)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to give assistance to the Russian military nuclear authorities to decontaminate the radioactive pollution at the Mayak atomic complex and the nearby Tecka river near Chelyabinsk.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In conjunction with our NATO partners, we are ready to consider requests for assistance in the nuclear field from the successor states to the former Soviet Union. NATO is reviewing where best that effort might be directed.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all national and local television and radio broadcasts he and other Ministers in his Department have made since 20 December on the questions of *(a)* the control of the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union by the Commonwealth of Independent States and *(b)* the future of British nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not available in the form requested.

Nuclear Research

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military nuclear research has been conducted at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich; and what clean up programmes have taken place at former facilities used for military nuclear research or storage.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some early research was carried out at various locations at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich. The facilities used have been decommissioned and cleaned up. Current decontamination work at the nearby Woolwich garrison is unrelated to the former facilities at the Royal Arsenal site.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Woodland Premium Scheme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the implementation of the farm woodland premium scheme announced in November last year.

Mr. Curry: We are finalising the details of this scheme, which will be introduced on 1 April 1992, in the light of comments received from interested organisations consulted about our proposals. A further announcement will made shortly.

I would also refer the hon. Member to the announcement on 19 December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), *Official Report*, column *296* about special arrangements for the payment of higher establishment grants in respect of all planting carried out under the farm woodland scheme since 1 October 1991.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 16 January 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Repossessions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has concerning the number of repossessions adjudicated in the Crown courts in Wales in each of the last four quarters up to 31 December 1991.

The Attorney-General: Possession actions are dealt with in the county court, not in the Crown court. The figures for the number of repossessions are not collected. The only information available on mortgage possession is the number of actions entered and orders made in each county court. The table gives the information for Welsh county courts for the first three quarters, and October and November of 1991, the latter being the latest data available. Not all the orders will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrnts of possession.

Mortgage possession—actions entered and orders made in the Welsh county courts

1991	*Total number of actions entered*	*Total number of orders made*
January to March	2,236	1,644
April to June	2,591	1,754
July to September	3,050	1,990
October to November	1,769	1,455

TRANSPORT

Freight Terminal, Isle of Grain

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the new freight terminal at Thamesport, Isle of Grain, is to be opened; and what assessment he has made of the benefits it will bring to residents of Medway.

Mr. Freeman: I visited Thamesport on 7 January to inspect the start of work on the new rail freight terminal which has attracted a £1·77 million grant under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974. I understand that the terminal will be operational by the end of the year and should enable up to 35 per cent. of container traffic to be carried by rail bringing relief to roads in this part of Kent and in particular the A228 which links the port to the A2/M2.

Brownhills Roundabout, Lancashire

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made on the improvement scheme to Brownhills roundabout, A666/A6119 intersection, and the A6119 bridge over the railway nearby; what has caused the delays; and when Lancashire county council will be enabled to go ahead with the scheme.

Mr. Chope: Compulsory purchase orders are to be published shortly. Some of the land to be acquired is public open space and there has been some difficulty in identifying suitable replacement land. We hope that work will start during the 1992-93 financial year.

Vehicle Statistics

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, using the data in the south-east regional brief published by his Department on 4 December 1991, the number of cars per 1,000 of the population in England excluding the south-east region in 1989 and the number of vehicles per mile of surfaced road in 1989 in *(a)* the south-east Region and *(b)* the rest of England.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is as follows:

(i) In 1989 there were 354 cars per 1,000 of the population in England, excluding the south-east region;
(ii) In 1989 there were 149 vehicles per mile of surfaced road in the south-east Region
(iii) In 1989 there were 122 vehicles per mile of surfaced road in the rest of England.

Hastings-Ashford Line

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the electrification of the railway line between Hastings and Ashford has been included in British Rail's programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from British Rail that it is examining proposals for the electrification of the railway line between Hastings and Ashford, for inclusion in its programme of work scheduled to commence in 1994-95.

Bedford Bypass

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current position of *(a)* the southern bypass for Bedford including a Norse road connection and *(b)* the western relief road.

Mr. Chope: I hope to be able to make a further announcement shortly.

Clyde Port Authority

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of the parties which have formally expressed their intention to seek to acquire the Clyde port authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. That is a matter of commercial confidence between the Clyde port authority, as vendor of the port undertaking, and the parties concerned.

Speed Limit Order, Essex

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department received the Borough of Chelmsford (A414 Main Road and Maldon Road, Danbury) (Speed Limit) Order from Essex county council for confirmation; and when his Department's confirmation is expected.

Mr. Chope: The application for consent to these speed limit proposals which is currently with the Department was effectively lodged in August 1991 when detailed supporting information was received from Essex county council. This followed earlier lengthy discussions and correspondence leading to my Department's approval in principle being given in December 1990.

There are a number of legal issues in respect of the order itself still to be resolved before the Secretary of State can give formal consent. The Department's regional office has brought these to the attention of the county council.

Progress is dependent on the county council's resolution of these legal problems and I am therefore unable at this stage to specify a date by which consent may be given. Immediate consideration will be given however to the council's response, when received.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he intends to make to the recommendations made by the International Atomic Energy Agency that no further flights of plutonium should take place until the agency's review panel on safety and security of plutonium transport completes its recommendations for new standards for international carriage.

Mr. McLoughlin: The International Atomic Energy Agency has made no such recommendation.

Buses

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to promote the use of buses.

Mr. Freeman: I announced recently a series of measures to promote the use of the bus:

- provision of at least £10 million over the next two years to fund specific local authority bus schemes;
- publication through HMSO of the Department's "Keeping Buses Moving"—a guide for local authorities on the provision of bus priority measures;
- more resources to the traffic commissioners to check that local bus services run in accordance with their published timetables;
- a review by the Department of current arrangements for passenger information with a view to providing guidelines for local authorities and bus operators;
- the Department will seek to fund a local authority demonstration project which utilises fully accessible low floor buses;
- the introduction in 1992 of an instrumented smoke emissions test for in-service vehicles, together with tough road side enforcement.

These measures have been widely welcomed by the Bus and Coach Council and local authority associations.

Coastguards

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the amount of money spent on providing the coastguard service for each of the years for the period 1979 to 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* The amount of money spent on providing the coastguard service during the years 1983-84 to 1991-92 is as follows:

Year	£ million
1979-80	6·99
1980-81	7·92
1981-82	10·88
1982-83	11·91
1983-84	14·06
1984-85	18·66
1985-86	21·57
1986-87	21·80
1987-88	23·99
1988-89	25·85
1989-90	28·58
1990-91	29·63
[1]1991-92	31·00

[1] Forecast.

The level of past and planned expenditure on Her Majesty's coastguard is consistent with the commitment to provide a modern, efficient and effective search and rescue service for the United Kingdom.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Single European Currency

15. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement upon the naming of a new single European currency.

Mr. Maude: Under the terms of the proposed treaty on European monetary union, the single currency would be the ecu.

Business Investment

17. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of GDP at factor cost and in current prices is accounted for by business investment also at current prices; and what was the percentage in 1979.

Mr. Mellor: At current prices, the ratio of business investment to GDP at factor cost was 14·8 per cent. in 1990 and 14·3 per cent. in 1979.

Manufactured Goods

18. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was Britain's share of main manufacturing countries exports of manufactures in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* in the lastest available quarter.

Mr. Mellor: As I said earlier today in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), the UK's share has risen in each of the last three years after decdes of decline, as shown in the autumn statement. Based on a measure that includes the exports of all market economies, the share was 7·2 per cent. in 1979 and 6·1 per cent. in 1985. It is likely to have been 6¼ per cent. in 1991.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom's share of the world trade in manufactured goods; and what has been the trend in recent years.

Mr. Mellor: The United Kingdom's share stabilised in the mid-1980s, increased in 1989 and 1990, and looks most likely to have increased again in 1991. Its current level is 6¼ per cent., almost ¼ per cent. higher than in 1988.

European Central Bank

19. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to secure the location of the proposed European central bank in Britain.

Mr. Maude: The Maastricht summit concluded that it was not necessary to reach a decision now on the sites of the European central bank; that will be decided at a future date.

Manufacturing Investment

20. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the change in the level of manufacturing investment between the third quarter of 1990 and the third quarter of 1991.

Mr. Mellor: A fall of 12 per cent. in volume terms.

Taxation

21. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about tax levels.

Mr. Maude: Since 1978-79, the combined burden of taxation and public sector borrowing had been reduced by over 1 per cent. of GDP.

Income Tax

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes which have taken place in the standard rate of income tax since 1978-79; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Since 1979 we have reduced the basic rate in stages from 33 to 25 per cent. We will move towards a rate of 20 per cent. when it is prudent to do so.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much a cut of 1p in the pound off income tax would cost; how much the raising of the top rate of tax to 50 per cent. would yield to the revenue; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: At 1992-93 levels of income a 1p reduction in the basic rate of income tax would cost about £1·95 billion in a full year. Raising the higher rate of income tax to 50 per cent. would yield about £3·4 billion in a full year.

These estimates, however, do not allow for any behavioural effects that might result from such changes to the tax system and do not include capital gains tax.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would be the loss of revenue from raising the income tax threshold for all income tax payers to £100 per week;

(2) how many extra persons would be exempt from income tax if the tax threshold were raised to £100 per week.

Mr. Maude: At 1992-93 levels of income, the cost of raising the personal allowance to £5,200, compared with the amount due under the illustrative assumption of 4 per cent. indexation given in the Autumn Statement 1991, would be about £10½ billion. About 3·8 million people would be taken out of tax by this change.

Interest Rates

24. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when was the last time he held discussions with the CBI to discuss interest rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend last met CBI representatives at the National Economic Development Council on 8 January. A number of general economic issues were discussed.

Economy

25. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage growth in the economy for the last quarter for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: Gross domestic product rose by 0·2 per cent. in the third quarter of 1991, the latest period for which figures are available.

Inflation

26. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the business representative bodies regarding the Government's anti-inflation policy.

Mr. Maude: I regularly receive representations from business on all aspects of economic policy. They consistently endorse the Government's objective of reducing inflation and keeping it down.

28. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of inflation.

Mr. Maude: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell).

VAT

27. **Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT has been raised since November 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: On 1 April 1991 the standard rate of VAT was increased from 15 to 17½ per cent.

Income Statistics

Mr. Lester: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an estimate of per capita income in the United Kingdom in 1991 and 1990.

Mr. Maples: Data in respect of income per head are published regularly in table 8 in "Economic Trends", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest available data, for periods up to the third quarter of 1991, will be included in the December issue, due for publication later this month. However, this information is already available on the CSO database which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Repossessions

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the Government's policies on the level of house repossessions in 1992.

Mr. Maude: Lenders estimate that the measures my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced to the House on 19 December will reduce the number of repossessions in 1992 by about 40,000—half the anticipated number.

Football Pools Betting Duty

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the Government's total income from the football pool bettings duty for each of the years 1979-80 to 1990-91 and as a total over the same period.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Receipts from pool betting duty were as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	136·1
1980-81	157·0
1981-82	176·0
1982-83	199·3
1983-84	204·9
1984-85	218·0
1985-86	235·3
1986-87	254·2
1987-88	277·0
1988-89	279·0
1989-90	303·8
1990-91	303·9
Total	2,744·5

Cigarette Duty

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the increase in duty, including value added tax on cigarettes in the 1991 budget had on the retail prices index.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The RPI impact effect was an increase of 0·3 per cent.

Bloodstock Industry

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current negotiations taking place within the EC Council of Finance Ministers to seek an agreed reduction in VAT for the breeding and sales of bloodstock in the United Kingdom after 1993.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* The discussions currently taking place are to decide which goods and services may be subject to a reduced rate of VAT within the European Community after 1992. The present list includes goods and services used and supplied by farmers. It has yet to be decided finally whether horses will fall within any of the reduced rate categories.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list details of any alternative schemes being considered by Her Majesty's Government to assist the bloodstock industry in the United Kingdom after 1993.

Mr. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* Detailed discussions are currently taking place between officials and interested parties on the merits of an agricultural flat rate scheme for the United Kingdom.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cohesion Fund

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which regions of the United Kingdom will benefit from the cohesion fund agreed at the Maastricht summit; and which of the six objective regions in the European Community will *(a)* benefit from and *(b)* be excluded from the benefits of this fund.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The cohesion fund will benefit those member states with a per capita GNP of less than 90 per cent. of the Community average—that is, Spain, Portugal, Greece and the Republic of Ireland. The fund will provide finance for projects in the fields of the environment and trans-European transport infrastructure.

East Timor

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate discussions with the other countries of the European Community to consider what joint action needs to be taken in relation to the occupation of East Timor by Indonesia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are already in contact with our EC partners on this matter. We continue to believe that the best hopes for a solution lie in the hands of the United Nations Secretary-General.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Portugal regarding the situation in East Timor; and what further discussions he proposes.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs sees his Portuguese colleague regularly and has discussed East Timor with him on several occasions, most recently during his visit to Lisbon on 7 January. We remain in close contact on this issue, together with our EC partners.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the United Nations the continuing repression by Indonesia of the people of East Timor with a view to agreeing appropriate joint action.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This issue will be considered at the forthcoming session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva from 27 January to 6 March.

Falklands Islands

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Argentina about the future constitutional position of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There have been no recent discussions; nor is it the Government's intention to engage in any.

Gulf War

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in obtaining compensation from Iraq for losses suffered by British nationals and companies during the Gulf war.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Work has gone ahead well in the governing council of the United Nations Compensation Commission in Geneva which will administer the fund established by Security Council resolution 687: the United Kingdom is playing a leading role. Very good progress is being made in drawing up criteria for eligibility of claims. The commission has also prepared claim forms for expedited claims by individuals up to US$ 100,000. We are now sending them to claimants who have notified us of their losses. Advertisements will be placed in the national

press so that the opportunity to make claims is widely known. The commission hopes to begin assessing claims in July this year.

ENERGY

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what provisions have been made for the long-term storage, management or disposal of *(a)* high, intermediate and low-level radioactive wastes arising from foreign reprocessing contracts signed by British Nuclear Fuels plc up to 31 December 1975 and *(b)* low level radioactive waste arising from foreign reprocessing contracts signed by British Nuclear Fuels plc since 1 January 1976 for processing of spent nuclear fuel in the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All wastes arising from overseas reprocessing contracts signed by British Nuclear Fuels plc before 1976 will be dealt with in accordance with the United Kingdom's national waste strategy.

Since 1976, contracts for reprocessing overseas spent fuel have contained options for the return of wastes. The Government intend that these options will be exercised and wastes returned. As envisaged in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) on 2 May 1986 at columns *500-01*, the option of substituting for less radioactive wastes an equivalent quantity, in radiological terms, of higher level wastes is being considered.

Any low-level wastes retained as a result of such substitution would be disposed of in the same way as equivalent United Kingdom waste.

WALES

EC Committee of Regions

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce the representatives from Wales who will sit on the Committee of the Regions within the European Community; and if he will consider making hon. Members of Parliament eligible for such positions.

Mr. David Hunt: The treaty giving effect to the new Committee of the Regions is not intended to come into force until 1 January 1993. No decisions have therefore yet been taken on membership. The Government will however be considering in the course of 1992, the question of allocation of the United Kingdom seats and how individual members will be chosen.

Transplants

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients in Wales are now awaiting transplant surgery; and if he will separately distinguish these by organ by district health area and by length of time they have been waiting.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The requested information is not available centrally.

Land Acquisition

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each of the last 12 years, and for each county in Wales, the area of land that has been used for major highway construction and ancillary purposes; and if he will indicate the total compensation paid to landowners.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

St. David's Hospital, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his Department received the application for approval in principle for the new neighbourhood hospital on the site of the St. David's hospital, Cardiff; when the reply to South Glamorgan health authority was sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Application for approval in principle for a neighbourhood hospital on the St. David's hospital site, Cardiff, was made by South Glamorgan health authority on 13 November 1991. A reply was sent on 20 December 1991. South Glamorgan health authority is currently reviewing the position in the light of that response.

Drinking Water

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of Welsh Water to discuss the purity of the drinking water in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for the Environment have jointly appointed the drinking water inspectorate to monitor and report to them on water company performance. The inspectorate's report to them of its first round of inspections, including that of Dwr Cymru, was published in July 1991 and confirmed that 99 per cent. of samples taken by Dwr Cymru met the stringent statutory requirements of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989—SI 1989 No. 1147. A second round of inspections, during which Dwr Cymru is again being inspected, is ongoing and the results will be published later this year. My officials are, of course, regularly in contact with Dwr Cymru on various aspects of drinking water quality.

TB Eradication Scheme

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been paid in compensation in respect of cattle slaughtered in Wales under the tuberculosis eradication scheme in each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Payments made under the bovine tuberculosis compensation scheme are detailed in the table. The information is only available on a financial year basis.

Year	*Total compensation (£'s)*
1980-81	35,911
1981-82	7,105
1982-83	6,918

Year	Total compensation (£'s)
1983-84	13,626
1984-85	28,680
1985-86	37,068
1986-87	42,491
1987-88	58,233
1988-89	37,045
1989-90	35,785
1990-91	86,159

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Diumide-K (a diuretic with potassium) or a similar preparation has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents has been prescribed *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area;

(2) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Burinex A or a similar preparation (bumetanide with amiloride hydrochloride) has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents has been prescribed *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area in Wales;

(3) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Caprozide or a similar preparation has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents—Captopril and hydrochlorothiazide—has been prescribed *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area in Wales;

(4) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Prempak-C or a similar preparation has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents—conjugated oestrogens/norgestrel—has been prescribed *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Valleys Programme

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the percentage unemployment rate for the valleys programme area, for Wales, for each year from November 1988 to November 1991, inclusive.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is given in the table.

Unemployment rates[1]

November	Valleys programme area	Wales
1988	12·4	9·2
1989	9·5	6·5
1990	10·1	6·9
1991	13·1	9·2

Source: Employment Department, Welsh Office.
[1] Unadjusted rates, expressed as a percentage of the work force.

Kinnerton Primary School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Kinnerton county primary school; and if he will meet *(a)* the parent teacher association and *(b)* the staff and governors.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I has any plans at present to do so.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on the sale of school playing fields; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Authorities are encouraged to dispose of land and buildings which are surplus to requirements. Local education authorities are responsible for taking decisions about the disposal of school playing fields. In view of public concern about the possible loss of playing fields, I shall be asking local education authorities to consider long-term school and community needs before taking disposal action.

School Land

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales have had portions of their land and buildings sold since 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Local education authorities are responsible for taking decisions on the disposal of school land and buildings. Information about disposals by these authorities is not held centrally.

Patient Funding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the funding of out-of-area patients being allocated operations at the four treatment centres in Wales for the period commencing 1 April 1992.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Decisions on how the treatment centre initiative will be taken forward in 1992-93 will be announced shortly.

British Aerospace

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last visited British Aerospace, Broughton, Clwyd; and if he will visit British Aerospace to meet apprentices in their final year.

Mr. David Hunt: I visited British Aerospace at Broughton, Clwyd on 30 September 1991 to open the new dispatch wing. No date has yet been fixed for my next visit.

NHS Value-for-money Unit

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the remit of the NHS value-for-money unit and its programme of work for 1992.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The NHS value-for-money unit operates within the framework of the strategic intent and direction for the NHS in Wales which dedicates the organisation to the pursuit of health gain and the continuous development of people-centred, resource effective health services. Within this framework, the unit's mission is to add value to the use of resources and to encourage enterprise in the delivery of health services.

The main initiatives which the unit will be pursuing in 1992 include: helping providers of service compare their performance with the best; helping managers improve the monitoring of service delivery by focusing on high level indicators; reviewing progress and adding impetus to cash-releasing cost improvement and income generation programmes; undertaking all-Wales reviews; helping the NHS in Wales develop overseas trading activities and the commercial exploitation of innovative ideas and products; establishing the clinical resource utilisation group; reviewing progress and adding impetus to the market testing initiative.

More information is provided in chapter 9 of the document "NHS Wales: Agenda for Action 2" published in December 1991; a copy of which has been placed in the Vote Office and in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to receive the report from the value-for-money unit on the cost-effectiveness of the treatment centre at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital, Cardiff; and if he will give the terms of reference for the value-for-money unit's exercise.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The study at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital is part of a wider evaluation of the treatment centre initiative as a whole. The purpose of the study is to assess the potential of treatment centres to deliver health care services cost-effectively and also the options for the future funding of such centres. The aim is to complete this exercise before the end of the current financial year.

Hospital Services Study

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the terms of reference of the joint study into the supply and demand for hospital services in south and mid Glamorgan, commissioned by South Glamorgan health authority, Mid Glamorgan health authority and the University of Wales College of Medicine.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 13 January, at columns *510-11*

Water Pollution

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to clean-up iron oxide and sulphur pollution in streams, rivers and waterways that flow though or close to former mines.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The National Rivers Authority is currently undertaking a study, which includes an examination of the River Pelena in West Glamorgan, to look at the best ways of preventing polluted water from abandoned mines affecting our rivers.

GPs (Night Calls)

87. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from general practitioners in Wales regarding the problem of excessive night-time calls; and what response he has made.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Since the introduction of the revised contract for GPs, one letter has been received from a GP in Wales about increased demand for night visits to patients.

The reply explained that the GPs' remuneration system has been revised to reward those doctors who provide the fullest range of services to their patients. This includes paying a higher fee where doctors undertake night visits to their patients personally, rather than using a deputising service or a large rota.

Cataract Removals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients have been treated for cataract removal at the new treatment centre at Bridgend hospital since its opening in October 1991; how many were from the Mid-Glamorgan health authority; if he will list all other health authorities from which other patients treated at the treatment centre have originated; and how this compares with his Department's agreement with the treatment centre.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Between 1 October and 31 December 1991 the new ophthalmic treatment centre treated 182 patients, of which 54 per cent. came from Mid Glamorgan. The centre is on target to meet the contract agreement that 50 per cent. of the total throughput of 300 patients in 1991-92 should be referred from health authorities other than Mid Glamorgan. In addition to Mid Glamorgan, referrals have been received from South Glamorgan, West Glamorgan, East Dyfed, Powys and Gwent.

Shotton Steelworks

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last visited Shotton steelworks, Clwyd; and if he will visit Shotton steelworks to discuss the impact of redundancies.

Mr. David Hunt: I last visited Shotton steelworks on 27 November. I have not yet fixed the date for my next visit. During my visit I was most impressed by the determination of both management and work force to maintain the steelwork's position as a world leader in steel coatings technology.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

UK World Trade Share

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the United Kingdom's share of world trade, taking visibles and invisibles together, for each of the last 15 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: In terms of the value of overseas transactions, the United Kingdom is the fourth largest trading nation in the world.

The information is in the table.

United Kingdom's share of OECD total trade[1] 1975-90
(percentage terms)

Year	Exports	Imports
1975	9·5	10·0
1976	9·1	9·1
1977	9·3	9·1
1978	9·5	9·3
1979	10·3	10·0
1980	11·3	10·4
1981	11·6	10·6
1982	11·7	11·1

Year	Exports	Imports
1983	11·0	10·5
1984	10·6	10·2
1985	10·8	10·2
1986	10·0	9·9
1987	10·1	10·0
1988	10·0	10·7
1989	10·0	10·7
1990	10·3	11·1

[1] Visible and invisible trade.
Source: IMF Balance of Payments Statistics.

Radio and Television (Interference)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what help is available for radio listeners and television viewers to avoid interference in reception.

Mr. Redwood: My Department, through the Radiocommunications Agency, provides helpful advice on improving radio and television reception and I am asking the chief executive of the agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Textiles and Clothing

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made on a conclusion of the negotiations within the Uruguay GATT round on textiles.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *598-99*.

Maastricht

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement outlining the areas of his responsibility in which the EC will have competence following the implementation of agreements at Maastricht.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 17 December 1991]:* The treaty agreed at Maastricht contains new chapters relating to industry, consumer protection and trans-European networks. The Community already has competence in these areas. The responsibility for policy on trans-European networks is shared between my Department, the Department of Energy and the Department of Transport.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Football Pool Betting Duty

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the meeting held on 9 January between officials in his Department and representatives of the Football Trust to discuss eligibility of football Premier League clubs for funds released through the reduction in the football pool betting duty; and what further meetings, and on what dates, are planned on this issue involving officials and ministers in his Department.

Mr. Atkins: At the request of the Football Trust a meeting was held with officials from my Department and the Treasury to hear the views of the trust on its handling of grant applications by prospective members of the Premier League and arrangements following the establishment of the league. The trust will be informed shortly of the Government's views. Further meetings will be arranged as appropriate.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science further to his letter of 12 July 1991 to the Football Association, if he will set out the precise conditions necessary for Premier League clubs to be rendered eligible for access to funds released through the reduction of the football pool betting duty.

Mr. Atkins: The trust would need to amend its resolution of April 1990 to allow clubs in the Premier League to have access to such funds. My position remains as set out in the letter of 12 July. In supporting such a change I would wish to have regard to how any additional money available to football was to be used for purposes of Taylor implementation throughout the present Football League. I have written to the FA to ask for further information on this objective, together with other relevant matters.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by what criteria the national stadiums at Wembley, Hampden park and Windsor park are deemed eligible for assistance through the reduction in the football pool betting duty.

Mr. Atkins: Under a resolution passed by the Football Trust in April 1990 the grounds of clubs in the Football League and the Scottish League and the three national stadia are eligible for assistance from the moneys made available by the reduction in pool betting duty for capital works for the safety and comfort of spectators at football grounds in accordance with the recommendations contained in Lord Justice Taylor's final report on "The Hillsborough Stadium Disaster, 15 April 1989". The trustees also resolved to distribute the money fairly having regard to the differing needs of those clubs and the stadia authorities and the resources available to them.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy concerning the repayment of grants made to clubs through the reduction in the football pool betting duty if relegated from the Football League to the Vauxhall conference.

Mr. Atkins: It is for the trust itself to decide its grant policy. I myself see no reason why the Football Trust should ask for repayment of grants in such circumstances.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what amendments he intends to make to the statement of case pro forma for school closure proposals to take account of the change in procedure for evaluating possible deficiencies in playing field provision at neighbouring schools; when the amendments will be made; and if he will place a copy of the original and amended statements in the Library.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. and learned Friend will decide what amendments are required to the statement of case pro forma for school closure proposals in the light of any comments received from the local authority

associations to the consultation letter on the disposal of school playing fields. A copy of the original and amended statements will be placed in the Library.

Medical Researchers

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the comparative levels of remuneration for medical researchers in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the rest of the EC and *(c)* the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My Department does not hold details of the levels of remuneration of medical researchers employed by United Kingdom private companies or charities; nor does it have such information covering medical researchers in the rest of the EC or the United States of America. The pay scale for researchers in universities in the United Kingdom extends from £12,129 to £30,447, although some clinical academic staff are linked to national health service scales which range from about £17,000 to £40,000. Clinical academics holding consultant contracts are also eligible for NHS distinction awards.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make it his policy to increase the funding of research into Alzheimer's disease being carried out at St. Mary's hospital, Paddington;

(2) if he will make a statement on the funding of research into Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Medical Research Council, the main Government agency for the support of medical research in this country, is funded from this Department's science budget. The MRC's grant-in-aid from the science budget has increased by about 28 per cent. in real terms since 1979-80. It is an independent body, however, and our policy is not to intervene in the MRC's judgment of its research priorities. Last month we announced a planned rising profile for the science budget generally over the next three years. That will enable the MRC to launch its "Neurosciences Approach to Human Health", so expanding its programme of research on the treatment of psychiatric and neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.

In addition to research council funding, substantial public funding for medical and other research at universities is provided by the Universities Funding Council as part of its block grant to institutions, which are free to dispose of it in accordance with their academic and research priorities. The distribution of grant between universities is a matter for the UFC. Research funding is also provided through the health departments and health authorities. The Government welcome, moreover, the very important contribution made by the medical research charities and has introduced a more favourable tax regime to encourage support for charities.

HEALTH

Fluoridation

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on the increase of morbidity in any population following the fluoridation of water to one part per million.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 19 November at columns *126-27*. There is no evidence that fluoridation of drinking water at the rate of one part per million has any adverse effect on health.

Accident Victims (Organs)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward legislation to introduce a scheme whereby accident victims would automatically make their organs available for transplantation unless they have specifically indicated that they wish to opt out.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Transplants

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in England are now awaiting transplant surgery; and if he will separately distinguish these by organ by health region and by length of time they have been waiting.

Mr. Dorrell: The table gives the number of people awaiting transplantation in England by organ and the region in which they expect to be treated. Information on the length of time waiting is not collected centrally.

Region[1]	*Kidney*	*Pancreas*	*Liver*	*Heart*	*Lung*
Northern	242	0	0	38	38
Yorkshire	220	0	6	2	1
Trent	354	1	0	9	0
East Anglia	120	0	11	23	20
North West Thames	233	1	8	152	48
North East Thames	466	0	5	16	2
South East Thames	309	1	16	0	0
South West Thames	81	1	0	9	0
Wessex	108	0	0	0	0
Oxford	93	0	0	0	0
South Western	216	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	381	0	34	0	0
Mersey	131	0	0	0	0
North Western	340	1	0	32	2
Total	3,294	5	80	281	111

[1] Based on information provided by the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority as at 3 January 1992.

Calorie Consumption

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on how many calories *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed men consume on average daily.

Mr. Dorrell: "The Dietary and Nutritional Survey of British Adults" published in 1990 shows average daily calorific intakes for men as *(a)* employed, 2,520; and *(b)* unemployed, 2,060. A copy of the report is available in the Library.

Clinical Standards Advisory Group

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work is being undertaken by the Clinical Standards Advisory Group.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales and I have asked the Clinical Standards Advisory Group to undertake studies with the following terms of reference:

To advise on access to, and availability of, selected National Health Service specialist services, with particular reference to the referral of patients across District boundaries to regional and national centres. Your investigations will consider, but not be limited to, the effects of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 in a representative sample of National Health Service regions and boards. The four services you have selected are: neo-natal intensive care; cystic fibrosis; childhood leukaemia; and coronary artery bypass grafting.

To advise on standards of clinical care for patients admitted to hospital urgently or as emergencies. Your investigations will consider the time patients wait for diagnosis and treatment in the 24 hours after arrival at a hospital, and the factors influencing these times including events prior to arrival, in a representative sample of National Health Service hospitals. You will select several clinical conditions for more detailed investigation, including if possible the effect on health outcomes of variations in the time patients wait.

To advise on standards of clinical care for women in normal labour. Your investigations will include variations in clinical protocols for and practice in the management of women having their first child in a representative sample of labour wards in National Health Service hospitals. You will also investigate the use of cortico-steroids in cases of premature labour.

To advise on standards of clinical care for people with diabetes. Your investigations will include reviews of existing statements of clinical standards, of the standards specified in National Health Service contracts, and of arrangements for auditing the delivery of services to contracted standards, in a representative sample of National Health Service districts and boards.

I have also welcomed the advisory group's intention to undertake preparatory work on hospital acquired infections and on community health care for the elderly before deciding whether the group wishes to propose studies in these areas; and to keep other areas of clinical care under review.

Brain Injury

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which sites have been selected for the new funding under the Government's initiative to improve national health service rehabilitation services for people with brain injury.

Mr. Waldegrave: Twelve sites will lead our £1 million initiative to improve services for rehabilitation and long-term care for people with brain injury. Each one will be a model from which others will learn to improve services to this group throughout the country.

The selected sites are:

	Funds for 1992-93 (£ thousands)
Regional Rehabilitation Centre, Hunters Moor Hospital, Newcastle-upon-Tyne	40
Leeds General Infirmary and Leeds Community Services	80
Derbyshire Royal Infirmary and Derby City Hospital	75
Nottingham Health Authority	75
Central Sheffield University Hospitals	70
Regional Neurological Rehabilitation Unit, Homerton Hospital, London	150
Rivermead Rehabilitation Centre, Oxford	70
Rayners Hedge Physical Rehabilitation Service, Aylesbury	40
Stroke and Rehabilitation Unit, Royal Cornwall Hospital (City), Truro	65
Frenchay Healthcare Services, Bristol	200
Neurobehavioural Rehabilitation Unit, St Edward's Hospital, Cheddleton and Neurological Rehabilitation Unit, Haywood Hospital, Burslem	90
Community Unit, Worcester District Health Authority	90

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Diumide-K—a diuretic with potassium—or a similar preparation has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents has been prescribed *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area;

(2) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Burinex A or a similar preparation—bumetanide with amiloride hydrochloride—has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents has been prescribed *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area;

(3) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Prempak-C or a similar preparation has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents—conjugated oestrogens/norgestrel—has been prescribed *(a)* in England and in each region and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area;

(4) in what number of prescriptions, in each of the last five years, Caprozide or a similar preparation has been prescribed; and in what number of cases one of the individual constituents—Captopril and hydrochlorothiazide—has been prescribed *(a)* in England and in each region and *(b)* in each district health authority or family practitioner committee area.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is not available in the form requested. The available data,

which relate to the estimated number of prescriptions dispensed in each regional health authority over the last four years, have been placed in the Library.

Deaths (Certification)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will take steps to ensure that every person authorised to certify a human death has first been satisfied that an ether test or an icard test, or similar, has been administered.

Mr. Dorrell: Death is certified by registered medical practitioners in accordance with accepted professional practices. Whether or not a particular test is appropriate will depend upon the individual circumstances of a particular case.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's current policies in regard to the treatment of breast cancer.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Our objective is to reduce morbidity and mortality from all forms of cancer. The aim of the national breast screening programme is to detect cancer at an early stage when treatment offers the best prospect of success. The treatment of each individual is a matter for discussion between her and her doctor.

Developments in treatment are kept under review by the Department's expert advisers on cancer; and the Government are supporting the "Europe Against Cancer" programme, which pools experience across the Community in the fight against this disease.

Mortality Rates

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing the *(a)* perinatal, *(b)* infant and *(c)* overall mortality rates by social class in London regional health authorities in 1970, 1980 and for the latest date available.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* The information is not available in the form requested. The available information is shown in the tables.

Perinatal and infant mortality by social class of father (as defined by occupation) 1980 (births within marriage only). Perinatal deaths per 1,000 total births. Infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Social Class	*Perinatal deaths*	*Infant deaths*
North West Thames regional health authority		
All	10·4	10·4
I-V	10·4	10·2
I	8·7	7·0
II	9·1	9·5
III	11·3	10·6
IV	10·7	11·8
V	12·8	15·5
North East Thames regional health authority		
All	13·1	11·1
I-V	13·0	10·7
I	10·5	8·3
II	13·4	10·7
III	12·2	9·2
IV	14·3	13·4
V	19·2	21·4
South East Thames regional health authority		
All	12·0	11·5
I-V	11·9	11·2
I	4·6	5·4
II	10·9	10·0
III	12·2	9·2
IV	15·7	15·6
V	14·8	15·4
South West Thames regional health authority		
All	10·5	10·4
I-V	10·1	10·0
I	7·1	7·3
II	9·5	9·8
III	10·5	9·4
IV	14·3	15·4
V	9·7	14·6

Perinatal and Infant deaths by social class of father (as defined by occupation) 1989 (births within marriage only).
Perinatal deaths per 1,000 total births.
Infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Social class	*Perinatal deaths rate per 1,000 total births*	*Infant deaths rate per 1,000 live births*
North West Thames regional health authority		
All	7·9	7·2
I-V	7·6	6·9
I	6·3	6·3
II	6·3	5·8
IIIN	8·1	7·5
IIIM	7·9	6·5
IV	10·7	8·8
V	[1]15·4	[1]19·1
North East Thames regional health authority		
All	7·8	7·4
I-V	7·8	7·4
I	[1]4·1	5·8
II	7·2	5·7
IIIN	8·3	8·8
IIIM	7·9	8·1
IV	10·8	8·4
V	[1]7·1	[1]10·0
South East Thames regional health authority		
All	8·2	7·6
I-V	8·1	7·5
I	[1]6·3	[1]5·4
II	7·7	6·7
IIIN	7·4	7·6
IIIM	8·7	7·7
IV	8·8	8·8
V	[1]9·2	[1]12·6
South West Thames regional health authority		
All	6·8	6·6
I-V	6·8	6·6
I	5·1	7·2
II	5·8	6·1
IIIN	8·0	[1]4·9
IIIM	7·7	6·7
IV	8·7	10·5
V	[1]11·5	[1]5·8

[1] Indicates rates calculated from less than 20 deaths to warn the user that their reliability as a measure may be affected by the number of events.

Deaths by social class (as defined by occupation) 1971
Rates per 1000 population for males aged 15-64

Metropolitan Regional Hospital Area	Total	Social class I	II	IIIN	IIIM	IV	V
North West	5·3	3·9	4·8	5·4	5·7	7·4	9·1
North East	5·5	3·6	4·9	5·2	5·6	7·1	8·5
South East	4·8	3·2	4·2	4·5	5·1	6·4	8·2
South West	4·2	3·0	3·8	4·4	4·7	6·0	7·1

Deaths by social class (as defined by occupation) 1981
Rates per 1000 population for males aged 16-64

Regional Health Authority	Total	Social class I	II	IIIN	IIIM	IV	V
North West Thames	4·5	3·0	3·7	4·2	5·1	6·1	8·3
North East Thames	4·7	2·9	3·7	4·3	5·3	6·5	8·7
South East Thames	4·8	3·2	4·2	4·5	5·1	6·4	8·2
South West Thames	4·2	3·0	3·8	4·4	4·7	6·0	7·1

Notes:

1. The figures in these tables are based on deaths in the years around the 1971 and 1981 censuses. The top table covers the years 1970-72, the bottom table covers 1979, 1980, 1982 and 1983.
   There was a strike among registrars in 1981 and so no data are available for that year.
2. Figures in these tables are crude death rates and have not been standardised for age differences between men in different social classes in different regions.

PRIME MINISTER

Bingham Inquiry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he has given evidence to the Bingham inquiry.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Espionage

Mr. Butler: To ask the Prime Minister what information he has recently received with regard to eastern bloc espionage within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The protection of national security against threats from espionage is a statutory function of the Security Service. It remains my normal practice not to comment in detail on security and intelligence matters.

Public Records Act 1958

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what reforms he intends to make to the Public Records Act 1958; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government have no plans to reform the Public Records Act or to make changes to the provision whereby public records which are selected for permanent preservation are normally made available to the public after 30 years. The only amendment to the Act which is in prospect, when a suitable legislative opportunity arises, is the removal of the statutory requirement for the Master of the Rolls to be chairman of the Advisory Council on Public Records.

UN Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the steps taken by each Department of Her Majesty's Government, respectively, to prepare for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June.

The Prime Minister: The Department of the Environment is responsible for co-ordinating the Government's approach to UNCED. Within this overall framework other departments have set up their own arrangements for contributing on appropriate matters to preparations for the conference. I am taking a close personal interest as I expect to lead the United Kingdom delegation in Rio de Janeiro.

Amritsar Massacre

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will authorise the release of official papers relating to the Amritsar massacre of 13 April 1919.

The Prime Minister: All official papers relating to the Amritsar massacre on 13 April 1919 have been available to the public since 1968, and are currently held at the Oriental and India Office collection of the British Library.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Secret Service

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his practice to give information in reply to parliamentary questions concerning secret intelligence services.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* It remains my normal practice not to comment on security and intelligence matters.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if privately run prisons will take category A prisoners; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: There are no present plans for contracting out the management of prisons intended to hold category A prisoners: neither Wolds remand prison nor Blakenhurst prison will hold such prisoners.

Special Secure Units

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average prisoners spend in the special secure units; what is the longest period a prisoner has spent in a special secure unit; and what was the offence for which he was sentenced.

Mrs. Rumbold: A figure for the average time spent by prisoners in special secure units is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The longest period a prisoner has spent in special security units is 18½ years, following conviction on charges of murder and possession of firearms with intent.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons prisoners are confined in special secure units; and for what offences they have been sentenced.

Mrs. Rumbold: The aim of the special security units is to provide a national resource to accommodate the prisoners assessed as category A—exceptional risk—that is, as posing the greatest risks both to the public and of escape, and therefore requiring the very highest conditions of security. Offences for which prisoners currently held in these units have been convicted include armed robbery, murder, drug importation and offences associated with terrorism.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were being held in special secure units in England and Wales on 31 December 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: Twenty-two.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the effect, in terms of their prison career, of persons being confined in a special secure unit.

Mrs. Rumbold: Prisoners in special security units do not have access to prison workshops, but in other respects the regime available to them is comparable to that of other convicted category A prisoners, and includes education, hobbies, exercise, recreation, and association with other prisoners in the unit throughout most of the day.

Categorisation is kept constantly under review, and any prisoner no longer assessed as category A—exceptional risk—is transferred to some other appropriate part of the prison estate.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the improvements in *(a)* electoral registration and *(b)* postal vote availability made since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of registered electors in England and Wales has risen from 36,695,180 in 1979 to 38,509,382 in 1991. We provide a variety of publicity material in support of electoral registration officers, and conduct an annual national advertising campaign to encourage people to register. We also carry out annual research into the working methods of electoral registration officers, and produce guidance and advice to assist them in compiling an accurate register.

We have made it easier to obtain a temporary postal vote for a particular election, by replacing the separate and specific categories listed in the Representation of the People Act 1983 with a single provision entitling an elector to a postal vote if his or her circumstances on the date of the election are such that he or she could not reasonably be expected to vote in person at the allotted polling station. This means that those who are away from home unexpectedly on business, on holiday or visiting sick relatives may now have a postal vote in the United Kingdom. The provisions for postal voting have also been extended to elections for parish and community councils.

Life Sentences

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many life prisoners who have been sentenced to life imprisonment are currently in prison; and how many of them are held in low-security prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: According to the records held centrally about 3,000 persons in prison service establishments in England and Wales were serving life sentences on 30 November 1991. Of these, about 920 were held in low-security establishments, which for adult males are category C or D establishments.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he decided to answer no further questions on the Birmingham pub bombings investigations; and if he will give the reasons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The chief constable of the West Midlands Police is responsible for the conduct of these investigations. It would be improper for my right hon. Friend to comment on them while they are continuing, because this might prejudice their outcome.

Football Spectators Order

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all persons and organisations with whom ministers and officials in his Department have held meetings, and the dates, concerning the extension of the measures outlined in the Football Spectators (Corresponding Offences in Italy) Order 1990 to cover offences committed in Sweden; and what further measure he intends to take to extend these measures to Sweden.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government are seeking a bilateral agreement with the Swedish Government on

corresponding offences under the Football Spectators Act 1989. Details of meetings between Home Office Ministers and officials and their Swedish counterparts are contained in the table.

Date	*Home Office representatives*	*Swedish representatives*
18 October 1991	Officials	Mr. Jarbourg, Consul General at the Swedish Embassy and Mr. Wibling of the Arlanda Police Service
28 October 1991	Officials	Mr. Sandström, Head of the Swedish Police Planning Unit for the 1992 European Championship Finals and Mr. Wibling
15 November 1991	Officials	Mr. Wibling
2 December 1991	Minister of State and officials	Mrs. Hellsvik, Swedish Justice Minister

Additionally, diplomats in the Stockholm embassy have met Swedish officials.

Home Office officials will be having further discussions with the Swedish police and with Swedish Ministry of Justice officials next month.

Rugby

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the views of the Association of Chief Police Officers on the extension of mandatory all-seated accommodation to rugby league and rugby union grounds; and when he expects to make a statement on the extension of mandatory all-seated accommodation to these sports.

Mr. John Patten: The views of the Association of Chief Police Officers on the extension of mandatory all-seated accommodation to rugby league and rugby union grounds was received in June 1991.

We have now completed our consultation procedures. While we still require Football League clubs to move towards all seater grounds as recommended by Lord Justice Taylor, for other sports we see no reason to depart from a voluntary approach. We do not therefore intend to introduce primary legislation. However, we shall continue to keep this matter under review.

EMPLOYMENT

Hairdressers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has relating to the average pay for 16, 17 and 18-year-old trainee hairdressers.

Mr. Forth: No information is available.

Emergency Equipment

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, when implementing the workplace directive, he will require the independent certification of all emergency lighting and fire alarms to the appropriate European standard before installation; and if he will make a statement on emergency equipment.

Mr. Forth: Independent certification of equipment is not a requirement of the workplace directive and the Health and Safety Commission has made no such proposal in its consultative document containing proposals to implement the directive which was published on 15 January. A copy is in the Library.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of people registered as unemployed in the Greater London area on 13 January.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available data for unemployed claimants relate to 12 December. On this date there were on a seasonally adjusted basis, 385,200 unemployed claimants in the Greater London region. Figures for January will be released on 13 February.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to issue contracts to training and enterprise councils for more than one year to enable TECs to sign contracts with core providers of training for more than one year and to bridge the academic year differential year with the financial year.

Mr. Jackson: The process for parliamentary provision of the large sums of public money spent through training and enterprise councils means that it is not possible to agree with them detailed funding for three years ahead. The Department is nevertheless developing a closer understanding with TECs of their longer term activities based on their three-year corporate plans. It is for individual TECs to decide on the duration of contracts with individual training providers.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to ensure that officers dealing with disability living allowance claims during the period February 1992 to April 1993 do not tag computer records with a view to automatically creating subsequent reviews.

Mr. Scott: Awards of disability living allowance will be made either for life or for a fixed period. There will be no automatic reviews during the course of an award. As now, clients with fixed period awards will be invited to re-apply towards the end of the period. These arrangements will apply to cases determined during the period of transition and will continue to operate thereafter.

Heating Costs

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the notional amount for heating costs included in income support.

Miss Widdecombe: Benefit rates are not composed of set amounts for specific expenditure items. In April 1992 income support will rise by 7 per cent., nearly 3 per cent. more than the retail prices index for the corresponding period. Those over 80, and younger disabled pensioners, will receive further additions over and above this rise.

Invalid Care Allowance

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in receipt of retirement pensions are caring for dependent members of their family and ineligible for invalid care allowance.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not readily available. Invalid care allowance is intended for people who forgo work opportunities to provide regular and substantial care, and is not normally available to those over pensionable age. However, where entitlement to invalid care allowance has been established before pensionable age it continues to be payable subject to the overlapping benefit rules.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to adjust the cold weather payment system to take account of climatic variations in different parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: The system already fully reflects climatic variation around the United Kingdom, through the links to 63 weather stations. This system of linkages is kept under review, and further refinements were introduced as part of our recent package of improvements to the scheme, introduced in November 1991.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to meet representatives from the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans for such a meeting.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the administrative costs or savings in replacing the current system of cold weather payments by a system of cold weather credits, as recommended by the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits.

Mr. Scott: The recommendations of the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits do not contain sufficient details for a proper estimate to be made. They would be likely to be more expensive than the current cold weather payments scheme.

Retirement Pensioners

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the percentage of retirement pensioners whose total incomes are below *(a)* £60 per week, *(b)* £70 per week, *(c)* £80 per week, *(d)* £90 per week and *(e)* £100 per week; and for each of these groups what percentage of their gross income is paid in rent and rates/poll tax.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the tables:

Table 1: Percentage of pensioner units with net incomes below the level shown

Net income level less than £	Married pensioner units	Single pensioner units	All pensioner units
60	—	35	22
70	—	60	38
80	9	74	49
90	22	79	58
100	36	83	65

Table 2: Gross rent and rates as a percentage of gross income

Net income level less than £	Married pensioner units	Single pensioner units	All pensioner units
60	—	19	20
70	—	24	24
80	18	25	25
90	16	25	24
100	18	25	23

Notes:

(i) Net income is defined as gross income less National Insurance and income tax.
(ii) Pensioner units are defined as single people who are at state pension age or over or married couples where the husband is at state pension age or over.
(iii) Data source is the 1988 Family Expenditure Survey.
(iv) Fewer than 20 units in the sample.

Income Support

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether, in the light of Commissioner's decision No. CIS/371/1990, he will amend the Social Security (Hospital In-Patients) Regulations so that nursing home residents are not regarded as being maintained free of charge for the purposes of entitlement to income support.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the protocol of the Maastricht agreement which reverses much of the right to equal treatment in occupational pensions that was established by the Barber decision.

Miss Widdecombe: The protocol on article 119 of the treaty of Rome clarifies the retrospective effect of the Barber judgment. The implications of the protocol are still being discussed.

Benefit Payments (Christmas)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what modifications of benefit payment arrangements are made during the Christmas period; and what evidence he has of the extent to which the modified arrangements meet the wishes of claimants.

Miss Widdecombe: Arrangements for benefit payments are a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress the Social Security Benefits Agency has made towards meeting the targets set out in the published business plan for 1991-92; and whether there have been any changes to the targets.

Mr. Newton: I am informed by the chief executive of the Social Security Benefits Agency that if current performance is maintained the agency should meet 19 out of the 21 key targets specified in the published business plan with performance improving in the remaining two areas—war pensions disablement claims, where the number of claims has been much higher than expected, and short-term benefits accuracy. This will represent a substantial achievement in the first year of the agency.

I have decided to revise four of the Benefits Agency's published key targets for technical reasons. Changes to two of the published social fund targets are necessary following the increase in provision for social fund grants and loans in 1991-92 which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced on 6 November. The revised targets are:

i. to live within a gross budget of £268 million for loans and grants;

ii. to recover £139 million in loan repayments.[1]

The agency's efficiency savings target for the current financial year has been revised to take account of lower than forecast average salaries and a small transfer of savings to the Contributions Agency. The revised target is:

iii. to achieve cumulative running costs efficiency savings of £182·4 million, reflected in the net Budget figure.

I have decided to replace the ARMS Phase 2 milestone target. The ARMS—administrative resource management system—project has been subsumed within the FAMIS—financial and management information systems—project which is an overall strategy to integrate and upgrade the Department's finance and management information systems. The new milestone is:

iv. to complete the FAMIS resource management user requirement by 31 March 1982.

[1]The new target represents the higher cash level of loan repayments which the Benefits Agency is expected to achieve as a result of the increased gross allocations for loans. We do not propose to increase the rate of recovery from individual customers or change their repayment arrangements.

Housing Costs

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what provision exists to enable individuals who leave home to take up places on training schemes to claim housing costs during the period of the scheme;

(2) what plans he has to make adequate housing costs available through the benefit system to make it possible for trainees to leave home to take up places on schemes in areas of high housing costs;

(3) what research his Department has conducted to establish the level of need to provide adequate housing costs through the benefit system to enable trainees to leave home to take up places on schemes in areas of high housing costs.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* Housing benefit is normally payable in respect of reasonable rents incurred by people for their home. This includes trainees on employment training and youth training programmes. Although housing benefit is not normally paid for a second home, couples who need to maintain two homes because one member is absent on a training course are able to claim housing benefit for both their main home and temporary accommodation occupied during the period of the scheme. Single people are also able to claim housing benefit for rented accommodation occupied while on a training course if no other liability to pay rent or mortgage exists. Housing benefit is generally available to meet reasonable market rents throughout the country. It is for local authorities to decide whether the rent payable is reasonable in individual cases.

In addition, payment of accommodation costs for people who leave home to take up a training opportunity on a Government training scheme can be made at the discretion of the training and enterprise councils in England and Wales and the local enterprise companies in Scotland. In the case of the Government's priority groups for youth training or employment training, where the trainee can only join in or continue in a suitable training place by incurring certain costs, including housing costs, he is entitled to have these costs met or reimbursed by the training and enterprise council or relevant local enterprise company up to a level which is considered reasonable.

In view of these provisions, there are no plans to conduct any research into the need to provide further housing costs for trainees through the benefit system.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Tuberculosis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many badgers were culled by his Department for each of the months of August, September, October and November in each county in England and Wales under the tuberculosis eradication scheme.

Mr. Maclean: The number of badgers killed as part of official badger control operations in the months August to November 1991 was as follows:

County	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*Total*
Cornwall	19	33	29	21	102
Devon	35	14	0	0	49
Gloucester	6	0	10	6	22
Wiltshire	11	0	17	3	31
Avon	9	9	8	10	36
Dorset	9	15	16	9	49
Sussex	33	0	0	0	33
Total	122	71	80	49	322

There were no operations in any other county.

It is estimated that some 20,000 badgers are killed in road accidents each year.

Beef Special Premium

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average cost per head of cattle for the facilities provided through the intervention board for the beef special premium scheme in markets where there is a throughput of 20 cattle or fewer.

Mr. Curry: The estimated average cost per head of cattle for all facilities provided through the intervention board for the beef special premium scheme in markets is £1. Separate information is not available at individual auctions but in general the unit costs at auctions with low throughput would be higher than the average.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many markets he expects to be closed as a result of the intervention board's decision to withdraw facilities from market centres where the average throughput for beef special premium purposes is fewer than 10 cattle units per week.

Mr. Curry: The decision to withdraw certification facilities from markets and abattoirs which have an average weekly throughput of fewer than 10 cattle units per week was taken by Agriculture Ministers. It represents the application of long established policy to the circumstances of the ending of the sheep variable premium scheme on 5 January.

Sheep Exports

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has completed its investigation of the transport and subsequent export of sheep from Kent to Pianella, Italy on 18 September and 24 September 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: An investigation into the transport of certain consignments of sheep to Italy is continuing.

Fish Hygiene

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the boiling of freshly caught shrimps in seawater would be banned as part of the implementation of the EC directive on fish hygiene; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: It will not. EC Directive 91/493 setting common public health requirements for fishery products contains no provisions on the water to be used for cooking shrimps at sea. It does require shrimps cooked at sea to be rapidly cooled, and states that the water used for this purpose must be drinking water or clean seawater. "Clean seawater" is defined in the directive as

"seawater or briny water which is free from microbiological contamination, harmful substances and/or toxic marine plankton in such quantities as may affect the health quality of fishery products".

Hence, the directive expressly envisages the use of seawater by shrimpers, and recent reports that this will be prohibited are incorrect. The Department of Health has lead responsibility for preparing national regulations which will give effect to the provisions of the Directive by 1 January 1993; the proposed regulations will of course be the subject of consultation.

DEFENCE

RAF Wittering

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library details of the pilot project at RAF Wittering for the purchase of housing by service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I hope to make an announcement shortly concerning a number of measures affecting provision of housing for service personnel.

Belize

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Government of Belize about the future of the garrison there; what plans there are to alter the deployment of men or equipment over the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have made clear to the Belize Government that the Garrison will remain for as long as appropriate. The arrangements for the garrison are kept under review; there are currently no plans to make changes to its size or composition.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current establishment of the garrison at Belize; what changes there have been over the past 10 years; what equipment is deployed there; and what substantive changes there have been in major equipment deployment over the past 10 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details about the Belize garrison were given in the Eighth Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence on British forces in Belize, session 1987-88. There have been no substantive changes in major equipment deployment in the past ten years.

Antares

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive the report from the Commander-in-Chief, Fleet on his consideration of what action should be taken concerning the culpability of members of the crew of HMS Trenchant as described in the board of inquiry report into the loss of the fishing vessel Antares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Commander-in-Chief Fleet is currently considering the matter and will make a decision in the near future.

Submarine Reporting Scheme

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the extension of the submarine reporting scheme operating in the Clyde estuary to other fishing areas around the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work is well in hand and I expect to make an announcement shortly.

Indonesia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions, with whom and on what topics, he had on his recent visit to Indonesia; and what assurances he

received that equipment and weapons supplied from the United Kingdom will not be used against the people of East Timor.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Indonesia in September last year, when he met representatives of the Indonesian Government. A wide range of issues of mutual interest was discussed. As regards defence sales, all applications to export military equipment are carefully scrutinised on a case by case basis. We do not allow the export of arms and equipment likely to be used for repressive purposes against civilians. In the case of Indonesia, this covers the possible repression of the population of East Timor.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what licences have been approved for the export of arms to Indonesia in each year since 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our normal practice to disclose details of United Kingdom defence sales to particular countries.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with United Kingdom military equipment and weapons manufacturers concerning exports to Indonesia following his visit there.

Mr. Alan Clark: All discussions between my Department and United Kingdom defence suppliers are conducted on a confidential basis.

HMS Warspite

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the provisions taken for the safe storage of HMS Warspite.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: HMS Warspite has been decommissioned and will shortly be placed in afloat storage at a suitable berth within Devonport naval base pending final disposal. All appropriate safety provision has been made.

Soldiers (Convictions)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the number of serving British soldiers convicted of offences of *(a)* dishonesty, *(b)* involving violence and *(c)* any other category for each of the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information on soldiers convicted of offences is given in tables 13, 14, 15 and 16 of the Tri-Service Manpower Statistics Defence Statistics Annual Return TSM32, a copy of which is held in the House of Commons Library.

Rowner Housing Estate

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be in a position to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Gosport dated 19 December in which he asked for a joint ministerial meeting involving Ministers from the Department of Defence and the Department of the Environment in order to discuss the defective housing on Rowner housing estate with a delegation from Gosport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member shortly.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Veal

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will ensure that all veal supplied to the House of Commons Refreshment Department is produced in Great Britain.

Mr. MacGregor: The Refreshment Department is aware of the Minister of Agriculture's dissatisfaction with the minimum standards set by the recently agreed Community directive on the rearing of veal calves and of his intention to maintain the British legislation which ensures that calves in this country are reared humanely. In the light of that position, the Refreshment Department will seek to purchase only British veal or veal from other countries where production methods are known to meet the required standards.

Metal Can Recycling

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects to respond to the offer made by the Save-a-Can scheme of a can collection and recovery service for the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: A number of offers of assistance with can recycling have been made and continue to be received. These have been brought to the attention of the authorities of the House who are investigating what arrangements can be made for that purpose in order that the matter can be considered by the Accommodation and Works Committee.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Tax

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to provide for the registration of council tax payers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No. There is no need for a register under the council tax.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to run an advertising campaign on his council tax plans within the next six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: We have still to decide on the timing of a publicity campaign for the council tax but shall observe all the customary conventions concerning Government publicity.

Urban Programme

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources will be made available for the urban programme in 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I am pleased to announce an urban programme funding package for 1992-93 totalling some £260 million. This figure excludes the resources top-sliced for city challenge pacemaker authorities.

Initial allocations to the 57 urban programme authorities for 1992-93 total £248 million. An additional £11 million will be made available in 1992-93, through the urban programme, to three police authorities for the urban crime fund. This initiative was announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 26 November 1991.

Urban programme money will be used to support a wide range of projects addressing the issues of job creation, training, health, education, safety and environmental improvement. In 1992-93, it will be targeted to smaller, defined areas of particular need to achieve greater impact.

The urban crime fund will target additional funds on an experimental basis to three police authorities to help in tackling crime and providing a better environment in inner cities.

Urban programme funding demonstrates the Government's commitment to a co-ordinated attack on inner city problems in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors. A list of the initial allocations in England for 1992-93 is set out in the table.

Urban programme allocations 1992-93

	£ million
Newcastle-Gateshead	16·207
Hartlepool	2·017
Langbaurgh	2·050
Middlesbrough	5·156
North Tyneside	3·371
South Tyneside	4·756
Stockton	1·686
Sunderland	5·052
Manchester-Salford	20·789
Blackburn	3·819
Bolton	3·794
Burnley	2·111
Oldham	3·785
Preston	2·328
Rochdale	3·777
Wigan	2·638
Liverpool	18·278
Halton	1·466
Knowsley	3·984
St. Helens	1·794
Sefton	1·665
Wirral	3·548
Merseyside special allocation	1·000
Birmingham	22·496
Coventry	4·645
Dudley	1·561
Sandwell	4·642
Walsall	1·748
Wolverhampton	5·194
The Wrekin	0·961
Derby	1·359
Leicester	4·728
Nottingham	5·087
Barnsley	2·064
Bradford	4·491
Doncaster	2·225
Hull	4·884
Kirklees	1·083
Leeds	5·144
Rotherham	2·224
Sheffield	5·894
Hackney	5·393
Islington	8·550
Lambeth	8,452
Brent	2·660
Greenwich	1·534
Hammersmith and Fulham	2·515
Haringey	2·930
Kensington and Chelsea	1·765
Lewisham	2·550
Newham	3·100
Southwark	2·696
Tower Hamlets	4·500
Wandsworth	3·120
Bristol	1·635
Plymouth	1·318

Municipal Bonds

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to give local authorities the right to raise capital finance by means of issuing municipal bonds with a maturity of more than five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Local authorities are already able to raise capital finance by issuing bonds with a maturity of more than five years. We are not currently contemplating any change in authorities' powers in this field.

Bedfordshire County Council

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to make a statement on his decision upon the Bedfordshire county council structure plan alterations No. 3.

Sir George Young: We have completed the consideration of the 481 objections received to the proposed modifications to the Bedfordshire structure plan alterations No. 3, published in July 1991. We expect to publish the approval of those alterations, subject to modifications, early in February.

Rowner Housing Estate

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Gosport dated 19 December in which he asked for a joint ministerial meeting involving Ministers from the Department of the Environment and the Department of Defence in order to discuss the defective housing on Rowner housing estate with a delegation from Gosport.

Mr. Yeo: A reply to my hon. Friend's letter was sent to him on 15 January.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require certain local authorities to make a transfer from their housing revenue account to their general fund; if he will list the authorities involved; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Schedule IV to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires a local housing authority to make a transfer from its housing revenue account to some other revenue account if its housing revenue account subsidy calculation results in a negative amount. The transfer must be equal to that amount. An authority not entitled to housing revenue

account subsidy may also transfer any end-of-year surplus on its housing revenue account to some other revenue account. In 1991-92 the following authorities are expected to transfer an estimated total of £23,286,882 from their housing revenue accounts:

Barking and Dagenham
Newbury
Swale
Suffolk Coastal
South Wight
St. Edmundsbury
Wandsdyke
Medina
Epson and Ewell
Sevenoaks
Tonbridge and Malling
North Bedfordshire
Broadland
East Dorset
Mid Bedfordshire
West Oxfordshire
Wycombe
South Bucks

Thamesmead

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Local Government Boundary Commission to submit its recommendations on the future of Thamesmead to him.

Mr. Key: The Commission has issued draft proposals covering the Greenwich/Bexley boundary. Public comments have been received and are being considered by the commission, after which they will submit their report to my right hon. Friend.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce the new membership of the Inland Waterways Advisory Amenity Committee.

Mr. Heseltine: Shortly.

Air Pollution

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legislation exists to control *(a)* toxic mercury vapours from amalgam tooth fillings, *(b)* radioactive particles from nuclear powered heart pacemakers and *(c)* PCB contamination from plastic coffin materials given off from crematoria chimneys.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* Under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, crematoria are subject to local authority air pollution control. The Secretary of State's process guidance on the standards of pollution control to be met by crematoria gives guidance on minimising the emission of potentially toxic substances, for example by ensuring complete combustion (clauses 41-44 of PG5/2, available from HMSO). The holding and use of radioactive material and the discharge of radioactive waste is subject to the provisions of the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. It is our understanding that heart pacemakers are removed prior to cremation.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Crumlin Road, Belfast

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what form of inquiry was held into the bomb explosion in HM Prison, Crumlin road, Belfast; in which room of the prison the explosion occurred; how many prisoners died as a result of the explosion; when he expects to receive the results of the inquiry; how many people have been prosecuted in connection with this incident; and if he will make a statement on the present safety arrangements for remand prisoners at this prison.

Dr. Mawhinney: Two remand prisoners died as a result of injuries received when a bomb exploded in the recreation and dining hall in C wing, HM prison Belfast, on 24 November 1991. To date there have been no prosecutions in connection with the incident. The police investigation is continuing.

Following the explosion two inquiries were initiated. A senior governor in the Northern Ireland prison service was requested to inquire into the effectiveness of search and other procedures at Belfast prison and to consider what changes, if any, should be made. While Lord Colville was asked to review the operational policy at Belfast prison for the management of paramilitary prisoners from opposing factions and to make recommendations.

The internal inquiry, which was completed on 10 December, contained a number of recommendations and these are currently being considered with a view to their urgent implementation. Lord Colville is at present taking evidence and I hope to have his report by February.

The Government are conscious of its duty to take all practical and reasonable steps to ensure the safe custody of all prisoners in the Northern Ireland prisons and safety arrangements are kept constantly under review. In addition to the changes recommended by the internal inquiry, a number of security measures have been introduced at Belfast prison since the explosion to provide greater protection for remand prisoners.

Low Achievers

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision and resources he has made for low achievers.

Dr. Mawhinney: All schools are funded by formulae which allocate additional resources to schools in respect of children with special needs and social deprivation. In addition, under the Making Belfast Work and Londonderry initiatives, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland has targeted almost £3 million over the last three years at selected primary and secondary schools. This is aimed at improving educational standards and the employability of pupils.

Roads

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the major capital road schemes and the estimated costs of each scheme which are programmed for the years 1992-93, 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Financial year	Proposed schemes	Estimated cost (£ million)
1992-93	Newry bypass, stage 3 (bridge)	1·9
1993-94	Church street/Scotch street, Downpatrick	1·6
	Newry bypass, stage 2	3·6
	Newry bypass, stage 3 (roadworks)	4·2
1994-95	M2 Crosskannan slip roads	0·5
	Purdysburn road, Belfast, stage 1	0·8
	A4 Ballygawley/Londonderry improvement schemes	0·3
	Omagh throughpass, stage 2	2·9
1995-96	Killead bypass	0·9
	Forster Green, Belfast	1·6
	Ballymaconaghy road, Belfast, stage 2	0·5
	Greenmouth link, Coleraine, stages 3 & 4	0·5
	Strand road, Londonderry, stage 2	1·0
	Balloo road, Bangor, stage 3	0·5
	Northern distributor, Ballymena	2·2
	Great Victoria street/Sandy row, Belfast	1·4
	Comber bypass, stage 2	2·6
	A26 Antrim/Ballymena, stage 2	2·7

The precise timing of all these schemes will depend on the completion of the statutory processes and the availability of finance at the time.

University Applicants

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his reply on 19 December 1991, *Official Report*, column 317, how many applicants from Northern Ireland were refused enrolment for the current academic year, 1991-92, into *(a)* Queen's university and *(b)* the University of Ulster.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Republic of Ireland (Education)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost to public funds for students from the Republic of Ireland now receiving their higher education in Northern Ireland as a result of European Community regulations.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the estimated cost to public funds of tuition fees for students from the Republic of Ireland in the 1991-92 academic year will be approximately £3·8 million.

Urban Development Programme

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether all the expenditure on the urban development programme is included in public expenditure totals in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The urban development programme is a scheme of assistance wholly funded by the International Fund for Ireland. Expenditure under the scheme is not included in public expenditure totals in Northern Ireland.

SCOTLAND

Cold Weather Credits

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet representatives of the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No requests for a meeting have been received from the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has made to the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government are already addressing the issues raised by the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits by making significant improvements to the Department of Social Security cold weather payments scheme which came into effect last November. From January 1992, the Department of Energy introduced the home energy efficiency scheme which replaces and improves on community insulation projects and the home insulation scheme; and the Scottish Office "Keep Warm this Winter" Campaign offers free advice and assistance to anyone concerned about the adverse effects of cold weather.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in support of the introduction of cold weather credits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have recently received written representations from Citizens Advice Scotland and West Lothian district council in support of the scheme.

Dounreay

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on environmental restoration work carried out at the nuclear power development establishment at Dounreay on radioactive waste seepage from the low-activity waste pits since 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* No seepage of liquid containing radioactivity is known to occur from the low activity waste pits and no environmental restoration work is proposed. Leachate from the radioactive waste disposal pits at Dounreay is collected from the pit drainage system and sampled on a regular basis of radioactivity. The leachate is then pumped to the main effluents tanks from where it is discharged to the sea along with other liquid effluents in accordance with the site authorisation.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will evaluate the requirement for a programme to renovate the shallow-level radioactive waste disposal pits at the nuclear power development establishment at Dounreay along the lines of the restoration work done at similar disposal trenches at Drigg in Cumbria.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* There is no evidence to suggest that remedial or additional restoration work is required on the four filled pits, or the two pits currently in use.

Coastguards

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of coastguards at each station in Scotland and the number for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement on the future of this service.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* I have been asked to reply.

The answer to the hon. Member's question with regard to lists of numbers of coastguards at each station in Scotland for each year since 1979 can only be obtained at excessive cost.

Her Majesty's coastguard will continue to co-ordinate civil maritime search and rescue from the current 21 maritime rescue co-ordination centres and sub-centres for the foreseeable future, including seven in Scotland. Support will continue to be provided by local sector and auxiliary coastguard stations whose effectiveness and efficiency will be enhanced by the formation of 68 additional auxiliary companies at new locations around the coast, including 33 in Scotland. Numbers of pagers and portable radios are being doubled, and improvements in the remuneration, equipment and training of the auxiliary coastguard service are to be made.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 17 January 1992

EMPLOYMENT

Virus Research

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library a summary of the procedures that are now required to be implemented by employers for the protection of employees working in HIV and hepatitis B virus research laboratories and production facilities in England and Wales.

Mr. Forth: Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, employers are required to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees and others who may be affected by their activities. In addition, under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 employers are required to carry out a risk assessment for all activities which are likely to expose any employee to any substance hazardous to health, including pathogenic micro-organisms, and to introduce appropriate precautions commensurate to the risk.

To assist employers with these provisions, guidance has been published for the protection of employees working in HIV and hepatitis B virus research laboratories and production facilities. The guidance is contained in "Categorisation of pathogens according to hazard and categories of containment" and "HIV—the causative agent of AIDS and related conditions" prepared by the Health and Safety Commission's Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens. Copies of the document will be placed in the Library.

Unemployment

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the level of unemployment in the original EC Six countries as a whole each year since 1962, in the EC Nine as a whole after 1973, and in the EC Twelve as a whole since 1986, both in numbers and as a percentage of their total work force.

Mr. Jackson: The following two tables provide the extent of the readily available information:

(i) estimates of the annual average numbers of unemployed for the years 1983 to 1990 produced by the Statistical Office of the European Community (SOEC). Comparable estimates of numbers unemployed are not available on a monthly basis;

(ii) internationally comparable unemployment rates produced by SOEC from 1983-1990. Similar standardised rates, produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), are available from 1975. These have been provided for the years 1975 to 1982.

Table 1 *Estimates of the number of unemployed in EC countries annual averages*

(thousands)

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Belgium	487	496	463	463	447	390	328	302
Denmark	247	237	199	156	158	184	222	238
Germany	1,921	1,988	2,012	1,796	1,770	1,747	1,603	1,482
Greece	—	—	—	287	286	304	297	281
Spain	—	—	—	2,910	2,917	2,813	2,512	2,407
France	1,912	2,314	2,424	2,474	2,500	2,375	2,265	2,189
Ireland	200	221	239	240	239	230	208	202
Italy	1,970	2,097	2,189	2,420	2,373	2,535	2,498	2,316
Luxembourg	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	3
Netherlands	702	711	603	616	651	609	571	535
Portugal	—	—	—	383	321	266	240	224
United Kingdom	2,894	2,954	3,124	3,161	2,908	2,411	2,037	2,033

Source: EUROSTAT "Unemployment" bulletins

Table 2 *Unemployment Rates, Annual Averages*

	1975	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Belgium	5·0	6·4	7·4	7·9	8·2	8·8	10·8	12·6	12·5	12·5	11·6	11·6	11·4	10·0	8·4	7·7
Denmark[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9·3	8·7	7·2	5·6	5·7	6·5	7·8	8·2
Germany	3·6	3·7	3·6	3·5	3·2	2·9	4·2	5·9	6·9	7·1	7·1	6·3	6·2	6·1	5·5	5·1
Greece	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7·4	7·4	7·7	7·5	7·0
Spain	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	21·1	20·4	19·3	17·1	16·1
France	4·0	4·4	4·9	5·2	5·9	6·3	7·4	8·1	8·2	9·8	10·2	10·3	10·4	9·9	9·4	9·1
Ireland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	15·2	16·8	18·2	18·2	18·0	17·4	16·0	15·6
Italy	5·8	6·6	7·0	7·1	7·6	7·5	7·8	8·4	8·8	9·3	9·6	10·5	10·2	10·8	10·7	9·8
Luxembourg[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3·5	3·1	2·9	2·6	2·6	2·1	1·8	1·7
Netherlands	5·2	5·5	5·3	5·3	5·4	6·0	8·5	11·4	12·4	12·3	10·5	10·2	10·0	9·3	8·7	8·1
Portugal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8·2	6·8	5·6	5·0	4·6
United Kingdom	4·3	5·6	6·0	5·9	5·0	6·4	9·8	11·3	11·0	11·0	11·4	11·4	10·4	8·5	7·1	7·1

[1] OECD standardised rates are not available for Denmark, Luxembourg and Greece.
There are no OECD figures available prior to 1983 for Ireland.

[2] There are no reliable figures available as yet for the unified Germany, the figures quoted relate to the former West Germany.

Sources:
EUROSTAT "Unemployment" bulletins for 1983-1990 rates.
OECD "Quarterly Labour Force Statistics" for 1975-1982 rates.

Contaminated Syringes

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if he will introduce regulations to require contaminated syringes stored in a primary container in health treatment premises to be placed in a secondary container if leakage is possible during handling, storage, transport or shipping.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State, does not consider it necessary to introduce regulations so specific as to cover this matter. Adequate guidance regarding the handling, storage, transport and shipping of contaminated syringes is provided in the publication "The safe disposal of clinical waste" published by the Health and Safety Commission's Health Services Advisory Committee, which was revised in 1991.

This document provides employers in all health care premises with the necessary information for them to comply with their legal obligations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 (the COSHH regulations) which involve risk assessment and the provision of adequate controls to guard against exposure to infection for both workers and the public.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his reply at 2 July 1991, *Official* Report, column *121*, if he will make a statement on the likely date of the conclusion of the appeal relating to the severe disability premium awarded to Miss M. Hunt of Perry Barr, Birmingham, Ref 401: 33209.

Miss Widdecombe: On 7 January 1992 the Social Security Commissioner gave, with the consent of all interested parties, an interim decision to award the severe disability premium in respect of the period from 11 April 1988 to 8 October 1989. A copy of the decision was issued to all parties on 13 January 1992. The Commissioner has postponed the further decision for the period 9 October 1989 onwards until the House of Lords has given its decision in another case.

Hours of Work

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in 1991 with a physical or mental disability who received income support were working for *(a)* more than 24 hours a week, under regulation 6 of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 and *(b)* working for between 16 and 24 hours.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disability

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether lifetime awards of attendance allowance and mobility allowance will be reconsidered by adjudication officers under the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Act 1991.

Mr. Scott: Awards of attendance allowance for people aged under 65 and mobility allowance will be replaced by awards of disability living allowance—DLA—from 6 April 1992. Life awards of DLA and attendance allowance for those aged over 65 will not be reviewed by adjudication officers unless the person expressly applies for a review of the award of either or both components, or, in exceptional circumstances, where information comes to light which gives the adjudication officer reasonable grounds to believe that entitlement is either too low or too high.

Medical Evidence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate total annual cost to social security claimants of providing medical evidence required by the social security appeals procedures which is not provided under the national health service.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's general policy is to provide medical evidence for Social Security claimants free of charge where this is required by the appeals system.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the weather stations which have recorded temperatures triggering cold weather payments in each week in 1992.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

TRANSPORT

Lorry Speed Limits

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the costs to British businesses of the European proposal of a 50 mph speed limit on lorries.

Mr. Chope: The costs for some vehicle operators would have been substantial. In the event the Transport Council decided upon a speed limiter setting of 90 km/h—56 mph —for heavy goods vehicles. This will increase some journey times, although there will be offsetting fuel savings.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has taken place into accidents on motorways caused by motorists falling momentarily asleep.

Mr. Chope: Research has been carried out by the university of Loughborough in this country and by various institutions overseas.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contact his Department has with his opposite numbers in the European Community and the United States of America on research into motorists falling momentarily asleep whilst driving on motorways.

Mr. Chope: My Department has regular contact with other countries to discuss all aspects of road safety and research.

Bus Priority Schemes

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will undertake to review the criteria for Transport supplementary grant funding of bus priority schemes.

Mr. Freeman: Consultations will shortly begin with the local authority associations about the transport policies and plans circular for 1992-93. The references in the circular to bus priority schemes and their eligibility for transport supplementary grant and credit approval will be covered in these consultations.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had concerning the funding of bus priority schemes.

Mr. Freeman: I recently chaired a working group comprising the Bus and Coach Council, the local authority associations, the police, bus manufacturers and the National Federation of Bus Users during which the funding of bus priority schemes was discussed. The group endorsed the statement I made on 16 December announcing the provision of at least £10 million over the next two years to fund specific local authority bus schemes.

Pavements

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to monitor the provisions of the Road Traffic Act 1990 with respect to the condition of pavements.

Mr. Chope: On 31 December 1991 my Department wrote to local authority associations and other interested organisations to consult them about draft regulations and a draft non-statutory code of practice on various aspects of the arrangements for inspection of undertakers' street works. The draft code of practice was prepared by a joint committee of local authorities' and undertakers' representatives.

Utilities' Street Works

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with representatives of local authorities concerning procedures for carrying out the inspection of utilities' street works.

Mr. Chope: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the street works provisions of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. These provide, in sections 71 and 139, for reinstatements of the street, including pavements, following street works to comply with prescribed specifications of materials and standards of workmanship. The Government have commissioned consultants to advise on appropriate arrangements for monitoring the effects of the Act.

Speed Limits

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to issue revised advice on the criteria to be applied for road speed limits in villages and semi-rural areas.

Mr. Chope: Consultation with interested bodies on revisions to the criteria for setting speed limits will take place within the next week few weeks, with a view to issuing the revised criteria as soon as possible thereafter.

Severn Tunnel (Accident)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of the effect of drying out of a length of self-healing cable on its usefulness to the railways inspectorate inquiry into the Severn tunnel accident on 7 December.

Mr. Freeman: The cable in question was stored at British Rail's laboratory at Reading for as long as was necessary to arrange a programme of tests, which would identify possible faults without causing further damage or concealing evidence of other problems. Storage of the cable for any length of time in laboratory conditions could cause the latex-like insulation on the individual wires in the cable to reseal, so tests were conducted as soon as possible with both British Rail and HM railway inspectorate engineers being present. The tests have now been successfully completed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct the railways inspectorate to make available immediately to *(a)* the British Rail national inquiry and *(b)* independent inspection the length of self-healing cable from signal box 164 suspected to be part of the cause of the signalling failure which may have led to the accident in the Severn tunnel on 7 December.

Mr. Freeman: The accident is being investigated both internally by British Rail and independently by the Health and Safety Executive's HM railway inspectorate. The cable in question has now been examined in detail by engineers from both organisations working together in a British railways laboratory.

Network SouthEast

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) pursuant to his reply to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *239*, when he expects the individual objectives for all 15 of the Network SouthEast route groups to be set under the British Rail passengers charter; and who will be the judge and against what criteria as to whether the service delivered falls significantly short of published standards.

(2) whether he has set the new performance standards for the Kent coastal services in 1992 that his hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport said in the House on 12 December, *Official Report*, column 1143, that he would be setting from 1 January; and whether he will publish those standards.

Mr. Freeman: The individual performance targets for each of the 15 route groups of Network SouthEast and the related compensation arrangements will be set out in the BR passengers charter shortly. Monitoring of performance already occurs and the targets will apply from January 1992.

Job Applicants (Expenses)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances his Department is willing to pay reasonable travelling expenses for applicants to attend job or recruitment board interviews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department pays reasonable travelling expenses to applicants for many jobs in the Department. For clerical and secretarial posts, recruitment tends to be from the local area, with less need to pay travelling expenses.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in ordering the trains for the north of London daytime passenger services through the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: The seven train sets needed for the north of London daytime channel tunnel services were ordered by the railways on 18 December 1991.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the implementation report of the 1990 efficiency scrutiny of vehicle excise duty enforcement will be available.

Mr. Chope: I have today placed copies of the scrutiny implementation report in the Libraries of both Houses. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has made good progress in putting into practice the 28 main recommendations. The number of VED evaders caught and penalised through out-of-court settlements has increased by more than 30 per cent. over the past two years and 420,000 offenders will be brought to book in the present financial year. Further efficiency benefits currently under development will be included in a follow up report to be produced in 12 months' time.

Road Schemes

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he will be issuing for consultation the criteria he proposes to use in exercising his discretionary power under section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 to acquire property which is seriously affected by his Department's road schemes; and whether he expects to make the criteria public before the end of 1991.

Mr. Chope *[pursuant to his reply, 21 November 1991, c. 237.]:* My right hon. Friend will use the new power of earlier and wider acquisition to alleviate hardship by buying off-line property which in his opinion is suffering from serious "blight by proximity". Until now property not likely to be needed for a scheme could be acquired only if conditions during construction or after road opening would be intolerable. Acquisition will be from as early as the announcement of the preferred route. Each case will be considered on its merits, but as a guideline we would normally expect qualifying properties to lie within about 100 m of the centre of the road.

The other guidelines are as follows:

(a) Where it would be intolerable for the occupier to remain in the property during works or once the road is open the vendor must show that he has made reasonable efforts to sell. The property must have been on offer for at least 20 weeks at a reasonable price and have been impossible to sell other than at a price substantially lower than that for which it might have been expected to be sold but for the scheme. Normally the difference should amount to not less than 5 per cent.

(b) Therre are a variety of reasons why a vendor might need to move without delay, and where they appear cogent, they should be accepted. In the case of owner occupiers of dwellings guidelines set out the following main types of reason which should be accepted:

(i) acquisition of a job outside reasonable commuting distance when unemployed (what is reasonable under this and the next head will vary with the circumstances, including the means of the individual);

(ii) acquisition of a different job outside reasonable commuting distance (it is undesirable for blight to impede job mobility);

(iii) need to move for medical reasons, including need to look after an elderly relative in a different sort of house;

(iv) need to provide for growing family (primarily to be considered in relation to bedrooms—it is undesirable for growing children of different sexes to share);

(v) need to realise assets, perhaps because of serious financial difficulties or dissolution of marriage.

PRIME MINISTER

Oxleas Wood

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister when he last visited Oxleas Wood, south-east London; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have not visited Oxleas Wood.

European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *470*, concerning the inclusion in the draft treaty of European union of a reference to the role and significance of European parties, when he expects to receive a draft formulation from the presidency; when he expects to lay this before Parliament; and what is the objective of the provision.

The Prime Minister: The Portuguese presidency has proposed the following draft treaty article:

"Political parties at European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union".

Discussion is continuing in Brussels as to where this article should appear in the treaty. This is one of a number of technical points which will be settled before signature in early February. The text of the treaty will be published in the normal way after signature.

Advisory Council on Science and Technology

Dr. Bray: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the current members of the Advisory Council on Science and Technology; if he will give the date of their original appointment; and what is the date on which their current term of office will end.

The Prime Minister: The current members of the Advisory Council on Science and Technology are as listed. In addition, the chief scientific adviser, Cabinet Office, Professor William Stewart, attends council meetings. Departmental chief scientists/scientific advisers are also invited to attend most meetings.

Name	*Date of original appointment*	*Appointment ends*
Sir Robin Nicholson (Chairman) Executive Director, Pilkington plc	July 1990	July 1993
Professor Roy Anderson Department of Pure & Applied Biology Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	July 1989	July 1992
Professor Sir Michael Atiyah President, The Royal Society	July 1991	July 1994
Professor Michael Brady Department of Engineering Science, University of Oxford	July 1990	July 1993
Lord Chilver Chairman, Universities Funding Council	May 1989	[1]n/a
Dr. Peter Doyle Director of Research and Technology, Imperial Chemical Industries plc	July 1989	July 1992
Mr. Ian Harvey Chief Executive, British Technology Group	July 1989	July 1992
Mr. Keith Henry Chief Executive, Brown and Root Ltd.	July 1991	July 1994
Sir Graham Hills Past Principal of University of Strathclyde	July 1987	[2]July 1993
Dr. Nigel Horne Head of IT Practice, KPMG Management Consulting	July 1990	July 1993
Professor Christopher Llewellyn Smith, Chairman of Physics, University of Oxford	July 1989	July 1992
Professor Leonard Maunder Department of Mechanical, Materials and Manufacturing Engineering, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	July 1987	July 1993[2]
Professor Sir David Phillips Chairman, Advisory Board for the Research Councils	July 1987	[1]n/a
Professor Gareth Roberts Vice Chancellor, University of Sheffield	July 1989	July 1992
Sir Alfred Shepperd Former Chairman and Chief Executive, Wellcome plc	July 1989	July 1992
Dr. David Smith Consultant	July 1987	[2]July 1993
Dr. William Wilkinson Deputy Chief Executive, British Nuclear Fuels plc	July 1990	July 1993
Sir Martin Wood Deputy Chairman, Oxford Instruments Group plc	July 1990	July 1993

[1] Lord Chilver and Professor Sir David Phillips are ex-officio members in their capacities as chairman of the Universities Funding Council and Chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils respectively.
[2] Members in their second term.

Staff Salaries

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the number of those employed in his office, their position and the salary range in each case, excluding secretarial and clerical staff.

The Prime Minister: The number of those currently employed in my office excluding Secretarial and clerical staff and paid from public funds are:—

Positions Held	*Grade*
1 Principal Private Secretary	Grade 2
1 Private Secretary—Overseas Affairs	Grade 3
1 Private Secretary—Economic Affairs	Grade 5
1 Private Secretary—Parliamentary Affairs	Grade 7
1 Private Secretary—Home Affairs	Grade 7
1 Secretary for Appointments	Grade 5
1 Chief Press Officer	Grade 3
1 Deputy Chief Press Officer	Grade 5
1 Policy Adviser	Grade 3
1 Policy Adviser	Grade 5
1 Security Co-ordinator	Grade 7
2 Assistant Private Secretaries	SEO
1 Parliamentary Clerk	HEO
5 Special Advisers	—
3 Senior Information Officers	—
4 Higher Executive Officers	—
11 Executive Officers	—

It is not our practice to reveal the salaries of individual advisers as they are individually negotiated in relation to previous outside earnings and are therefore confidential. The rest are paid in accordance with the civil service pay scales.

Televisions

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister how many television sets there are at 10 Downing street; and how many television licences are held for 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: Nineteen television sets are currently in use at 10 Downing Street. No licence fees are payable for television sets on Crown property used for Government purposes.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Research Councils

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the current members of *(a)* the Medical Research Council, *(b)* the Science and Engineering Research Council, *(c)* the Economic and Social Research Council, *(d)* the Natural Environment Research Council, *(e)* the Agriculture and Food Research Council and *(f)* the Advisory Board for the Research Councils; if he will give the date of their original appointment; and if he will detail the date on which their current terms of office will end.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information is as follows:

Medical Research Council

Members	*Date of original appointment*	*Date term of office ends*
Sir David Plastow *(Chairman)*	October 1990	September 1994
Dr. D. A. Rees FRS	October 1987	July 1995
Professor I. V. Allen	August 1989	July 1993
Professor D. T. Baird	September 1989	July 1993
Mr. R. Bauman	November 1990	July 1994
Professor C. L. Berry	August 1990	July 1994
Professor M. Bobrow	November 1988	July 1994
Dr. K. C. Calman	January 1989	—[1]
Sir Michael Carlisle	November 1991	July 1995
Dr. J. T. Carter	July 1983	July 1995
Dr. P. Doyle	August 1990	July 1994
Professor C. R. W. Edwards	August 1991	July 1995
Professor J. G. Evans	January 1992	July 1995
Professor R. E. Kendell	October 1991	—[1]
Sir Aaron Klug FRS	August 1990	July 1994
Emma Nicholson MP	August 1991	July 1995
Professor M. Peckham	January 1991	—[1]
Professor G. K. Radda FRS	November 1988	July 1992
Professor Sir Michael Rutter CBE FRS	August 1991	July 1995
Professor Sir Joseph Smith	November 1988	July 1992

Science and Engineering Research Council

Members	*Date of original appointment*	*Date term of office ends*
Sir Mark Richmond FRS *(Chairman)*	October 1990	September 1995
Professor P. Burke FRS	August 1989	July 1993
Dr. R. F. Coleman CB	June 1987	July 1994
Dr. D. A. Davis	August 1989	July 1993
Professor A. Donnachie	August 1989	July 1993
Mr. G. Fairtlough	August 1989	July 1993
Dr. K. W. Gray CBE	September 1991	July 1995
Professor R. E. Hester	July 1990	July 1994
Sir Gordon Higginson FEng	August 1989	July 1993
Professor C. Humphreys	August 1988	July 1992
Dr. S. D. Iverson	September 1991	July 1995
Dr. A. Ledwith	February 1990	July 1993
Dr. J. S. Mason	July 1990	July 1994
Mr. D. P. Nash	August 1988	July 1992
Professor R. Oxburgh FRS	September 1988	July 1992
Professor J. T. Stuart FRS	August 1989	July 1993
Dr. J. O. Thomas FRS	July 1990	July 1994
Professor D. J. Wallace FRS	August 1990	July 1994
Professor A. W. Wolfendale FRS	August 1988	July 1992

Economic and Social Research Council

Members	*Date of original appointment*	*Date term of office ends*
Professor H. J. Newby *(Chairman)*	October 1988	September 1992
Dr. D. Anderson	September 1989	July 1993
Professor M. Anderson	August 1990	July 1993
Professor J. M. Ashworth	September 1989	July 1993
Professor J. Beaumont	September 1989	July 1993
Mr. M. Bichard	September 1989	July 1992
Mrs. E. J. Filkin	August 1990	July 1994
Nigel Forman MP	August 1991	August 1995
Mr. J. Fox	August 1990	July 1994
Miss C. Hancock	August 1991	August 1995
Professor D. Hargreaves	August 1991	August 1995
Professor A. Hay	August 1990	July 1994
Professor L. C. Hunter CBE	September 1989	July 1992
Professor D. Kavanagh	August 1991	July 1995
Mr. H. Liesner	December 1989	July 1992
Professor S. J. Nickell	August 1990	July 1994
Mr. G. T. Pepper	December 1989	July 1993
Professor D. K. Stout	March 1989	July 1992
Mrs. M. Tuck CBE	August 1990	July 1994
Professor P. Warr	September 1989	July 1992

Natural Environment Research Council

Members	*Date of original appointment*	*Date term of office ends*
Professor J. L. Knill *(Chairman)* FEng	October 1988	September 1993
Dr. P. J. Bunyan	July 1991	—[1]
Professor W. G. Chaloner FRS	August 1991	July 1994
Lord Chorley	August 1988	July 1994
Dr. R. F. Coleman CB	June 1987	—[1]
Professor C. D. Curtis	August 1990	July 1993
Dr. W. D. Evans	December 1989	—[1]
Dr. D. J. Fisk	September 1987	—[1]
Dr. I. J. Graham-Bryce	August 1989	July 1992
Professor J. S. Gray	August 1986	July 1992
Professor M. P. Hassell FRS	August 1991	July 1994
Professor B. J. Hoskins FRS	August 1988	July 1994
Professor P. S. Liss	August 1990	July 1993
Professor J. G. Ramsay FRS	August 1989	July 1992
Professor D. A. Ritchie	August 1990	July 1993
Mr. D. G. M. Roberts CBE	August 1987	July 1993
Dr. O. Rogne	August 1990	July 1993
Professor J. I. Sprent	August 1991	July 1994
Professor S. A. Thorpe FRS	August 1991	July 1994
Professor D. Wood	August 1987	July 1993

Agricultural and Food Research Council

Members	*Date of original appointment*	*Date term of office ends*
Sir Alistair Grant *(Chairman)*	September 1990	August 1995
Professor T. L. Blundell FRS	January 1991	December 1995
Dr. P. J. Bunyan	January 1990	—[1]
Professor E. C. D. Cocking FRS	August 1990	July 1994
Professor J. R. Coggins	August 1991	July 1995
Professor J. M. M. Cunningham CBE	April 1987	May 1993
Sir Sam Edwards FRS	August 1990	July 1994
Dr. D. A. Evans	October 1989	July 1992
Mr. D. F. R. George	October 1989	July 1992
Mr. B. Gill	August 1991	July 1995
Mr. L. P. Hamilton CB	May 1984	—[1]
Professor R. M. Hicks	August 1991	July 1995
Professor G. Horn FRS	August 1991	July 1995
Roger Knapman MP	January 1991	July 1994
Professor J. R. Krebs FRS	November 1988	July 1995
Professor C. J. Leaver	August 1990	July 1994
Professor T. A. Mansfield FRS	October 1989	July 1992
Mr. J. L. C. Provan	August 1990	July 1994
Mr. G. T. Pryce	June 1986	July 1994
Dr. D. W. F. Shannon	September 1986	—[1]
Professor W. V. Shaw	August 1990	July 1994

Advisory Board for the Research Councils

Members	*Date of original appointment*	*Date terms of office ends*
Professor Sir David Phillips FRS *(Chairman)*	January 1983	March 1993
Professor Sir Eric Ash CBE FRS FEng	January 1989	March 1992
Professor T. Blundell FRS[2]	January 1991	September 1995
Dr. A. S. Ganguly	May 1991	March 1994
Professor R. L. Gardner FRS	April 1990	March 1992
Professor M. Hart FRS	April 1990	March 1993
Professor J. L. Knill[2] FEng	October 1988	September 1993
Sir Mark Richmond FRS[2]	October 1990	September 1995
Professor H. J. Newby[2]	October 1988	September 1992
Dr. D. A. Rees FRS[2]	October 1987	—
Professor I. A. Shanks	April 1990	March 1993

[1] Not more than four members of the Medical Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council and Science and Engineering Research Council are appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science on the nomination of such Ministers of the Government as the Secretary of State shall determine. Up to four members of the Agriculture and Food Research Council are appointed by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and up to two members by the Secretary of State for Scotland. With the exception of the Science and Engineering Research Council, in the case of members who are officials of Government Departments their length of office is not specified.

[2] Ex-officio members.

Ecstasy

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to inform drugs education co-ordinators and teachers about ecstasy, its symptoms and its harmful effects.

Mr. Atkins: We believe that health (formerly drugs) education co-ordinators are generally well-informed about the nature and effects of ecstasy, and are briefing teachers as necessary. It is not the Department's normal practice to distribute information on particular drugs, but we should be prepared to consider doing so if a need became apparent.

Education Reform

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those he has consulted regarding *(a)* changes to GCSE coursework requirements, *(b)* the plans for further education in the Further and Higher Education Bill, *(c)* the plans for the schools inspectorate in the Education (Schools) Bill and *(d)* the plans for higher education in the Further and Higher Education Bill.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend consulted the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC), which has access to the advice of examining bodies and teachers, on changes to GCSE coursework requirements.

The plans for further education underlying part I of the Further and Higher Education Bill were set out in the White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century" (Cm 1536). This contained an open invitation to interested parties to comment.

The plans for school inspection were set out in the parents charter, which also contained an open invitation to comment. In addition, the Department of Education and Science wrote to local education authorities and relevant national bodies inviting comments on the inspection proposals. A full list is attached to the Department's letter of 2 October, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

The plans for higher education underlying part II of the Further and Higher Education Bill were set out in the White Paper "Higher Education: a New Framework" (Cm. 1541). Although the White Paper did not itself invite comments, the Government have since consulted higher education institutions and their representatives on various aspects of the new framework, as foreshadowed by the White Paper.

Mexico (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the purpose of his recent visit to Mexico; who accompanied him in any official capacity; and what was the total cost to the Exchequer for him and those with him.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My visit was in response to an invitation from the Mexican Government. The Mexican Government are giving very high priority to the modernisation of their education system and they wished to share our experience of education reform particularly our policies to raise standards and improve efficiency in post-school education and training. I was also able to assist British suppliers of educational goods and services to benefit from this expanding market. I had meetings with President Salinas and with the Foreign Secretary and the Education Secretary of the Mexican Government and with several state governors.

I was accompanied by a departmental private secretary and a senior official of my department. The breakdown of our costs for the visit is as follows:

—Transport to Mexico and within Mexico: £9,739
—Accommodation and subsistence in the British Embassy and in hotels: £487
—Other costs: £453

I was also accompanied for part of the trip by three British businessmen who covered their own costs.

Great Britain Sports Council

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current number of staff employed by the Great Britain Sports Council; and what additional numbers of staff over this number he has assumed in proposing a separate Sports Council for England and the United Kingdom Sports Commission.

Mr. Atkins: A total of 542 staff are currently employed by the GB Sports Council. I see no case for additional staff to be employed as a result of its re-structuring.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table setting out the present functions of the Great Britain Sports Council, together with an indication of *(a)* which of these functions will be carried out solely by the proposed United Kingdom Sports Commission, *(b)* which of these functions will be carried out solely by the proposed Sports Council for England, *(c)* which of these functions will be jointly carried out by the proposed United Kingdom Sports Commission and the proposed Sports Council for England and *(d)* which functions of the proposed United Kingdom Sports Commission and the proposed Sports Council for England are not currently undertaken by the Great Britain Sports Council.

Mr. Atkins: The functions of the Great Britain Sports Council are set out in general terms in its Royal Charter. Annexes A and B of "Sport and Active Recreation" published in December set out the functions of the United Kingdom Sports Commission and the Sports Council for England respectively. These are based on the functions of the Great Britain Sports Council.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *455*, if he will make it his policy to request and consider responses to his consultation letter on the disposal of school playing fields from the Sports Council, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the National Playing Fields Association and the regional councils for sport and recreation before announcing the conclusions of his consultation exercise on this matter.

Mr. Atkins: All these organisations have been sent copies of the consultation letter for information and are free to comment before any announcement is made on the conclusions of this consultation exercise.

Sport Policy

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his written answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *454*, and the publication of his review of Government sports policy, what calculations he made as to the likely cost of the additional offices required for a separate United Kingdom sports commission.

Mr. Atkins: As I made clear in my written answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *454*, the United Kingdom Sports Commission and the Sports Council for England will be funded from within the provision made available for the Great Britain Sports Council. The size and location of offices required as a result of this re-structuring will be a matter for discussion with the Great Britain Sports Council and its successor bodies.

Primary Education

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date he received the report from Professor Alexander, Mr. Rose and Mr. Woodhead on primary education.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend expects shortly to receive the report he commissioned from Professor Alexander, Mr. Rose and Mr. Woodhead. When it is published it will be placed in the Library.

Virus Research

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will pulish a list of all HIV and hepatitis B virus research laboratories and production facilities in England and Wales.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The main Government agency for funding medical research in this country is the Medical Research Council. Its latest handbook for 1991 gives details of the location of the research which it supports. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Publicly funded medical research is also conducted in universities and through the health authorities and health Departments. Information on such research and on research undertaken by companies and the medical research charities is not collected centrally.

Funding Councils

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what senior appointments he expects to make to the Further Education Funding Council for England and the Higher Education Funding Council for England to be established under the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill, we intend to make the following appointments.

For the Further Education Funding Council for England:

Chairman: Mr. Robert Gunn, former Chairman of the Boots Company plc; and

Chief Executive: Dr. William Stubbs, currently Chief Executive of the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC).

For the Higher Education Funding Council for England:

Chairman (as already announced): Sir Ron Dearing, currently Chairman of the PCFC; and

Chief Executive: Professor Graeme Davies, currently Chief Executive of the Universities Funding Council.

These will be strong teams to help steer the two new councils in funding the effective expansion of both further and higher education.

In advance of these appointments, Dr. Stubbs will be seconded to the Department to help prepare for the new further education funding arrangements. Professor Davies is therefore being appointed also as chief executive of the PCFC.

Open University

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration is given in allocating funds to the Open university, to the teaching and learning difficulties encountered in remote and scattered rural areas.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Government recognise the special role of the Open university in serving those living at a distance from other higher education institutions. The Government continue to support the Open university and has funded 3,000 additional undergraduate places at the university in 1992.

The funds given to the Open university are not earmarked to particular areas. However, the university has a commitment to make its services available to those living in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Funding

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to provide an equal level of funding for each school pupil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The schools component of standard spending assessments (SSAs) is already largely based on pupil numbers, but with an allowance, equivalent to about 20 per cent. of standard spending for schools, for the additional cost of educating pupils in areas of relative deprivation and for the relatively high labour costs of London and the south east. Authorities are not bound by SSAs, but are free to make their own decisions about total spending on schools and the distribution of funding between schools and between pupils, subject to the current LMS requirement that at least 75 per cent. of funds delegated to schools must be distributed with reference to pupil numbers. My right hon. Friend welcomes indications that LEAs are beginning to take action to narrow the gap between spending levels per pupil in the primary and secondary phases.

Primary Schools

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the pupil/teacher ratio in primary schools in Staffordshire in each of the past three years.

Mr. Fallon: The "within school" pupil:teacher ratio (PTR) in primary schools in Staffordshire Local Education Authority, for each of the past three years, is given in the following table.

Staffordshire local education authority

	Pupil: teacher ratio[1] 1989	1990	1991
Primary Schools[2]	23·0	23·3	23·1

[1] Excludes nursery schools.
[2] Based on qualified teachers only in schools.

Key Stage One Tests

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the information relating to the attainment of children in key stage one tests in English, mathematics and science, and in all three subjects combined, ranking local authorities by attainment in their area at level three.

Mr. Eggar: The following table ranks LEAs' combined English, mathematics and science results of the 1991 tests of seven-year-olds by the proportion of pupils attaining level three. The other information requested can be derived from the tables at annex B of the full report placed in the Library of the House on 19 December.

Key Stage 1 Assessment
LEA Ranking

LEA	Percentage at Level 3
Bromley	26
Haringey	26
Harrow	24
Richmond upon Thames	24
Merton	23
Barnet	22
Camden	22
Hackney	21
Sutton	21
West Sussex	21
Wirral	21
Gloucestershire	20
Hertfordshire	20
Isle of Wight	20
Rotherham	20
Surrey	20
Hillingdon	19
Kensington and Chelsea	19
Kirklees	19
Lewisham	19
Redbridge	19
Solihull	19
Westminster	19
Brent	18
Buckinghamshire	18
East Sussex	18
Enfield	18
Hampshire	18
North Yorkshire	18
Nottinghamshire	18
Wandsworth	18
Avon	17
Cheshire	17
Newcastle upon Tyne	17
Shropshire	17
Waltham Forest	17
Warwickshire	17
Wiltshire	17
Bedfordshire	16
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	16
Croydon	16
Doncaster	16
Hereford and Worcester	16
Islington	16
Manchester	16
Norfolk	16
Somerset	16
St. Helens	16
Stockport	16
Trafford	16
Wolverhampton	16

English, Mathematics and Science combined

LEA	Percentage at Level 3
Barking and Dagenham	15
Berkshire	15
Cambridgeshire	15
Cumbria	15
Devon	15
Dorset	15
Essex	15
Gateshead	15
Northamptonshire	15
Northumberland	15
Sheffield	15
South Tyneside	15
Derbyshire	14
Durham	14
Ealing	14
Greenwich	14
Hammersmith and Fulham	14
Liverpool	14
North Tyneside	14
Oldham	14
Oxfordshire	14
Sefton	14
Southwark	14
Tameside	14
Wigan	14
Havering	13
Hounslow	13
Humberside	13
Kent	13
Leeds	13
Leicestershire	13
Lincolnshire	13
Suffolk	13
Coventry	12
Kingston upon Thames	12
Bury	11
Calderdale	11
Rochdale	11
Bexley	10
Birmingham	10
Bolton	10
Cleveland	10
Knowsley	10
Salford	10
Sandwell	10
Wakefield	10
Dudley	9
Lancashire	9
Newham	9
Sunderland	9
Walsall	8

LEA	Percentage at Level 3
Barnsley	7
Staffordshire	6
Bradford	5
Total England	15

ENVIRONMENT

Loft Insulation

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of housing stock has loft insulation.

Mr. Yeo: It is estimated that over 90 per cent. of the dwellings in Great Britain with accessible lofts have loft insulation.

Local Government Commission

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimate of the annual costs of the local government commission when it is fully operational.

Mr. Key: Provisional expenditure figures for the Local Government Commission will be published shortly in the departmental report.

Housing Courts, Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with Nottingham city council regarding the use of housing tribunals or housing courts to process actions against bad neighbours and neighbour nuisance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: None.

Urbanisation and Human Settlement

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has any plans to consider the issue of human settlement in the preparatory work undertaken by his Department for the forthcoming United Nations conference on environment and development;

(2) what proposals Her Majesty's Government has for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development for addressing the issue of urbanisation and human settlement generally.

Mr. Baldry: Early United Nations meetings concerned with drawing up the agenda for UNCED took little account of urban development and human settlements. However the United Kingdom and the other member states of the EC successfully argued that the subject should be dealt with as a major cross-sectoral issue. The secretariat's proposals to be presented to the final preparatory committee in March are expected to reflect the views put forward by the EC.

Royal Parks

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what initial screening of companies seeking to tender for the maintenance of any of the royal parks took place on grounds of a horticultural quality threshold or the company's financial position;

(2) what account he has taken of the experience of individual local councils who have awarded horticultural contracts to a prospective tendering company, in drawing up short lists for maintenance of the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* Companies wishing to tender for garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks were asked to complete a pre-tender questionnaire providing details of their company finances and their contracts. This information, together with assessments of the horticultural quality of their current work by site visits and the financial viability of each company, was then considered in drawing up a short list of tenderers for each park. The experience of individual local authorities has been a relevant factor in drawing up these short lists of tenderers for garden and landscape work in the royal parks.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will disqualify any contractors proposing staffing levels signficantly below the minimum staffing levels for maintenance recommended in the 1989 consultants' report from bidding for the maintenance contract of St. James's park.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* No. But my Department has satisfied itself that the chosen contractor will employ enough skilled and unskilled operatives to tend the gardens and grounds to our high standards—and indeed to improve on our present standards in certain respects.

Environment Policy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution he made towards the "Manual of Environmental Policy: The EC and Britain."

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* This Department contributed £12,000 towards the Institute for European Environmental Policy's costs in researching the material for this publication.

HEALTH

Low Income Benefit Scheme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to his Department of administering the national health service low income scheme for health benefits.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The NHS low income scheme is administered by the Department of Social Security on behalf of the Department of Health, on a repayment basis. Figures are available only for the three years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92. The repayments for those years have been £8·107 million, £7·180 million and £5·137 million respectively.

Gene Therapy

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will present to Parliament the report of the Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government yesterday laid before the House the report of the Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy (Cm. 1788).

The Committee was chaired by Sir Cecil Clothier KCB, QC. The Government are grateful to Sir Cecil and the members of this eminent committee for producing a clear and comprehensive report on a scientifically complex subject.

The committee's main conclusions and recommendations are:

- Gene therapy offers for the first time in many genetic disorders the prospect of effective treatment and cure. It also has other possible clinical applications. Before introduction into medical practice it must be ethically acceptable and shown to be so.
- Gene therapy raises no new ethical principle but the familiar issues which attend the introduction of any new medical procedure are heightened because of the special qualities of the genetic make-up of individuals. The Committee believe that, all gene therapy treatments should initially be regarded as research and be governed by the existing requirements which already apply in the United Kingdom to research involving human subjects. This is an important safeguard for the patient.
- Gene therapy should be directed to the alleviation of genetic disease in individual patients. It should not be used to change or enhance normal human traits.
- A new expert supervisory body should be established to provide scientific and medical advice on matters germane to the safety and efficacy of human gene modification, and its use. This supervisory body should work in conjunction with local research ethics committees when proposals for gene therapy are made.
- Because there is insufficient knowledge to evaluate the risk to future generations, genetic modification of reproductive cells, or the germ cells which give rise to them, should not at present be attempted.

As the report says, gene therapy offers for the first time the prospect of effective treatment and cure in many genetic disorders. In such an important and sensitive area, Ministers believe that those with an interest—both professional and lay people—should be given an opportunity to respond to the committee's recommendations. We have therefore decided to consult widely on the committee's report and would welcome comments from organisations and individuals. The Government will decide what steps to take once these views are available. The consultation period will end on 18 May 1992.

It is not expected that proposals for gene therapy will be made in the immediate future; but it is judged prudent to make arrangements for handling any proposals that may be made before substantive arrangements are in place. Accordingly the Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy has been asked to remain in being.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library and I am arranging for copies to be available in the Vote Office.

Fluoridation

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue a definitive circular on fluoridation.

Mr. Dorrell: The fluoridation of water supplies is a matter for local decision. Procedural guidance was issued to health authorities in 1987, HC(87)18, a copy of which is available in the Library. There are no plans to issue any further guidance at present.

Ecstasy

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines the chief medical officer has issued to consultants and general practitioners on how best to treat those suffering from the use of ecstasy and similar drugs;

(2) what advice has been given to general practitioners on how best to warn patients on their lists of the risks of illness and death from ecstasy and similar drugs.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has recently published updated "Guidelines on Clinical Management of Drug Misuse and Dependence", a copy of which is available in the Library. These are being circulated to every doctor in England, Scotland and Wales. The guidelines include information for doctors on the problems associated with use of ecstasy and similar drugs and recommend a range of treatments for these problems.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he is funding into the medical and psychological effects of use of ecstasy and similar drugs.

Mr. Dorrell: Exploratory work is being undertaken by a group of doctors at the Institute of Psychiatry and the Maudsley hospital to determine the possible adverse effects of ecstasy. The Department is keeping a watching brief on this and is aware of some interest in this area among other drug researchers.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of illness due to use of ecstasy and similar drugs have been reported by month during 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Health Workers (Infections)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will introduce legislation to require surgeons and dental surgeons to wear masks in combination with eye protection devices whenever splashes, spray, spatter or droplets of blood or other potentially infectious materials may be generated and eye, nose or mouth contamination can be reasonably anticipated;

(2) if he will place in the Library a summary of those requirements that employers are required to meet to protect their employees who work in hospital premises from being infected with blood or other potentially infectious materials;

(3) if he will introduce legislation to increase protection for employees working in health premises who have contact with laundry contaminated with blood or other potentially infectious materials;

(4) if he will introduce legislation to ensure that all health employees who carry out phlebotomies at volunteer blood donation centres are required to wear gloves when *(a)* the employee has cuts, scratches or other breaks in his or her skin, *(b)* the employee judges that hand contamination with blood may occur and *(c)* the employee is receiving training in phlebotomy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Legislation on health and safety at work is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

All employers have legal obligations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work for all their employees, and to ensure that persons not employed, but who may be affected by their undertakings, are not exposed to risks to their health and safety.

Employers are also required by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1988, to carry out a risk assessment for all activities which are likely to expose any employees to any substance hazardous to health, including pathogenic micro-organisms.

A range of guidance and codes of practice, published by the Health Departments, the Health and Safety Executive, and by health service professional associations, is available to employers and employees to help ensure appropriate standards of hygiene and minimise the risk of any spread of infection as a result of clinical activities. I would refer the hon. Member particularly to the booklet, published in January 1990 by the UK health departments through HMSO, entitled "Guidance for Clinical Health Workers: Protection Against Infection with HIV and Hepatitis Viruses". A copy of this booklet is available in the Library.

There are no plans for legislation to cover separately the matters referred to by the hon. Member.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Wolfson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the results of energy management schemes in the national health service over the last 10 years; and what energy efficiency targets have been set for the next five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The National Health Service is currently saving £68 million a year through improved energy management. The cumulative savings from this source released to improved patient care in the past 10 years amounts to £379 million. The NHS is committed to achieving further savings of 15 per cent. over the five years from April 1991 as part of the Government's continuing energy efficiency campaign.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an immediate announcement on the declarations of interest in trust status submitted by the Churchill hospital and the acute services in Oxford.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am currently considering a number of possible configurations for trusts in Oxford. My decision will be made public in due course.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce a freeze on pending trust applications until after the general election.

Mr. Dorrell: There is no intention of freezing the trust programme. The health service reforms are already producing benefits to patients and we wish to see the national health service building on the progress already established.

Cook-chill Catering

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which district health authorities and trusts have cook-chill systems of hospital catering; and which regional health authorities have a region wide policy of cook-chill catering in hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. It is a matter for district health authorities and trusts to use catering systems that they consider meet their requirements of quality within their available resources.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to amend the terms and conditions of contract of services for general practitioners to include the provision that medical evidence is supplied free to all claimants where this is submitted in relation to a claim for social security benefits;

(2) what measures are in hand to consolidate and review the national health service General and Medical and Pharmaceutical Regulations; and if he will bring forward proposals to make it mandatory that all medical evidence needed by social security claimants in support of their benefit claims is available free.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Where medical evidence is expressly required under Social Security legislation to establish entitlement to a particular benefit, GPs are obliged to provide it free of charge to their NHS patients. Such certificates are listed in the National Health Service (General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1974. This obligation will be preserved intact in these regulations which are currently being consolidated.

Social Security Benefits (Hospital Patients)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure that hospital patients are made aware of any social security benefits to which they may be entitled.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Hospital-based social workers often advise hospital patients about how to claim social security benefits. In addition, depending on local arrangements, hospital staff may sometimes perform this function.

Mental Health Act

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued to health authorities and trusts with regard to involving the police in returning to hospitals patients subject to compulsory detention under the Mental Health Act 1983 who have absconded.

Mr. Dorrell: The code of practice issued under the Mental Health Act 1983 states (at paragraph 21.4) that the hospital should always inform the police if a dangerous or restricted patient absconds. Section 18 of the Act also authorises police officers to detain such patients and return them to hospital.

Medical and Pharmaceutical Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the second draft of National Health Service (General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Once the regulations have been made they will be published and made available to hon. Members in the usual way.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Africa (Assistance)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much financial support is given to African countries by members of the development assistance committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, according to the most recent available information.

Mrs. Chalker: Net official development assistance to Africa were as follows:

Donor	*US$ million*
Australia	76·27
Austria	47·35
Belgium	220·16
Canada	514·23
Denmark	293·43
Finland	252·13
France	3,388·55
Germany	1,342·41
Ireland	12·44
Italy	1,208·70
Japan	1,206·02
Netherlands	552·31
New Zealand	0·88
Norway	312·90
Sweden	534·39
Switzerland	167·75
United Kingdom	697·89
United States	1,853·00
Total	12,650·79

Source: OECD.

Rainforests

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impact of World bank funded projects for soya bean production on south American rainforests.

Mrs. Chalker: The World bank has not funded projects for soya bean production in South America apart from one in Bolivia which was partly concerned with changing the use of existing agricultural land to soya bean production. An overall aim of this project is to develop sustainable agriculture on existing agricultural land, one effect of which would be to reduce pressures for further encroachment into the forest areas.

Know-How Funds

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the contributions made to date, and planned under the know-how funds for central and eastern Europe; and if he will make a statement on those countries not yet in receipt of the fund.

Mrs. Chalker: Expenditure under the fund in 1989-90, 1990-91 and commitments to date in 1991-92 by country are as follows:

	1989-90 £ million	*1990-91 £ million*	*1991-92 £ million*
Poland	2·3	10·9	11·5
Hungary	n/a	1·6	6·1
Czechoslovakia	n/a	2·0	6·4
Ex-German Democratic Republic	n/a	0·5	n/a
Bulgaria	n/a	n/a	1·3
Romania	n/a	n/a	1·3
Baltic States/Former Soviet Union	n/a	n/a	10·0

Our total budget for 1991-92 is £36 million which, allowing for a small amount of slippage, we expect to spend in full. The budget for 1992-93 has been increased to £46 million which again we hope to spend in full.

We have no plans at present to extend the fund to any further countries.

Czechoslovakia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects and amount of Government aid which have been given to Czechoslovakia since 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: Under the know-how fund, which was extended to Czechoslovakia in March 1990, we provided some £2 million in 1990-91 and expect to spend up to £6 million in 1991-92. For details of the projects supported I refer to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 18 June 1991 at column *93*. Additional activities agreed since then are as follows:

Financial services and macroeconomic advice

Title: Assistance for Privatisation.
Description: A team of privatisation advisers from Ernst and Young, Schroders and Denton Hall are advising on privatisation policy and implementation.
Status: An ongoing programme of assistance of which the latest phase has just been agreed.
Cost: £738,000.

Title: Training courses for the State Bank.
Description: Courses on banking procedures run by the Bank of England.
Status: Underway.
Cost: £10,000.

Title: Training on bank-lending, credit analysis and credit control.
Description: Six two week courses on the basic principle and skills involved in lending decision making and credit control for staff of various Czechoslovak banks.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £100,000.

Title: Banking Training Adviser.
Description: An adviser to be based at the Prague offices of the State Bank to advise on training needs, policies and programmes for all banks in Czechoslovakia.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £50,000.

Title: Assistance to the Slovak General Credit Bank.
Description: A short training programme to raise the level of ability in international banking operations at the Slovak General Credit Bank.
Status: Underway.
Cost: £38,000.

Title: Assistance to Obchodni Bank.
Description: A treasury management specialist to advise on

the organisation and staffing of the Obchodni Bank's treasury department.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £60,000.

Title: Assistance to the Slovak State Insurance Company.
Description: A five day course, by the Chartered Insurance Institute's College of Insurance, on management development.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £5,000.

Title: Assistance to the insurance sector.
Description: Advice on the restructuring of the Slovak State Insurance Company.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £185,000.

Title: Assistance to Komercni Bank.
Description: Advice on international trade finance.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £27,000.

Title: Assistance to Prague Stock Exchange.
Description: A training programme by the London Stock Exchange in conjunction with D. C. Gardner, for members of the newly established Stock Exchange in Prague.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £50,000.

Title: Assistance to the Prague and Bratislava Stock Exchanges.
Description: Advice to the organisers of the Stock Exchange in Prague and the one in Bratislava.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £100,000.

Title: Assistance to Investicini Bank.
Description: A treasury management specialist to advise on the organisation and staffing of the bank's treasury department.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £85,000.

Title: Assistance to Agrobanka.
Description: A short-term consultancy to advise on corporate strategy and organisation.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £20,000.

Title: Training for Slovak Securities Market.
Description: A training course for Securities Market intermediaries.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £50,000.

Title: Assistance to Slovak General Credit Bank.
Description: A programme of training for members of the newly established fund management subsidary.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £130,000.

Title: Voucher Privatisation—Secondary Market Study.
Description: A study to analyse existing resources to cover the privatisation programme.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £150,000.

Employment services
Title: Training of trainers in labour market assessment and analysis.
Description: A training course for Job Centre managers and directors, organised by the Department of Employment, in labour market assessment and analysis.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £12,000.

Title: Seminar on employment and training policy.
Description: A two day seminar on training needs in a restructuring economy, organised by the Department of Employment.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £8,000.

Title: Management training in the employment sector.
Description: Training courses run by the Department of Employment for Job Centre Directors and their deputies.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £4,000.

Title: Industrial Relations.
Description: A visit to the United Kingdom by officials from the Federal and Republic Ministries to discuss industrial, employment and trade union policy.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £5,500.

Title: Assistance with health and safety at work.
Description: Three projects run by the Health and Safety Executive for Czech and Slovak Labour Inspectors, and officials from the Office of Occupational Safety and the Occupational Safety Research Institute.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £23,000.

Management training and small business advice
Title: Assistance to small business development.
Description: Pilot project by B'nai B'rith to advise existing small businesses on how to utilise their potential.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £40,000.

Title: Management training development.
Description: A distance learning package on management training, developed by the Open University in conjunction with the City University of Bratislava.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £220,000.

Title: Enterprise Education Seminars.
Description: A three day seminar by Department of Employment officials and leading representatives from the business/education world to explain the concepts of enterprise education with a view to implementing longer term programmes of assistance.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £12,500

Title: Management training and development programme.
Description: A three part programme of training and consultancy aimed at strengthening the capacity of selected management training institutions, management trainers and senior managers.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £740,000.

Title: Enterprise Europe placement programme
Description: Placement programme for selected young Czechoslovak managers with small firms in Britain.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £25,000.

Title: Industrial training programme
Description: Programme of attachments to United Kingdom firms for some 40 Czechoslovak managers organised jointly by the CBI and the British Council.
Status: To be Implemented
Cost: £200,000

Environment/Energy

Title: Environmental Liaison Centre.
Description: The establishment of an umbrella organisation for various non-governmental environmental bodies.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £42,000.

Title: Training for Natural Gas Buyers:
Description: A short training programme, organised by British Gas; on the purchasing of gas on the open market for Czech and Slovak natural gas buyers.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £10,500.

Title: Pricing and restructuring the electricity industry.
Description: Provision of advice and assistance to the Czechoslovak government on the implementation of changes to their electricity sector.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £32,000.

Title: Restructuring the coal industry.
Description: An initial visit to determine the requirements of the Czech government in respect of their restructuring programme in the coal indus-try.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £4,000.

Title: Retraining in the coal sector.
Description: A study visit to the United Kingdom, organised by British Coal Enterprises.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £8,500.

Title: Restructuring the coal industry.
Description: A 2-3 week consultancy by British Coal Enterprises to advise the OKD enterprise on the establishment of a job creation and outplacement subsidiary.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £25,000.

Title: Assistance to the Water Research Institute.
Description: A programme of assistance by the United Kingdom Water Research Centre to improve management of water resources, waste water, environmental engineering and science.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £20,000.

Education, ELT, Publishing and Broadcasting
Title: Assistance to Slovak TV.
Description: To ascertain requirements for organisational changes at Slovak TV.
Status: Completed.
Cost: 1,500.

Title: Assistance to the Czech Bar Association.
Description: To advise on the establishment of a specialist legal publishing house.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £15,000.

Title: Assistance to Barrandov Film Studios.
Description: To ascertain the requirements for improving management structure in readiness for privatisation of the studios.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £1,800.

Title: Assistance to Slovak Television.
Description: A restructuring programme.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £35,000.

Public Administration/Local Government
Title: Assistance to Federal and National Statistics Offices.
Description: A programme of assistance involving secondments to the United Kingdom and visits to Czechoslovakia by specialists from the United Kingdom Governmental statistical services.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £54,000.

Title: Assistance to local government.
Description: A three year programme of assistance, through the Institute of Local Government Studies, to help the Czechoslovaks in their local government reform programme.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £383,000.

Political projects
Title: Placement scheme for officials from the Czech and Slovak Ministries of Justice.
Description: A one month long placement scheme on commercial law organised by Queen Mary and Westfield College.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £3,000.

Title: Assistance for Czechoslovak parliamentarians.
Description: A seven day seminar, organised by the Great Britain/East Europe Centre, on all aspects of parliamentary practices and procedures for 12-14 newly elected parliamentarians from the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £15,000.

Title: Assistance to the Czechoslovak News Agency.
Description: A programme of placements with United Kingdom media organisations for four key personnel of the Czechoslovak News Agency.
Status: Under way.
Costt:: £3,000.

Title: Assistance to ZTS Martin.
Description: A pilot project to advise on quality improvement and stock reduction.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £40,000.

Other projects
Title: Information Technology.
Description: An appraisal mission to identify the needs in this sector with a view to providing some form of assistance.
Status: Completed.
Cost: £15,000.

Title: Information Technology.
Description: Two seminars designed to help information technology decision makers to understand key issues in the building of information systems.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £45,000.

Title: Restructuring State farms.
Description: A pilot project to advise the Czech Ministry of Agriculture and the Vlasim State farm to make the transformation to a market based operation.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £150,000.

Title: Seeds Course.
Description: A training course for officials and technical experts in production and marketing of agricultural and horticultural seeds.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £65,000.

Title: Agricultural Land Management.
Description: The preparation of an initial study to advise on the best ways to create and manage a system of private ownership, occupation and use of

agricultural and other rural land.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £50,000.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Precautions

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the Fire Precautions Act 1971 to bring into scope all premises other than domestic dwellings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Certain hotels, boarding houses, factories, offices, shops and railway premises currently require a fire certificate by virtue of designation orders made under section 1 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971. We have no plans to designate further premises as requiring such certificates.

We intend, however, to bring forward regulations to implement the fire safety requirements of the European Community Directives 89/391/EEC and 89/654/EEC relating to the health and safety of workers at work. These will generally apply to every place in which one or more persons work and will take effect on 1 January 1993.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is to be the policy of transfer of prison inmates from privately run prisons to state run prisons; who will decide when such a transfer is to take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Wolds remand prison will hold only unsentenced prisoners. On their receiving custodial sentences, Wolds prisoners will be taken directly from court to the appropriate local prison. Blakenhurst prison is to be a local prison, holding both sentenced and unsentenced prisoners. Arrangements for the transfer to other prisons of sentenced prisoners held at Blakenhurst will be set out in the invitation to tender which is in preparation.

Dog Fighting

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been in each of the last 10 years for illegal dog fighting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Information collected centrally does not distinguish offences relating to dog fights from other offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) of 20 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *351*, whether the new level of eligibility for criminal injuries compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme will apply to all cases irrespective of the date of the injury for which compensation is sought; and if he will make an estimate of the number of claims that will be disallowed annually as a result of the change in minimum award level.

Mr. John Patten: The new lower limit for eligibility for compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme will apply to all applications received by the board on or after 6 January 1992, irrespective of the date of the injury that led to the application.

It is estimated that up to an additional 6,000 applications will be excluded by the new lower limit in a full year. However, the old lower limit will apply to all applications received by the board before 6 January 1992.

Correspondence

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letters of the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East of 17 September 1991 concerning crime prevention in Bolton and 21 October 1991 concerning help for the disabled by his Department; and if he will update his note entitled "Action Against Crime."

Mr. John Patten: I wrote to my hon. Friend about crime prevention in Bolton on 15 January. My hon. Friend also wrote to me on 13 January requesting an up to date copy of the note "Action Against Crime". "Action Against Crime" is updated regularly. I have arranged for a copy of the latest version to be sent to my hon. Friend, and a copy is placed in the Library of the House.

My hon. Friend also asked when he could expect a reply to his letter to my right hon. Friend of 21 October. We can reply only in respect of actions as an employer of people with disabilities and I or my right hon. Friend will do so shortly.

Ecstasy

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to control rave parties and young people's clubs where ecstasy use is likely.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The police have adequate powers to deal with parties of this sort, including common law powers to deal with a breach of the peace or public nuisance. In addition, the Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act 1990 has significantly increased the penalties for people convicted of providing music without a licence, where one is required, or being in breach of the condition of such a licence. Any law breaking on such premises, including the misuse of drugs, will of course be dealt with by the police.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths from use of ecstasy and similar drugs were recorded for each of the past five years and for that part of 1991 for which statistics are available.

Mr. John Patten: The number of deaths mentioning dependence, abuse or poisoning with MDMA—"ecstasy"—and similar drugs registered in England and Wales are as follows:

Number of deaths registered

England and Wales	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	[1]*1990*	[3]*1991*
Deaths attributable to:						
MDMA (ie ecstasy) or MDA	—	—	1	3	1	2
Amphetamine (not further described)	3	3	1	2	2	8
Other hallucinogens	—	1	—	2	—	[2]—
Deaths which also mention the above in combination with other drugs	4	4	4	2	2	[2]—
Total	7	8	6	9	5	[2]—

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

[1] Provisional.

[2] Not available.

[3] Figures for 1991 only include deaths registered up to September 1991. Deaths of this nature result in an inquest thus delays of registration of up to one year may occur.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports of ecstacy use have been identified by local teams operating within the drugs prevention initiative.

Mr. John Patten: Fourteen of the 16 local drugs prevention teams have received such reports concerning MDMA—"Ecstasy".

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information about the drug ecstasy has been passed to police forces in order to assist analysis of material which has been seized and to pass warning information on to those in contact with potential users.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Drugs seized by police forces are sent to the Forensic Science Service, or in the case of the Metropolitan police, their own laboratories, who have the necessary expertise to identify them.

With regard to the provision of warning information for those in contact with potential users, I will write to my hon. Friend separately.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is being done through the Pompidou group of European countries to control and reduce the international trade in ecstasy and similar drugs and in the chemicals used to make them.

Mr. John Patten: The report of the G7 chemical action task force adopted by the London Economic summit in July 1991, recommended that the four main precursors used in the manufacture of MDMA—"ecstasy"—should be brought under control. This recommendation is being implemented in the European Community by an amendment to Council (EEC) Regulation 3677/90 and a draft Council directive, which are currently before the Council. The Pompidou Group will hold an expert meeting in March to consider how this and the other task force recommendations can be implemented most effectively at the wider European level; and I have asked the British representative in the Pompidou Group to ask the group to consider what further measures might be taken to curb the international trade in this and similar drugs.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been done to inform local drugs prevention initiative teams about ecstasy, its symptoms and its harmful effects.

Mr. John Patten: Each local team has been provided with a copy of "Drug abuse briefing", issued by the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence, which includes information about the symptoms and harmful effects of a wide-range of drugs, including MDMA—"ecstasy".

Mental Health Act

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is issued to police authorities with regard to police involvement in returning to hospital patients subject to compulsory detention under the Mental Health Act 1983 who have absconded.

Mr. John Patten: Section 18 of the Mental Health Act 1983 provides that where a patient who is liable to be detained in hospital absents himself without leave, he may be taken into custody and returned to the hospital by certain authorized persons, including any police constable. Home Office circular No. 35/1986—"Consolidated Circular to the Police on Crime and Kindred Matters." which was issued to all police forces on 30 December 1986, drew attention to this provision. Further information about it was contained in a memorandum on the 1983 Act issued by the Department of Health and Social Security in 1983.

Correspondence

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East will receive a reply to his letter of 19 November 1991 concerning Mr. Twomey, prison number 5W 859.

Mrs. Rumbold: I wrote to the hon. Member on 23 December.

Extradition

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on seeking extradition of nationals of another country with which the United Kingdom has no extradition agreement for prosecution in connection with offences committed outside that country.

Mr. John Patten: Such requests are very rare but can be made in respect of offences over which the United Kingdom has jurisdiction if it is considered to be in the interests of justice to do so.

Police Complaints Authority

Mr. Dickens: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Police Complaints Authority to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 16 to 20 March.

Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people have applied in each of the last five years for visitors visas in *(a)* Bombay, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Culcutta, *(d)* Dakha, *(e)* Karachi and *(f)* Islamabad; how many applications have been refused; and what is the percentage refused.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is given in the table.

Persons applying for a visit visa to the United Kingdom 1987-1991
Number of persons/percentages

	Newly received	*Refusals*[1]	*Refusals*[1] *as percentage of decisions*
Bombay			
1987	40,660	1,100	3
1988	40,500	1,420	4
1989	41,030	2,420	6
1990	42,700	4,870	11
1991 (Jan-Sept)	33,120	4,460	13
New Delhi			
1987	38,700	3,610	10
1988	40,910	4,440	11
1989	45,620	5,190	12
1990	50,650	7,400	16
1991 (Jan-Sept)	37,240	3,100	10
Calcutta			
1987	7,240	90	1
1988	6,910	110	2
1989	7,780	130	2
1990	7,570	140	2
1991 (Jan-Sept)	5,890	120	2
Dhaka			
1987	8,790	1,660	21
1988	10,320	1,940	20
1989	11,330	2,390	22
1990	11,260	2,680	25
1991 (Jan-Sept)	8,620	1,740	21
Karachi			
1987	25,270	2,130	9
1988	25,510	2,590	11
1989	26,530	2,620	10
1990	28,750	3,070	11
1991 (Jan-Sept)	18,440	1,980	11
Islamabad			
1987	31,590	5,230	18
1988	30,270	6,560	22
1989	36,420	6,690	19
1990	43,190	9,830	24
1991 (Jan-Sept)	35,460	9,420	29

[1] Refusals after subtracting applications granted on appeal.

Poll Tax

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have been summonsed for poll tax arrears in England to the latest available date; what is the estimated cost of legal proceedings to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

During the period 1 April 1990 to 30 September 1991 magistrates courts in England issued approximately 7·5 million summonses. The estimated cost of legal proceedings during this period is £5 million.

Settlement Applications

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the lengths of each of the queues for settlement applications in *(a)* Bombay, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Calcutta, *(d)* Dhaka, *(e)* Karachi, *(f)* Islamabad, *(g)* Dar es Salaam and *(h)* Nairobi; and in each case what is the waiting time for interview.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

As at 31 December 1991, the number of people waiting for interview for settlement entry clearances were:

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Total*
(a) Bombay	0	365	423	201	989
(b) New Delhi	0	222	286	108	616
(d) Dhaka	400	1,345	187	455	2,387
(e) Karachi	6	89	21	4	120
(f) Islamabad	77	1,091	346	586	2,100

There are no queues in Calcutta, Dar es Salaam or Nairobi.

The estimated waiting time for interview in months are:

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
(a) Bombay	0	3	9	12
(b) New Delhi	0	3	7	10
(d) Dhaka	3	5	6	10
(e) Karachi	1	2	3	6
(f) Islamabad	3	3	6	9

Settlement queues are organised as follows:

Q1 Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependant relatives over 70 years, special compassionate cases.
Q2 All spouses, and all children under 18 years.
Q3 Fiance(e)s and others applying for first time for settlement.
Q4 Re-applicants.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Gas Pipeline, Irish Sea

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the implications for fishermen in area VII/A in the Irish sea of the proposed gas pipeline from Brighouse Bay in Kirkcudbright, Scotland, to Loughshinny, north of Dublin in the Republic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The proposed route for the pipeline from Brighouse bay to Loughshinny crosses a number of fishing grounds. The main fishing activities are trawling for demersal fish, nephrops and scallops with some seasonal trawling for pelagic species. There is also dredging for scallops, beam trawling and seine netting for whitefish. The implications for fishermen, both during construction and thereafter will depend on the exact route of the pipeline, the time of year it is laid and the practicality of measures, such as trenching, to minimise interference with fishing gear. The company sponsoring the project is discussing these aspects with fishermen before finalising proposals.

Where the seabed is soft, the pipeline is expected to bury itself and the company sponsoring the project wish to trench as much as possible of the remaining length. Where the seabed is very hard, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will need to insist on rock armouring with a smooth profile to minimise snagging by fishing gear.

Set-aside

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the workings of set-aside and the level of payments to farmers for land which is set aside.

Mr. Gummer: I have nothing to add to my recent statements on this subject on 12 December 1991, columns *547-50*.

Beam Trawlers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many beam trawlers have been inspected at sea within the 12-mile limit to ensure they are complying with a 9m beam length restriction.

Mr. Curry: Every beam trawler inspected at sea has its gear, including beam length, checked and recorded. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the number of such inspections inside and outside 12 miles, but in 1991, 112 British registered and 139 foreign registered vessels fishing with beam trawls were checked at sea by the Royal Navy on behalf of the Ministry, some on more than one occasion.

Fishing Gear

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to resolve complaints relating to gear conflict within the 12-mile zone off the Sussex coast.

Mr. Curry: My officials had three meetings with the industry, in London and Hastings, on 13 January. There is to be a further meeting with representatives of the netsmen and the trawlermen on 25 January. It will be chaired by the Ministry's district inspector of fisheries and will aim to reach an agreement between the industry parties to reduce the risk of gear conflicts in the area.

Shellfish

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the locations in England where shellfish samples were taken for testing for paralytic shellfish poisoning; and what was the frequency of such sampling at these locations in 1991.

Mr. Curry: Following is the reply:

Mussels

From April to August 1991, samples of mussels were taken from sites along the North east coast of England at Berwick, Holy Island, Budle Bay, Craster, Croquet, Cresswell, Blyth, Trow Rocks, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Redcar, Saltburn, Staithe Wyke, Whitby, Scalby Mills, Cornellian Bay, Filey, Flamborough and Bridlington.

Sites were sampled once a week. Frequency of testing was increased to twice weekly samples if certain levels of the PSP toxin were reached.

Samples of mussels were also taken, approximately monthly, at the Wash, Kings Lynn, Norfolk; Brancaster, Norfolk; Pandora Sands, Norfolk; Poole, Dorset; River Exe, South Devon; River Teign, South Devon; River Avon, South Devon and Heysham, Morecambe Bay.

Scallops

A small programme of scallop sampling on a research basis is carried out throughout the year. Also, from April to August, samples of scallops identified as those coming from the North east scallop fisheries were taken twice weekly from the main processing plants. If toxins reached certain levels, sampling was transferred to the major scallop ports at Seahouse and Amble on a twice weekly basis.

Queens

During July and August, when Queens were landed at ports along the North east coast at North Shields, Whitby, Scarborough and Bridlington, samples were taken twice weekly.

Crabs and Whelks

If certain levels in mussels were exceeded in a two week period then crabs and whelks were sampled twice weekly at Berwick, Holy Island, Amble, Blyth, North Shields, Redcar, Whitby, Scarborough and Bridlington.

Grant and Advice Schemes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the numbers of staff by grade employed in each of his Ministry's divisional offices in each grant and advisory scheme, and the number of staff employed by grade on the same schemes at each of the new regional scheme centres.

Mr. Gummer: The information is not available in the form requested. The purpose of the regional reorganisation is to provide a more cost effective and efficient service for customers. It is projected that the new structure will result in a net loss of about 150 posts across the country as a whole. Of these, about 40 are the result of efficiency savings that will arise from the concentration of grant and subsidy processing at fewer, larger centres.

Czechoslovakia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice and financial aid from his Ministry has been given to Czechoslovakia since 1989.

Mr. Gummer: Financial aid to the Czech and Slovak Republics is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. My Department has had many contacts at ministerial and official level concerning advice to the Czech and Slovak Republics, particularly regarding state farm privatisation and training in seeds and plant varieties matters. In addition, my Department has arranged the exhibition and donation of agricultural books to universities in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Trawlers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many inspections his Department has had of individual trawlers who have de-rated engines within the 221 kW limit, to ensure they are complying with existing EC rules and their registration documents.

Mr. Curry: Every vessel inspected at sea has its official documents checked to ascertain its recorded engine power. In 1991, 1823 such inspections were carried out by the Royal Navy on behalf of the Ministry of which 735 were on United Kingdom registered vessels.

WALES

Leukaemia Research

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what effect he expects the granting of trust status to have in the level of research into leukaemia and associated blood disorders in Wales haematology units.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None.

Enforcement Action Appeals

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish, for each of the last 10 years, by district council area, the number of enforcement action appeals that he has *(a)* determined and *(b)* upheld.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Available information, for the whole of Wales, is as follows:

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Appeals determined	142	93	122	126	143	152	141	130	110	128
Appeals upheld (and Notices quashed)	65	29	48	48	63	83	85	54	54	65

In a number of cases where the enforcement notice was not quashed, appeals may have been successful to the extent that the requirements of the enforcement notice may have been varied.

Health Purchasing Consortium

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will reconsider his decision to set up a West Wales health purchasing consortium.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is in error. My right hon. Friend has made no such decision. The existing health authorities remain. East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire health authorities, together with the Dyfed FHSA, have committed themselves to formulating arrangements for a collaborative approach in meeting the health care needs of their local residents. This is a local initiative which has been welcomed.

Land Acquisition

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each of the last 12 years, the public inquiries that have taken place in Wales relating to the acquisition of land for road construction schemes; and if he will separately distinguish each person who received reimbursement from his Department of costs for representation and appearance at such inquiries, together with the sum disbursed.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The public inquiries that have been held in each of the last 12 years in respect of trunk road schemes in Wales that included land acquisition are detailed in the following table. Information relating to the reimbursement of costs of persons for either representation or appearance at such inquiries is not available.

Public inquiries relating to trunk road schemes 1980-1991

Year and Scheme

1980
- Hawarden By-Pass (A55)
- Carmarthen Southern By-Pass (A40)
- Morfa Improvement (A487)
- Pontyfenni Diversion (A40)
- Abercynon-Pentrebach (A470)
- Pont ar Gothi By-Pass (A40)
- Bangor By-Pass (A55)
- Llanon Village, Centre Section (A40)
- Dolcorsllwyn-Dolysgallog (A470)
- Newbridge/Ruabon, Johnstown (A483)

1981
- Kilgetty-Stepaside By-Pass (A477)
- Improvement at Cemmaes Road (A470)
- Improvement from RAC Box 487 to Storey Arms (A470)

1982
- Carmarthen-Bancyfelin Hill Diversion (A40)
- Penmaenbach-Dwygyfylchi Improvement (A55)
- Gresford-Pulford (A483)

1983
- Holywell By-Pass (A55)
- Bodelwyddan By-Pass (A55)

1984
- —

1985
- Pont Rhyd, Llwyncelyn (A487)

1986
- Road Improvements at Haverfordwest (A40)
- Boundary Terrace, Llandrindod Wells (A483)
- Chirk By-Pass (A483)

1987
- Cardigan By-Pass (A487)
- Nant-y-Caws By-Pass (A48)
- Aston Hill (A494)
- Travellers Inn Improvement (A55)

1988
- Llandeilo Northern By-Pass (A40)
- Haverfordwest By-Pass (A40)
- Ty-nant-Dinmael (A5)

1989
- Malpas Road Relief Scheme (M4)
- Ruallt Hill Improvement (A55)
- Bwlch Cutting Improvement (A40)
- Welshpool Relief Roads (A483)

Mold By-Pass (A494)

1990

Aberdulais-Glynneath Improvement (A465)
Whitland By-Pass (A40)

1991

Glangrwyney Bridge (A40)
Aber Improvement (A55)

Sows

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many breeding sows there are in Wales; what were the corresponding figures for 1971 and 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures from the June agricultural census are given in the following table:

Breeding Sows in Wales

In June	*Number*
1991	11,950
1981	16,256
1971	36,129

Ewes

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many breeding ewes there are in Wales; what were the corresponding figures for each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures from the June agricultural census are given in the following table:

Breeding Ewes in Wales in June

Year	*Numbers*
1991	5,222,915
1990	5,234,964
1989	5,111,490
1988	4,893,276
1987	4,700,960
1986	4,566,884
1985	4,460,463
1984	4,392,208
1983	4,270,282
1982	4,125,966
1981	4,015,836
1980	3,898,352

Fluoridation

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will issue a definitive circular on fluoridation.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I am considering this matter and I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

GPs (Night Calls)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department has taken to investigate the extent to which night-time calls pose a problem for general practitioners in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: All aspects of the GP contract are kept under continuous review by Health departments. It is for the General Medical Service Committee (GMSC) as the body properly representative of the profession, to raise any specific concerns through the normal negotiating channels. They have not done so on this matter.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evidence he has regarding variations in night-time calls made to general practitioners in Wales; and if he will provide the figures for each family health services authority area for each of the past five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Requests for night visits reflect patient demand and this will vary between different GP practices. Although a GP is a responsible for his patients 24 hours a day he is nevertheless free to exercise his clinical judgment on deciding whether a night visit is necessary.

The new GP contract which came into effect on 1 April 1990 introduced a two tier night visit fee payable to GPs by their local FHSA. The higher fee (£45) is payable in respect of night visits made by a doctor from the patient's own practice or from a small rota of local GPs. A lower fee of £15 is payable in all other circumstances. Prior to 1 April 1990 a single fee was payable.

The amounts paid to GPs for night visits in each FHSA area in Wales for the last five financial years are as follows:

Night visit fees paid in Wales by family health services authority (FHSA)

	1986-87		*1987-88*		*1988-89*		*1989-90*		*1990-91*			
									Higher night visit fee		*Lower night visit fee*	
FHSA	*Number*	*Expenditure (£)*	*Number*	*Expenditure (£)*	*Number*	*Expenditure (£)*	*Number*	*Expenditure (£)*	*Number*	*Expenditure (£)*	*Number*	*Expenditure (£)*
Clwyd	6,089	98,031	6,830	117,482	6,848	128,395	6,938	154,361	14,414	648,616	—	—
Dyfed	6,649	107,054	7,048	121,220	7,706	144,487	7,492	166,702	16,389	737,515	164	2,461
Gwent	9,378	150,985	9,589	164,927	11,381	213,394	9,900	220,266	15,124	680,583	7,489	112,332
Gwynedd	4,561	73,438	4,942	85,002	5,357	100,444	4,736	105,386	9,801	441,036	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	9,921	159,734	11,115	191,174	12,172	228,234	11,062	246,136	17,502	787,586	288	4,324
Powys	1,836	29,559	2,061	35,445	2,160	40,497	1,983	44,132	4,536	204,101	91	1,364
South Glamorgan	9,094	146,419	10,619	182,642	10,788	202,277	11,320	251,863	11,446	515,056	9,286	139,293
West Glamorgan	10,170	162,203	10,601	182,333	12,148	227,783	10,691	237,875	9,473	426,288	8,068	121,021

Note:
Prior to 1 April 1990, a night visit fee was payable for each visit requested and made to a patient between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am.
Since 1 April 1990, the night visit fee period lies between the hours of 10 pm and 8 am (ie an extension of two hours).

Ecstasy

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been done to inform all of those concerned with drugs misuse about ecstasy, its symptons and its harmful effects.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department already has a comprehensive non-specific prevention programme as part of its initiative to combat drug misuse through which information about ecstasy will be disseminated.

In respect of the medical profession, health departments have recently published updated guidelines on

clinical management of drug misuse and dependence. These are being circulated to every doctor in England, Scotland and Wales. The guidelines include information for doctors on the problems associated with use of ecstasy and similar drugs and recommend a range of treatments for these problems.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he has made to the terms and conditions of employment of the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency subsequent to the appointment of Dr. Gwyn Jones as national governor for Wales on the British Broadcasting Corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Tuesday 14 January 1992 at col. *549-50*.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his reply of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *549-50*, if he proposes any alterations in the terms and conditions of the deputy chairman and chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Shellfish

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the locations in Wales where shellfish samples were taken for testing for paralytic shellfish poisoning; and what was the frequency of such sampling at these locations in 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: During 1991, no specific programme of sampling shellfish for paralytic shellfish poisoning was carried out in Wales. Maritime environmental health departments routinely monitor shellfish for a variety of microbiological and chemical contaminants.

Apprentices

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he intends to take to assist apprentices in their final year of training to obtain employment.

Mr. David Hunt: The Employment Service offers a range of services aimed at helping people to find employment.

DEFENCE

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why the Union flag was not flown on the flag poles at Drumadd barracks, Armagh on Christmas day 1991; what new arrangements will be made to fly the Union flag on appropriate dates at this location; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The flying of flags at Army establishments is governed by Queen's regulations for the Army. Drumadd barracks, Armagh is not one of the locations in Northern Ireland which is listed in Queen's regulations as authorised to fly the Union flag. The list has not been revised for some time however, and it is now being reviewed.

Nuclear Convoys

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policy and precautions his Department implements when a convoy carrying nuclear warheads travels on United Kingdom public roads in adverse weather conditions; and what other public authorities and emergency services are informed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is our policy not to undertake nuclear weapon convoys when adverse weather conditions are forecast along the route. Local police forces are always informed in advance when convoys will enter their area of responsibility, and close contact is maintained throughout a convoy movement.

Injury Insurance

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain an estimate, on the open insurance market, of the approximate annual premium required to provide blanket insurance cover against injury whilst on duty—equivalent to that generally accepted in industry—for *(a)* all armed service personnel, and *(b)* all civilian personnel under the command of the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. Service and civilian personnel are eligible for benefits under the Armed Forces pension scheme and principal civil service pension scheme respectively where injury or illness results in premature retirement. In addition, the war pensions scheme administered by the Department of Social Security provides benefits to former service personnel who experience disability attributable to their service in the Armed Forces. Civilian personnel are eligible for an enhanced pension for loss of earning capacity resulting from injury or illness attributable to their employment. All personnel are eligible for compensation when the injury or illness results from MOD negligence. A voluntary personal accident insurance scheme is available for service personnel and a similar scheme is likely to be offered to civilian personnel.

Simon Britten

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to decide on the release from medical cadetship of Simon Britten, currently a senior house officer in accident and emergency at Queen Alexandra hospital, Portsmouth.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The earliest that a decision can be made on Captain Britten's application for premature voluntary retirement is 7 February 1992.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorist Firebomb Attacks

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for each year or financial year since 1972 in *(a)* Belfast and *(b)* the rest of Northern Ireland, the number of terrorist firebomb attacks, the amount of damage, the number of persons who have (i) been arrested, (ii) charged and (iii) convicted in respect of the attacks and the rate of convictions.

Dr. Mawhinney: I regret that the information requested is not available from existing records.

The best available relevant information is set out in the table. This shows, for each year since 1974, the number of incendiary devices which have exploded or have been defused in Northern Ireland. It also shows the number of persons charged with and convicted of explosives offences (it is not possible to identify separately explosives offences in which an incendiary device was an ingredient).

	Incendiaries exploded/ defused	*Persons charged with explosives offences*	*Persons convicted for explosives offences*
1974	270	161	[1]—
1975	56	100	91
1976	236	215	80
1977	608	146	146
1978	115	79	78
1979	60	40	72
1980	2	39	50
1981	49	39	28
1982	36	41	39
1983	43	48	31
1984	10	21	18
1985	36	37	33
1986	21	31	32
1987	9	22	28
1988	8	29	33
1989	7	24	30
1990	33	22	21
1991	237	24	[2]—

[1] Not recorded.
[2] Not yet available.

Note:
(a) Statistics on charges and convictions are kept according to the most serious offence with which an individual has been charged. The figures above do not therefore include persons convicted of explosives offences who have also been charged or convicted of a more serious offence, eg. attempted murder.
(b) A person convicted in a particular year was not necessarily charged in the same year.

Disability Allowances

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what work is being considered or begun, or for which funding is earmarked by the Department or the Social Security Agency for publicity in connection with the introduction of disability allowance and disability working allowance.

(2) how much money will be allowed for public education to be undertaken by his Department and/or the Social Security Agency prior to and following the introduction of the disability allowance and disability working allowance so that those who are disabled, informal carers and advice workers with caring professions are aware of the changes; and how the funds available will be spread over the number of staff/hours, print and broadcast media work, and printed materials on the benefits.

Mr. Hanley: A comprehensive publicity programme is planned to launch disability living allowance and disability working allowance in Northern Ireland. This will complement national advertising and will include local television commercials, advertisements in both the press and specialist publications for general practitioners, consultants and other health professionals. Education and awareness programmes aimed at carers, advisers, health professionals and the social security office staff will also run throughout 1992.

The Social Security Agency has established a communications team to take forward the publicity and education and awareness programmes. Leaflets explaining basic entitlement and eligibility criteria for the new benefits and the dates from which new claims will be accepted have been sent to organisations concerned with disabled people. A special disability living allowance leaflet for potential claimants with a tear-off coupon to obtain the claim pack will be available in post offices and social security offices from the end of January 1992. The disability working allowance claim pack will be available from the same sources from February 1992.

The Social Security Agency will be writing to people who are currently getting mobility allowance and/or attendance allowance to tell them that they will be transferred automatically in April to disability living allowance at the same rate of benefit and to inform them how to claim extra help if they think they are eligible. A benefits inquiry line will be established to provide specific information about the new benefits and where a caller is experiencing difficulty completing a claim form arrangements can be made for an officer to visit his or her home.

Information about the cost of these measures is not readily available.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the projected targets of people to be in receipt of disability working allowances in 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Hanley: It is estimated that by October 1992 approximately 1,700 people in Northern Ireland will be in receipt of disability working allowance and that this will increase to around 1,900 by October 1993. A further increase for 1994 is not anticipated at present.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people he expects to be in receipt of disability living allowance on its introduction in April; and how many people currently receive attendance allowance and mobility allowance.

Mr. Hanley: The total numbers of people in Northern Ireland in receipt of attendance allowance and mobility allowance at the latest date for which information is available are 37,991 and 16,600 respectively.

It is estimated that some 32,600 attendance allowance and mobility allowance recipients will transfer automatically to disability living allowance when it is introduced on 6 April 1992. Additionally it is estimated that in the first year around 9,500 disabled people who currently do not get either attendance allowance or mobility allowance will qualify for the new benefit.

Terrorism

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for each year since 1 January 1968 the number of terrorist incidents by category in which they were recorded in police records, the sums of *(a)* criminal damage and *(b)* personal injury, assessed by his Department in each year as arising from those incidents, the sums claimed, and the sums paid in each year to the latest available date.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 January 1992]:* It is not known precisely how many terrorist incidents there have been since 1968. However, information about

terrorist crime is published in the annual report of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and his 1990 report, a copy of which is in the Library, provides information for the years 1969-1990. Information about criminal damage and criminal injury claims is not held in the form requested but such information as is readily available is set out in the following table:

Total compensation paid in settled claims which were terrorist related

Financial year of settlement	*Criminal Damage £ million*	*Criminal Injuries £ million*
1979-80	24·8	1·2
1980-81	34·2	5·1
1981-82	26·4	3·5
1982-83	24·4	3·9
1983-84	21·4	4·6
1984-85	22·0	5·5
1985-86	15·9	7·9
1986-87	18·0	4·2
1987-88	9·9	4·3
1988-89	16·2	5·6
1989-90	15·3	6·3
1990-91	17·3	7·5
[1]1991-92	14·6	7·1

[1]To 18 December 1991.

Amounts exclude costs paid to applicants for making out and verifying their claims.

Shellfish

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the locations in Northern Ireland where shellfish samples were taken for testing for paralytic shellfish poisoning; and what was the frequency of such sampling at these locations in 1991.

Mr. Hanley: In 1991 samples were taken from the northern and southern sides of Belfast lough between May and September at intervals of a week to a fortnight. Strangford lough, Carlingford lough, Dundrum bay and Lough Foyle were sampled on two occasions during this period and the North coast at Portrush once.

SCOTLAND

University of Dundee

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many undergraduates entered the University of Dundee in the 1991-92 academic year; and how many of these were from *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland, *(d)* the Republic of Ireland and *(e)* Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest available information, which relates to 1990-91, is given in the table:

Undergraduate entrants to Dundee university 1990-91

Domicile	*Full-time entrants*	*Part-time entrants*
England	317	—
Wales	8	—
Northern Ireland	116	—
Scotland	623	14
Republic of Ireland	8	—
Other overseas	102	0
Total	1,174	14

Ecstasy

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been done to inform all of those concerned with drugs misuse about ecstasy, its symptoms and its harmful effects.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A comprehensive programme of information and education to prevent and discourage drug misuse is undertaken by the Health Education Board for Scotland. Material is regularly updated and contains information about "ecstasy". The Chief Medical Officer recently issued to every doctor and final year medical student in Scotland revised guidelines on the clinical management of drug misuse and dependence, which include information on the problems associated with the use of "ecstasy". The Scottish Office Education Department makes specific grant available for the in-service training of teachers in health education, including education about drugs, which keeps abreast of trends in drug misuse. Training for police officers covers aspects of drug misuse including current trends in drug taking and symptoms and harmful effects. The Scottish Drugs Forum, which is funded by the Scottish Office Home and Health Department, has produced a comprehensive guide to drugs currently used by drug takers, for use by drug workers.

Royal Parks

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the companies that have tendered for each of the royal parks maintenance contracts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The issue raised concerns operational matters within Historic Scotland, the executive agency within the Scottish Office which maintains the royal parks at Holyrood and Linlithgow Peel, and I have therefore asked the director to write to the hon. Member. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Shellfish

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the locations in Scotland, outside Orkney waters, where shellfish samples were taken for testing for paralytic shellfish poisoning; and what was the frequency of such sampling at these locations in 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The basic programme for monitoring for PSP toxins around the Scottish coast which began in April 1991 was based on 46 primary sampling sites (listed). In addition, secondary sites were included if certain levels of PSP toxin were detected.

The frequency of sampling necessarily varied from site to site according to local conditions, but areas where PSP problems were detected were targeted for intensive weekly sampling. Between April and September an average of 64 sites per week were tested (this figure includes Orkney, since data on sampling frequency at individual sites cannot readily be disaggregated). After September, sampling was largely confined to primary and secondary sites in areas which had known PSP problems.

List of Sites

1. Eyemouth
2. Musselburgh
3. Elie/Pittenweem
4. Eden Estuary, St. Andrews

5. Montrose
6. Aberdeen
7. Fraserburgh
8. Macduff
9. Lossiemouth
10. Tain
11. Moray Firth scallop grounds
12. Wick
13. West Shetland
14. East Shetland
15. Loch Eriboll/Kyle of Tongue
16. Kinlochbervie
17. Lochinver
18. Ullapool/Loch Broom
19. Little Loch Broom
20. Loch Ewe
21. North Minch scallop grounds
22. Stornoway/Loch Erisort
23. Loch Roag/West Lewis
24. Uists
25. North Skye
26. Loch Eishort
27. Loch Gairloch
28. Loch Torridon
29. Kyle
30. Mallaig
31. South Minch scallop grounds
32. Ardtoe
33. Loch Sunart/Loch Teacuis
34. Tiree Passage
35. Loch Spalve
36. Oban/Loch Etive
37. Seil/Loch Melfort
38. Islay scallop grounds
39. West Loch Tarbet
40. Campbeltown
41. Tarbert/Loch Fyne
42. Inveraray
43. Cumbrae
44. Ayr
45. Loch Ryan
46. Solway cockle beds

GP Contracts

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effect of the introduction of the new general practitioner contract on general practitioners' incomes and the service offered to the public.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the first year of the new contract GPs average incomes have risen substantially.

Despite the reservations expressed by the profession there has been a positive and impressive response to the new contract which was designed to encourage and reward improved performance by GPs. It is already clear that the range of services offered to the public has expanded. In particular, the introduction of new target payments has proved very successful in helping to stimulate high levels achievement by practice teams; as at 1 April 1991 over 97 per cent of GPs in Scotland had achieved target levels for primary immunisation, over 88 per cent. for pre-school boosters and over 96 per cent. (excluding Greater Glasgow where comparable figures are not available) for cervical cytology. Where GPs undertake their own night visits, for example, or offer a wider range of services such as a minor surgery, health promotion or child health surveillance, this has been reflected in their income; during the year ended 31 March 1991 GPs in Scotland undertook over 76,000 minor surgery procedures and over 69,000 health promotion clinics. And most importantly of all, we are seeing high levels of patient satisfaction

Electoral Registration

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of electors in the 1992 provisional electoral register for each constituency in Scotland and the equivalent number on the 1991 register.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* The information requested by the hon. Member is set out in the table. I must emphasise, however, that the numbers in the draft registers are likely to differ from those in the final registers because of late returns. The final registers will be published in a few weeks' time.

	1992 Draft register		*1991 Final register*	
Constituency	*Total*	*Attainers*	*Total*	*Attainers*
SCOTLAND	3,909,185	46,101	3,914,590	47,275
Aberdeen North	59,056	430	60,219	457
Aberdeen South	58,583	402	58,681	453
Angus East	63,461	488	62,769	706
Argyll and Bute	48,493	558	48,068	677
Ayr	66,190	925	66,126	882
Banff and Buchan	65,781	853	64,136	868
Caithness and Sutherland	31,227	304	31,120	338
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	55,833	799	55,999	879
Central Fife	56,069	391	56,307	380
Clackmannan	49,392	536	49,140	497
Clydebank and Milngavie	47,567	585	47,861	738
Clydesdale	62,529	915	62,325	811
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	46,911	704	46,895	752
Cunninghame North	55,222	774	55,390	770
Cunninghame South	49,601	843	49,728	794
Dumbarton	57,398	750	57,730	724
Dumfries	61,696	727	61,235	689
Dundee East	58,787	400	58,935	387

Constituency	1992 Draft register		1991 Final register	
	Total	Attainers	Total	Attainers
Dundee West	59,499	475	60,218	419
Dunfermline East	50,187	313	50,369	363
Dunfermline West	51,020	411	51,186	482
East Kilbride	64,685	849	64,365	873
East Lothian	67,133	1,060	67,223	1,004
Eastwood	64,344	991	64,276	983
Edinburgh Central	55,486	354	56,048	336
Edinburgh East	45,577	543	46,860	601
Edinburgh Leith	56,040	638	57,415	569
Edinburgh Pentlands	55,863	998	56,453	825
Edinburgh South	60,886	747	61,682	665
Edinburgh West	59,357	841	60,556	789
Falkirk East	52,353	537	52,307	541
Falkirk West	50,589	579	50,479	484
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	54,868	576	54,855	596
Glasgow Cathcart	45,120	516	45,835	558
Glasgow Central	48,094	302	48,862	328
Glasgow Garscadden	41,340	418	42,270	408
Glasgow Govan	45,959	412	46,720	445
Glasgow Hillhead	56,621	346	56,003	460
Glasgow Maryhill	48,277	392	48,393	469
Glasgow Pollok	46,487	580	47,206	498
Glasgow Provan	37,082	473	37,838	432
Glasgow Rutherglen	53,277	706	53,777	724
Glasgow Shettleston	52,319	525	52,129	517
Glasgow Springburn	46,047	410	45,873	410
Gordon	80,914	1,136	78,438	1,074
Greenock and Port Glasgow	52,281	638	53,267	710
Hamilton	62,220	933	62,543	1,036
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	69,891	784	68,848	781
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	62,576	883	62,513	911
Kincardine and Deeside	67,468	679	65,660	828
Kirkcaldy	52,050	272	52,419	370
Linlithgow	61,749	1,053	61,812	1,061
Livingston	61,628	1,220	62,070	1,247
Midlothian	60,774	1,079	60,875	1,002
Monklands East	48,904	761	49,226	847
Monklands West	49,723	754	50,132	869
Moray	64,325	786	63,357	729
Mortherwell North	57,780	920	58,215	929
Mortherwell South	50,600	709	51,236	727
North East Fife	53,521	504	53,399	500
North Tayside	56,027	421	55,252	475
Orkney and Shetland	31,749	420	31,355	409
Paisley North	46,872	525	47,770	546
Paisley South	48,236	555	49,091	658
Perth and Kinross	65,548	436	65,135	588
Renfrew West and Inverclyde	58,700	860	58,460	901
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	56,088	660	55,174	648
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	43,915	472	43,758	525
Stirling	58,723	630	58,296	651
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	61,493	898	61,806	946
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	39,923	484	39,608	485
Western Isles	23,199	253	23,073	241

HLCA

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the average length of delay in 1991 and 1990 respectively for the dispatch of hill livestock compensatory allowance applications forms; when he hopes this year's application forms will be sent out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* Application forms for the 1992 HLCA scheme were issued to producers on 13 January. The corresponding dates in 1991 and 1990 were 8 February and 28 December respectively.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to review the administrative arrangements governing the sending out and subsequent processing of hill livestock compensatory allowance applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* We aim to ensure that 85 per cent. of HLCA payments are made by the end of March each year. That remains our target for the 1992 scheme.

Committee of the Regions

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the places allocated to the United Kingdom in the Committee of the Regions will be allotted to Scotland; how he intends to ensure fair geographical distribution and fair political balance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* Membership of the Committee of the Regions will be determined unanimously by the Council of Ministers acting on a proposal from each of the member states. The committee is not expected to be established until 1993. Over the coming months the Government will be considering how the 24 United Kingdom seats will be allocated as between the different parts of the United Kingdom and how those seats should be filled.

THE ARTS

Lyceum Theatre

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has any plans to assist towards the establishment of a dance theatre on the present Lyceum theatre site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Foundation for Sport and the Arts has given a grant of £65,000 to the Lyceum theatre dance house project for a preliminary study on the possible operation of the theatre as a national dance theatre. We must now await the outcome of that feasibility study.

I look forward to the eventual restoration of this magnificent, but sadly deteriorated, theatre. Although it is a splendid idea, I understand that the dance house project is not the only possibility for the future of the Lyceum.

NATIONAL FINANCE

VAT

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those goods and services which the Council of Ministers of the European Community currently agrees can be subject to a reduced rate of 15 per cent. VAT, showing those that are currently exempt from value added tax, or zero rated respectively, in the United Kingdom and any commodity of each category not featuring in the Council's current list.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There has been no discussion by the Council of Ministers on the application of a reduced rate of VAT of 15 per cent. However, a political agreement was reached at ECOFIN on 24 June 1991 to apply a minimum standard rate of VAT of 15 per cent. from 1 January 1993. Agreement was also reached providing for the retention of existing United Kingdom zero rates. It was further agreed that member states may apply either one or two reduced rates of VAT below their standard rate, and that these reduced rates may not be less than 5 per cent. The reduced rate shall only apply to supplies of goods and services defined in a list of categories, the basis of which was agreed at ECOFIN on 18 March 1991. The list is as follows. Items included in each category which are zero-rated in the United Kingdom under schedule 5 of the Value Added Tax Act are identified by reference to the group number of that Act.

Category Number and Description		*Zero-rated under Schedule 5*
1.	Foodstuffs for human and animal consumption (excluding alcoholic beverages).	Group 1
2.	Water supplies.	Group 2
3.	Pharmaceutical products.	Group 14
4.	Medical equipment for the disabled.	Group 4 and Group 14
5.	Passenger transport.	Group 10
6.	Books, newspapers and periodicals.	Group 3
7.	Admissions to shows, theatres, circuses, fairs, concerts, museums, zoos, cinemas, exhibitions, libraries and access to television.	
8.	The output of writers, composers, performers etc. and copyright	
9.	Social housing.	Group 8
10.	Farm inputs.	Group 1
11.	Hotel accommodation.	
12.	Hire of camping sites.	
13.	Admission to sporting events.	
14.	Use of sporting facilities.	
15.	Welfare and charitable activities.	Group 16
16.	Funeral undertakings, cremation.	

Category Number and Description	Zero-rated under Schedule 5
17. Medical care in hospitals, spas etc., dental services.	Group 14
18. Street cleaning, refuse collection.	

At ECOFIN on 24 June 1991 Ministers agreed that the list of categories be extended to include supplies of natural gas and electricity.

Ministers also agreed that for supplies of restaurant services, young children's clothing and footwear, and all housing; a reduced rate may continue to be applied by those member states applying a reduced rate [1]to these products on 1 January 1991; and for Spain and Luxembourg a reduced, or super reduced rate may be applied.

The goods and services which are zero-rated in the United Kingdom and which are not included in the list of reduced-rate categories are sewerage services; fuel and power for domestic and charity use; housing not provided as part of a social policy; reconstruction, and supplies of services in connection with the alteration, of protected buildings; residential houseboats and caravans; clothing and footwear for young children; protective boots and helmets for industrial use; motor-cycle helmets.

Negotiations are continuing on the reduced rate list.

The inclusion in a reduced rate list of goods and services which are specifically exempted from VAT, or for which a technical zero rate may apply, by provision in the 6th VAT directive is not necessary. Other exemptions are provided for by derogation under article 28(3) of the 6th VAT directive.

[1] *Note:* Zero rates do not fall within the definition of reduced rates.

Energy Tax

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive results of Treasury models of the social effects of the EC energy tax proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The European Commission has yet to produce a formal proposal for a carbon/energy tax and the communication presented to the Council was not specified in sufficient detail to allow the likely social impact of the measure to be estimated. The effects would depend both on the specification of the tax and the use made of the revenue it would generate.

Mortgage Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the letter on mortgage payments given in his answer of 18 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns *251-52*, and give the information on a monthly basis.

Mr. Maude: The current costs net of basic rate tax relief for average new building society mortgages in the second quarter of 1988 are shown in the table.

Region	Average new building society mortgages quarter 2, 1988	Monthly interest payment[1] June 1988[2]	Current[3]	Increase
	£	£	£	£
Northern region	22,200	135·98	159·56	23·58
Yorkshire and Humberside	23,000	140·88	165·31	24·43
East Midlands	27,000	165·38	194·06	28·68
East Anglia	34,800	222·95	261·63	38·68
Greater London	54,900	387·10	454·25	67·15
South East	44,500	302·17	354·58	52·41
South West	34,900	223·77	262·58	38·81
West Midlands	28,100	172·11	201·97	29·86
North West	24,300	148·84	174·66	25·82
Wales	23,900	146·39	171·78	25·39
Scotland	24,200	148·23	173·94	25·71
Northern Ireland	24,300	148·84	174·66	25·82
United Kingdom	32,900	207·43	243·42	35·99

[1] Assuming endowment mortgage, net of basic rate tax relief.
[2] At an interest rate of 9·8 per cent.
[3] At an interest rate of 11·50 per cent.

Company Cars

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the income tax, and where applicable, national insurance contributions, payable on the benefit conferred by possession of a typical company car in each of the financial years *(a)* 1979-80, *(b)* 1984-85, *(c)* 1989-90 and *(d)* 1991-92; and what would have been the amount payable *(i)* in 1984-85 if the car scale benefit rates had remained those applicable during 1979-80, (ii) in 1989-90 if the car scale benefit rates had remained those applicable during (1) 1979-80, (2) 1984-85 and (iii) in 1991-92 if the car scale benefit rates had remained those applicable during (A) 1979-80, (B) 1984-85), (C) 1989-90.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Basic rate of tax	Scale charge for a typical company car[1]
	Per cent.	£
1979-80	30	250·00
1984-85	30	480·00
1989-90	25	1,850·00
1991-92	25	2,650·00

	£	£	£	£
Income tax charge at basic rate due on car scale charge applicable for:				
1979-80	75·00	75·00	62·50	62·50
1984-85	—	120·00	120·00	120·00
1989-90	—	—	462·50	462·50
1991-92	—	—	—	662·50

[1] A typical company car is taken as one which is less than four years old, in the middle range of cylinder capacity (1301cc to 1800 cc for 1979-80 and 1984-85, 1401 cc to 2000 cc for 1989-90 and 1991-92) and with an original market value below the relevant limit (£8,000 for 1979-80, £16,000 for 1984-85 and £19,250 for 1989-90 and 1991-92). It is also assumed that business mileage is between 2,500 and 18,000.

Employers' national insurance contributions on the car scale benefits rates were introduced from 1991-92. The contributions payable in respect of 1991-92 for the car scale benefit rates at levels applicable in 1979-80, 1984-85, 1989-90 and 1991-92 for a typical company car would be £26, £49·92, £192·40 and £275·60 respectively.

Iraq Supergun

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to investigate the business connections between the British firms Walter Somers (Halesowen) and Forgemasters (Sheffield) and the Swiss firm Von Roll Steel Products, regarding the provision of recoil systems and breechblocks to Iraq for its supergun project.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* The hon. Member should be aware that the business activities of Walter Somers (Halesowen) and Forgemasters Engineering Ltd. (Sheffield) in relation to the Iraqi supergun project were the subject of an investigation by Customs and Excise in 1990 which was brought to a halt when criminal charges were withdrawn in the magistrates court on 15 November 1990. Customs and Excise will take account of any new information not already covered in their investigation in deciding what, if any, further investigation would be appropriate.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Southwark Diocese

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what is the net income over expenditure or expenditure over income contributed to the funds of the Church by the diocese of Southwark for the last year for which records are available.

Mr. Alison: The total cost of ministers' stipends in the diocese of Southwark in 1991-92 is expected to be nearly £6 million, 46 per cent. of which is likely to be met through giving by Church people in the diocese, 40 per cent. by Church Commissioners' allocations and 14 per cent. from fees and other local income.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sri Lanka

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to review economic or military aid to Sri Lanka in light of its record on human rights.

Mrs. Chalker: As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs stated in his written reply of 24 July 1991 to a question from the hon. Member, following the Sri Lanka Government's expulsion of our previous high commissioner in Colombo we took a number of measures including delaying consideration of major new aid commitments pending the appointment of a new high commissioner and a further review of the human rights situation.

Our new high commissioner took up his post in November, and the review will take place in the near future, with the benefit of his advice.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the Students for Human Rights organisation in Sri Lanka; and what efforts he has made on behalf of its secretary Camunu Yasus Senviratne who disappeared on 9 December 1989.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are aware of the Students for Human Rights organisation but have had no recent contacts with them. Our High Commissioner and other heads of mission in Colombo made representations to the Sri Lankan authorities about Mr. Senviratne's disappearance at the time. The Sri Lankan Government are in no doubt about our deep concern at the number of disappearances in recent years.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many political prisoners he estimates to be in Sri Lankan jails; and if he will call through the United Nations for the abolition of the emergency regulations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Authoritative figures are not available, and estimates vary considerably. We have regularly encouraged the Sri Lankan Government to review the need for all its emergency regulations, but have no plans to raise the matter in the United Nations.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has regarding human rights abuses in Sri Lanka in the past three months.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I receive regular reports on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. The most significant recent development has been the Sri Lankan Government's undertaking on 12 December to implement most of the recommendations made by Amnesty International in its September 1991 report on "Sri Lanka —The North East". We welcome this and will continue to watch the situation closely.

Visa Office (Tehran)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to provide a full-scale visa issuing office in Tehran, and when the facility will be opened.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Visas for some categories of visitors from Iran are already issued by our embassy in Tehran. I do not envisage a full scale visa operation at the embassy in the near future, but it may be possible to expand the operation in stages as circumstances allow.

Visa Office (Taipei)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visas have been issued in Taipei since the visa handling office has been established there; and whether the income received equals or exceeds the cost of operating this facility in Taiwan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The numbers of visas issued by the visa handling office in Taipei from 1989-1991 was 78,782. The income during this period was:

	£
1989-90	824,456
1990-91	1,019,975
[1]1991	689,903

[1] April-October.

The total cost of the visa operation was:

	£
1989-90	56,917
[1]1990-91	206,030

[1] April-October costing figures not yet available.

Cambodia

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to the Cambodian Government with clearing their minefields.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: UN Security Council Resolution 728 of 8 January expanded the mandate of the United Nations advance mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) to include training in mine clearance and the initiation of a demining programme. The United Kingdom will contribute financially through payment of our assessed contribution (6·1 per cent.) to the costs of UNAMIC and later to the costs of the UN transitional authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

In response to a request from the UN Secretariat, we have agreed in principle to provide additionally a number of experts to UNAMIC's mine clearance training unit. We have also donated £60,000 to the Halo trust, a British non-governmental organisation, to help its mine survey work in Cambodia on behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

New Embassies

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European Community partners with a view to sharing the responsibilities in the new embassies to be established in eastern and central Europe.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We favour practical co-operation between EC missions in third countries. EC missions are already co-operating practically in fields such as emergency planning and medical care. We hope that the responsibilities opening in central and eastern Europe will extend the scope for practical co-operation. We are therefore discussing this with several of our EC partners.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the new Turkish Government on a new initiative for a settlement to the present dispute in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We remain committed to the search for a solution in Cyprus, and continue to work actively in support of the UN Secretary General's mission of good offices. We maintain regular contact with all parties to the dispute. I have had valuable discussions recently with both the Turkish and Cyprus Foreign Ministers and also discussed the next steps with the UN Secretary General.

Lockerbie

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support the efforts of the Government of Libya to prosecute the Libyan nationals alleged to have committed offences in connection with the Lockerbie bombing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. We believe that Libyan intelligence services are heavily involved in the functioning of the Libyan judiciary. As is clear from the Lord Advocate's announcement on 14 November, it is alleged that the Libyan intelligence services are implicated in the bombing of Pan Am 103. There can therefore be no confidence in the impartiality of a Libyan court.

Libya

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what extradition agreement exists between the United Kingdom and Libya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There is no extradition agreement between the United Kingdom and Libya.

Foreign Affairs Council

Sir Marcus Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held between 10 to 11 January.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, represented the United Kingdom at the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 January.

The Council agreed that the Community and member states should play a full part in the Washington conference on help to the former Soviet Union planned for 22-23 January. The Council had a preliminary discussion on the Community's relations with the newly-independent states of the former Soviet Union and invited the Commission to make specific proposals.

Ministers issued a statement welcoming the reconvening of the peace conference on Yugoslavia in the presence of all parties to the conflict. They noted the contribution by Montenegro towards creating the conditions necessary for the continuation of the conference. Ministers expressed

their readiness to apply positive measures to Montenegro, similar to those agreed for Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzogovina and Macedonia.

Ministers also discussed my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's proposal to hold a special meeting of the UN Security Council on 31 January. In a brief discussion of South Africa, Ministers confirmed their agreement that the EC ban on imports of iron, steel and krugerrands should be lifted and invited the Commission to submit a proposal to this effect to a future Council for formal adoption.

After the Council, Trade and Agriculture Ministers had an informal discussion on the GATT Uruguay round and reviewed the prospects for a successful conclusion of the round in the light of the draft agreement proposed by Mr. Dunkel, the GATT Director-General.

ENERGY

Sizewell B

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairman of Nuclear Electric regarding the extension or amendment of the existing nuclear plant operating agreement to cover Sizewell B PWR nuclear power station; and if he will place a copy of the agreement in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such discussions. He is unaware of any agreement with the title "existing nuclear plant operating agreement".

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has given guarantees to the chairman of Nuclear Electric concerning the relationship of the Sizewell B PWR nuclear power station with the National Grid Company and the electricity generator and distributor pool and operating arrangements on completion of the Sizewell B station.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There will be no unique arrangements in respect of output produced at Sizewell B. The non-fossil fuel obligation and levy arrangements will treat the output from Sizewell B in the same way as output from Nuclear Electric's existing portfolio of stations. The arrangements run until 1998. The Government will undertake a wide ranging review of the future prospects for nuclear power in the United Kingdom in 1994.

Energy Management Assistance Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many small and medium companies he anticipates will be assisted under the energy management assistance scheme—EMAS—what provisions he is making for publicising the availability of consultancy advice under EMAS; what steps he is taking to ensure an even distribution of awareness of the availability of EMAS grants in each United Kingdom region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My energy efficiency office has set itself the target of 500 successful applications for grants under the energy management assistance scheme during the 1992-93 financial year, with 1,000 grants in each of the subsequent two years. The scheme will be open to applicants throughout Great Britain and I understand that the Department for Economic Development is considering a similar scheme for Northern Ireland.

There was some preliminary publicity about EMAS at the national energy management exhibition and conference in December, when consultants and equipment suppliers from throughout the United Kingdom were able to learn about the principles of the scheme. This information was reported in four trade journals, leading to over a hundred inquiries from all parts of the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy will launch the scheme formally through the technical press in February and detailed guidelines and application forms for EMAS will be printed in preparation for this. The Energy Efficiency Office's own journal "Energy Management", which has a very wide circulation, will also publicise EMAS.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Rubber (Recycling)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance his department is giving to United Kingdom firms in recycling used motor tyres into rubber granules.

Mr. Leigh: Companies engaged in recycling activities, including firms recycling used motor tyres into rubber granules, are able to apply for grant aid from a number of schemes run by the Department. For example, the Department offers, on a regional basis, assistance via its enterprise initiative. The Department also operates two specifically environment-related schemes: the environment technology innovation scheme—ETIS—which aims to support pre-competitive industrial research on a collaborative basis; and the DTI environmental management options scheme—DEMOS—which encourages the wider adoption of proven best practices in environmental technology.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance he is giving to market United Kingdom produced rubber granules to substitute for imports.

Mr. Leigh: It is open to United Kingdom manufacturers of rubber granules to apply for assistance for marketing consultancy under the Department's enterprise initiative.

EC Regional Assistance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the regional share of successful applications for assistance under SPUR, support for products under research, SMART, the small firms merit award for research and technology, LINK and other innovation schemes, for each United Kingdom standard region in 1989-90, 1990-91 and up to 31 October this year.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* The table gives the share of successful applications for assistance for the major schemes falling under the Department of Trade and Industry's innovation budget for each region of the United Kingdom for 1989-90, 1990-91 and until 31 October 1991 in the current financial year.

Department of Trade and Industry Innovation Budget
Share of successful applications by United Kingdom region

Region	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1 April 1991 to 31 October 1991*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
SMART			
East Midlands	8	8	5
North East	6	4	5
Northern Ireland	4	3	5
North West	10	10	10
Scotland	9	11	11
South East	25	27	26
South West	11	11	12
Wales	10	9	6
West Midlands	11	9	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	6	8	9
TOTAL	100	100	100
SPUR			
East Midlands	0	0	9
North East	0	0	9
Northern Ireland	0	0	0
North West	0	0	13
Scotland	0	0	17
South East	0	0	22
South West	0	0	2
Wales	0	0	4
West Midlands	0	0	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	0	0	13
TOTAL	0	0	100
LINK, EUREKA, ATP, GICP			
East Midlands	9	10	8
North East	2	1	3
Northern Ireland	0	0	0
North West	9	7	8
Scotland	3	3	8
South East	51	50	52
South West	6	7	5
Wales	0	2	3
West Midlands	16	15	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	4	5	2
TOTAL	100	100	100

Notes:

1. SPUR was not launched until 1991-92.
2. Figures for the year to date are not necessarily representative of the expected full-year picture.
3. Figures for LINK, EUREKA, ATP (Advanced Technology Programmes), and GICP (General Industrial Collaborative Programmes) have been aggregated because they share the characteristic of collaborative schemes that information is recorded on the region of the lead organisation but not on the location of other collaborators. Care needs to be taken therefore in interpreting the regional significance of the figures.
4. Other activities under the innovation budget—notably technology transfer—do not have the location of the work recorded because they are conducted on a national scale.
5. Support for activities in Northern Ireland is largely provided through other budgetary mechanisms by the Northern Ireland Department.

Iraq (Military Nuclear Programme)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to investigate the links identified by the United Nations special investigation commission in Iraq between the London-based Meed International Company and the Technology and Development Group and the German companies H. N. Metalform of Drensteinfurt, Machinenbau Technikhandel Magdeburg, Dieburg, Schenk Werkzeug Machinenbau and Rittal-Werk Rudolf Lok in supplying high technology equipment to the Iraqi military nuclear programme.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* I am aware that the inspections in Iraq by the United Nations Special Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency has revealed the names of many companies around the world which have traded with Iraq, including some from Britain. It is possible that more names will be revealed as time goes on.

Any indications of wrongdoing will be investigated urgently.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will refer the opening of large stores on Sundays to the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* No. Competition legislation is not designed to apply to the opening of large stores on Sundays.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 201**

SESSION 1991–92

16th December 1991—17th January 1992

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A6
503w

A13
Havering 422w
Road construction 491-2w, 658-9

A26
397w

A27
397w
Road construction 164-5w

A36
Bypasses 568w

A44
Road works 584w

A59
387-8w

A628
503w

A666
607-8w

A6119
Road works 607-8w

Abbey National
443w

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary
NHS trusts 200-2w, 298-9w

Aberdeen University
298-9w

ABM Treaty
284w
Commonwealth of Independent States 582w

Abortion
Medical ethics 355w
RU486 (19:12:91) 558, (20:12:91) 567

Abortion Act 1967
Questions
355w

Absence abroad
Social security benefits rules 550w

Absent parents
510w

Absent voting
632w

Abu Dhabi
British residents abroad 181w

Access to countryside
Forestry Commission 197w

Access to Parliament
17-8, 548w
Handicapped 18

Accident insurance
Armed forces casualties 696w

Accidents
Death 526w

Accounting
Ports 162w, 405-6w

Adley, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 979
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 287-8, (19:12:91) 486, 492
Questions
Aircraft noise, Noise control 492-3w
Israel, Occupied territories 257
Railway transport, Transport subsidies 655-6

Adoption
(19:12:91) 559-66

Adult education
206-7w

Advertising
Dept of the Environment 70w

Advertising controls
Cardiff Bay barrage 73w
Tobacco advertising 521w

Advertising Standards Authority
268w

Advisory Board for the Research Councils
33-4w, 660-4w

Advisory Council on Science & Technology
Public appointments 658-60w

Aerospace industry
594-5w
Balance of trade 594w

Afghanistan
Peace negotiations 184-5w

Africa
Democracy 269-70
Foreign aid 677w
Overseas aid 588w

Age discrimination
564w

"Age File The Facts"
538w

Agricultural & Food Research Council
660-4w

Agricultural chemicals
Imports 191w

Agricultural education
438-9
Children 438

Agricultural land
Radioactive fallout 265-6w

Agricultural production
Fruit 76w
Vegetables 76w

Agricultural subsidies
301-2w
Common agricultural policy 77w

Agriculture
Czechoslovakia 690w
Expenditure 301w
Public expenditure controls 316w

Aid financed trade
560w

AIDS
Curriculum 447-8w
Death 139w
Northern Ireland 139w
Screening 524-5w

Air accidents
Tornado aircraft 380w

Air fares
EC law 500w

Air freight transport
Plutonium 609w

Air pollution
324-6w
Northern Ireland 480w
Wales 71-2w

Air pollution control
Carbon dioxide 103w
Cremation 645w
Local government functions 573-4w

Air pollution monitoring
326w

Air pressure gauges
Standards specifications 173-4w

Aircraft noise
Noise control 492-3w

Aircrew
Alcoholic drinks 47w

Airlines
Citizen's Charter 240w
Yugoslavia 101w

Airport security
237-8w
Scotland 46w

Aitken, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 334-6
Questions
Roads, Capital investment 233-6w

Al Fasi, Muhummad
217w

Alcoholic drinks
Aircrew 47w

Alcoholic drinks duties
Tax harmonisation 442-3w

Alcoholism
Railway workers 499w

Alexander, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1035-7
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 882-4
Questions
Farm buildings, Housing tenure 434w
Kenya 268
Road works, Local government expenditure 44w

Alexander Committee
see Primary Education Inquiry

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 339-41
Questions
Church buildings 14
Church Commissioners, Investment 13
Church of England, Southwark 709w
Church property, Theft 14-5
Family credit, Earnings rules 81w
Lotteries 15
Ordination of women 16
Redundant churches 14-5
Redundant Churches Fund 13-4
Women clergy 15-6

Allason, Mr Rupert
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 199-201

Allen, Mr Graham
Questions
Attendance allowance, Social security benefits rules 653-4w
Brittain, Simon, Armed forces retirement 696w
Child benefit 4-5
Civil Service College, New Members 330w
Community charge benefits, Concessionary coal 291w
Community charge benefits, Income support 201w
Constituency size 542w
Disability living allowance 634w
Disability living allowance, Social security claims 514w
Disability working allowance, Social security claims 514w
Disabled workers, Income support 653w
Electoral register 632w
House of Commons passes, Research assistants 99w
House of Commons stationery, Facsimile transmission 378w
Invalid care allowances 370w

Allen, Mr Graham*—*continued
Invalid care allowances, Social security benefits rules 549w
Lord Chancellor, Professional qualifications 233w
Low pay, Women 456w
Medical certificates, Social security claims 676w
Ministers 232w
Mortgages 708w
National Health Service (General Medical & Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992 676-7w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Nottingham 671w
New Members, Members' facilities 511w
NHS charges exemptions 519w
NHS charges exemptions, Expenditure 672w
Occupational pensions 145w
Pension funds, Fraud 513w
Postal services, EC action 186w
Prisons, Homosexuality 350w
Retirement age 145w
Social security, Maastricht summit 515w
Social security appeals, Evidence 654w
Social security benefits reductions, Personal injury compensation 289w
Social security benefits rules, Concessionary coal 204w
Top Salaries Review Body, Members' allowances 380w
Unemployment benefits, Carers 370w
Written questions, Members 378-9w

Alternative energy
Crops 444-5w
Electricity generation 18w
Finance 18w
Research finance 18w
Town & country planning 67w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 475
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1249-51, 1268
Questions
Abortion, Medical ethics 355w
Army 147w
Chemicals, Industrial accidents 337w
Croatia, Casualties 184w
Drug prevention schemes, Government grants 351w
Marie Stopes International, Government grants 470w
Mental patients, Ethnic groups 156w
Mental patients, Hospital admissions 156w
Ministerial policy advisors 380w
Pollution monitoring, Merseyside 325w
Sunday trading 348w, 448
Sunday trading, Feldman, Basil 347w
Sunday trading, France 348w
Sunday trading, Law reform 348w, 379-80w
Sunday trading, Licensing laws 348w
Sunday trading, Women 348w
Yugoslavia 266

Alzheimer's disease
Research finance 623-4w

Ambrosia
Industrial accidents 22w

Ambulance services
Greater London (20:12:91) 635-42

Ambulances
101w

Ammunition
Waste disposal 557-9w

Amos, Mr Alan
Questions
Citizen's Charter, Airlines 240w

Anchor Housing Association
Sheltered housing 104w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 688-9
Questions
Community charge, Civil proceedings 75w
Kenya 267-8
Sunday trading, Police 348w
Yugoslavia 184w

Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference
140-1w

Animal breeding
Horses 442-3

Animal experiments
Body Shop 188w
Cosmetics 188w
EC law 188w
Food additives 344w
Genetic engineering 346w
Licensing 457-8w
Pesticides 249w

Animal Procedures Committee
Public appointments 100w

Animal welfare
300w
EC action 300w
Poultry 436-7, 506-7w

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
Questions
249w
Law reform 345w

Annual reports
Civil service agencies 56w, 298w, 419w
Ministry of Defence 56w
Natural Environment Research Council 196w
Office of the Chief Adjudication Officer 145-6w
Scottish Office 298w

Anthrax
Disease control 367w

APEX Trust
965-8
Bankruptcy 963-5

Appeals
Rateable value 420w
Uniform business rate 167-8w, 537w

Apprentices
695w

Arachnoiditis
Medical research 355w

Arbuthnot, Mr James
Questions
Occupational pensions 7

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1003-6, 1059
Questions
APEX Trust 967

Argentina
Nuclear safeguards 569w

Armed conflict
Somalia 330-1w, 584w
Yugoslavia 101-2w

Armed forces
Intimidation 141
National parks 227w
Operating costs 58w

Armed forces casualties
Accident insurance 696w
Personal injury compensation (17:12:91) 152-4

Armed forces civilians
Manpower 386w

Armed forces deployment
512w
Belize 549w, 640w
Helicopters 285w

Armed forces discharges
Homelessness 386w
Housing associations 166-7w
Removal expenses 386w
Training 383-4w

Armed forces housing
138, 385w
Building repairs 385w
Defence review 137-8
Empty housing 160-1w, 512w
House purchase 384-6w
Housing associations 384w
Property transfer 384w
Swindon 160-1w
Tidworth 385w

Armed Forces Housing Task Force
Expenditure 385w

Armed Forces (Liability for Injury) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (17:12:91) 152-4
2R order read (17:01:92) 1286

Armed forces officers
Armed forces pensions 159-60w, 282-4w

Armed forces pensions
Armed forces officers 159-60w, 282-4w

Armed forces recruitment
Disclosure of information 286w
Parachute Regiment 285w

Armed forces retirement
Brittain, Simon 696w

Armed forces strength
Scotland 512w

Armed forces training
Dartmoor National Park 160w
Low flying 380w

Armed forces women
Marines 161w

Armoured fighting vehicles
286w

Arms control
Conferences 217w

Arms exports
Export licensing 230-1w

Arms trade
Conventional weapons 340w
Indonesia 582w, 640-1w
IRA 490-1w
Iraq 709w, 716w, 1093
Overseas aid 331w
Television programmes 395w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Questions
English education, Teacher training 212w, 322w
Ethnic minorities, Government grants to local authorities 100w
HM Inspectorate of Schools 322w
Inflation 1085
Pre-school education, School population 214-6w
Primary Education Inquiry 114w

Army
147w
Convictions 641w
York 150w

Army in Northern Ireland
Inquiries 59w

Army strength
Scotland 148w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Questions
Brazil, Diplomatic service 260
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 611w
Nuclear weapons 132

Arnold, Mr Jacques*—*continued
Overseas aid, Treaty of Rome 331w
Railway travel, Kent 492w
Uruguay round 959

Arnold, Sir Thomas
Questions
Bank of England, Legislation 543w
Economic situation, Statistics 219w
Foreign investment in UK, Employment opportunities 388w

Arrow Books
161w

Arson
Terrorism 248-9w, 696-7w

Art works
Export licensing 416w

Arts
Children 668

Arts Council
Handicapped 166w

Arts council grants
Northern Arts 219w

Arts finance
London Docklands Development Corporation 664
Lotteries 664
Opera 667-8
Poetry 667-8

Arts sponsorship
417w

Asbestos
Industrial health & safety 804-5
Public petitions (17:01:92) 1217

Asbestosis
Insurance 804-5

Ashby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 997-8, 1004-5, 1021, 1023, 1026-9
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1271
Questions
NHS, Expenditure 253-4w

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 300-5, 416, 424, (19:12:91) 543
Questions
Mortgage defaulters 143-4
Tax reform 810

Ashford
Railway stations 240w

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Debates etc.
Homicide (Amendment) Bill, 1R (18:12:91) 273-4
Questions
Armed forces, Intimidation 141
Personal social services, Fees & charges 51-2w

Ashton, Mr Joseph
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 994, 1002, 1008, 1019-20, 1029, 1034, 1040-4
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 466
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 460-1
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1227, 1233, 1236, 1267, 1281-2
Questions
Aerospace industry, Balance of trade 594w
Unemployment, Chelmsford 795

Asian immigrants
162w

Aspartame
Health hazards 525w

Assaults on police
Greater London 464w

Assisted areas
953
Foreign investment in UK 576w

Association of British Chambers of Commerce
960-1
Industrial policy 591w

Association of British Insurers
524-5w

Association of Chief Police Officers
633w

Association of Metropolitan Authorities
93w

Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1992
Questions
319w

Asylum Bill 1991/92
Questions
Commission for Racial Equality 461w

***Atkins, Mr Robert**, Under-Secretary of State, Department of Education & Science (Sport)*
Questions
Curriculum, AIDS 447-8w
Drug prevention schemes, Health education 665w
Football Association, Upper Waiting Hall 31w
Football pools, Betting & gaming duties 621-2w
Physical education, Schools & parents 450w
Playing fields, Land acquisition 215-6w, 453w, 666w
Playing fields, School closures 622-3w
Sports 211-2w
Sports, Young people 453w
Sports administration 666w
Sports administration, Offices 667w
Sports Council, Finance 452w
Sports Council, Manpower 666w
United Kingdom Sports Commission 452w

Atkinson, Mr David
Debates etc.
RU486, Public petitions (20:12:91) 567
Questions
Broadcasting reception 621w
Council tax 642w
Eastern Europe, Know-how Fund 677-8w

Atomic Weapons Establishment
Nuclear disarmament 286w

Attendance allowance
Social security benefits rules 653-4w
Social security recipients 82w

Attorney General
232w
Professional qualifications 233w

Auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels
385-6w

Average earnings
371-2w
EC countries 241w

AWE
see Atomic Weapons Establishment

AWE Aldermaston
Recruitment 282w

Ayr Hospital
603w

Babies
Mentally handicapped 129-30w

Badgers
Bovine tuberculosis 446w, 638w

Badgers Act 1991
Questions
Licensing 75-6w, 142w, 189-90w, 308w

Bail
Habitual offenders 197w
Scotland 197w

Bail Etc (Scotland) Act 1980
Questions
197w

Bail hostels
11-2w
Contracts for services 12w

Bailiffs
67w
Community charge 66-7w

***Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth**, Secretary of State for the Home Department*
Questions
Animal Procedures Committee, Public appointments 100w
Broadcasting Council for Wales, Public appointments 462w
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 351w
Home Office, EC integration 100w
Immigrants, Personal income 251w
Intelligence services, Disclosure of information 460w
Intelligence services, Public appointments 245w
Magistrates' courts, Administrative delays 541w
Magistrates' Courts Review 249-50w
Ministers' visits abroad, India 466-7w
Prison Service Management Review 13w
Prisons, Security 13-4w
Security industry 247-8w
Terrorism, Arson 248-9w
Terrorism, Confiscation orders 462w
Terrorism, India 462w
Terrorism, Warnings 463w
Trevi Group 351-2w

Balance of trade
543w
Aerospace industry 594w
Food 444-5
Manufactured goods 595w

***Baldry, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment*
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1164-6, 1171-2, 1189-91
Sheltered housing, Water charges (17:12:91) 250-4
Questions
Air pollution 324-6w
Air pollution control, Cremation 645w
Air pollution control, Local government functions 573-4w
Air pollution monitoring 326w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 103w
Carbon dioxide, Climate 62-3w
Carbon tax 327-8w
Cetaceans, Nature conservation 65w
Cetaceans, Pollution monitoring 66w
Cetaceans, Research 65-6w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Chlorine 329w
Climate, International conferences 66w
Coalite Group, Dioxins 171w
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, Indonesia 420w
Council of Ministers, Greenhouse effect 62w
EC environmental policy, EC law 328-9w
Environment Agency, National Rivers Authority 64w
Environment Agency, Waste management 63-4w
Environment protection, Expenditure 169-70w
Greenhouse effect 166w
Greenhouse effect, Meteorological satellites 63w

Baldry, Mr Tony—continued
Greenhouse effect, Press advertising 326w
Hedgerow management grants 68-9w
Incinerators, Construction 327w
Incinerators, Hazardous wastes 326w
Incinerators, Planning inquiries 423w
Livestock, Waste disposal 570w
"Manual of Environmental Policy", UK contributions 672w
National parks, Armed forces 227w
Nuclear accidents, Emergency planning 327w
Oil pollution control, UK contributions 571-2w
Ordnance Survey, Corporate plans 328w
Ozone layer, Cancer hazards 327w
Ozone layer, Treaties 62w
Pollution monitoring, Merseyside 325w
Radioactive waste disposal 574w
Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee 64w
Recycling 171-2w
River pollution, Rochdale 570w
UN Conference on Environment & Development 572-3w
UN Conference on Environment & Development, UK contributions 572w
UN Conference on Environment & Development, Urban planning 671w
UN Conference on Environment & Development, Women 64-5w
Waste disposal, Departmental leaflets 167w
Waste disposal, Licensing 426w
Waste disposal, Local government functions 63w
Waste management, Hazardous wastes 425-6w
Water treatment, EC law 430w

Ballots
Grant maintained schools 450w

Baltic states
CFE Treaty 218w
European Security Conference 218w
Overseas aid 470-2w
Technical assistance 232-3w

Bank of Credit & Commerce International
Company liquidations (13:01:92) 692
Compensation 1089
Standing Order No 20 applications (13:01:92) 692

Bank of Credit & Commerce International Inquiry
629w

Bank of England
1089
Legislation 543w

Bankruptcy
APEX Trust 963-5

Banks
Birmingham City Council 539w
Debts written off 438w

Banks, Mr Robert
Questions
Beef premiums, Markets 639w
Charing Cross Hospital, Hospital beds 354w
Cold weather payments 82w
Royal Naval Reserve 137
School governors 450w
Westminster & Chelsea Hospital, Construction 253w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 978
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 724, 727-8, 737, 739-46, 749-50, 759
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 279, 311, 332-4, 338, 346
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1238-9, 1241-2
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 822, 870, 893-4

Banks, Mr Tony—continued
Oral question time intervention (20:12:91) 13, (18:12:91) 258
Questions
Church property, Theft 14-5
Drinks 445
Drug seizures 1093
East Timor 181w
Nuclear weapons, USSR 258
Stratford station 660

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 474-5
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 304, 317, 384-6, 424
Questions
Association of British Chambers of Commerce, Industrial policy 591w
Business statements 1102
Food, Balance of trade 444-5

Barnes, Mrs Rosie
Debates etc.
Greenwich Park, Public petitions (17:12:91) 246

Barron, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1002, 1016, 1052-7
Questions
Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, Orders & regulations 376w
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 541-2w

Basingstoke
Caravan sites 226w

Bath University
212w

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Questions
East coast railway line, Vandalism 659
Minimum wage 562w
Scottish Development Agency, Company liquidations 405w

Bats
Nature conservation 136w, 158-9w
Wales 158-9w

Battle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 28
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 168, 170-3
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 281
Questions
Brazil, British embassies 259-60
Housing revenue accounts 108w
Manufactured exports 610w
Mortgage defaulters 145
One parent benefit, Northern Ireland 332-3w
One parent benefit, Social security benefits rates 375w
Part-time employment, Employment protection 803
Social security benefits, Expenditure 370-1w
State earnings related pension scheme 372w
State earnings related pension scheme, Northern Ireland 333w
Tax allowances, Tax yields 335w

BBC Wales
Public appointments 349w

BCCI
see Bank of Credit & Commerce International

Beaumont-Dark, Mr Anthony
Questions
Defamation, Damages 144
Higher civil servants, Women 667
Self-regulating organisations 1089

Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 455-6
Questions
Inflation 1085-6

Bedford bypass
Road construction 608w

Bedfordshire
Structure plans 644w

Beef
437-8, 443-4
Food exports 437, 508w
Wales 508w

Beef premiums
Markets 639w

Beer
Measurement 387-8w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Questions
Business statements 1107

Beith, Mr A J
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 100
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 457
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1069-70
Questions
Company liquidations 437w
Economic growth 1087-8
Higher civil servants, Women 666-7
House of Commons special Standing Committees 55w
Industrial development, North East region 952
Motorcycles, Leg protectors 498w
Redundancy, Northumberland 806
State earnings related pension scheme 83w

Belfast Prison
Explosions 646w

Belize
Armed forces deployment 549w, 640w

Bell, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 280
Oral questions, Points of order (17:12:91) 150
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 932
Tees & Hartlepool port, Standing Order No 20 applications (17:12:91) 147-8

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 481
Questions
Armed forces housing 138
Horses, Animal breeding 442-3
Shellfish, Food hygiene 639w

Bellotti, Mr David
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 26-7, 29, 80, 99-101
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 201-3, 227-30
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1240, 1255, 1259-60
Questions
Disabled workers 3-4w
Television licences, Video equipment 16w
Television programmes, Local broadcasting 15w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 727, 734-5
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 278

Benn, Rt Hon Tony*—*continued
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 821, 842, 860-5

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Questions
Clyde submarine base, Defence contracts 387w
Factories, Inspections 2w
Factory Inspectorate, Civil servants' background 2w
Factory Inspectorate, Training 2w
Family credit, Administrative delays 11-2
Health & Safety Executive, Employment agencies 2w
Health & Safety Executive, Inquiries 1w
Health & Safety Executive, Inspections 1-2w
Health & Safety Executive, Retirement age 1w
M66, Road construction 492w
Patients, Compensation 490w
Retirement age, Costs 287w
Retirement age, Skill shortages 287w
Retirement age, Women 286-7w
Sellafield, Inquiries 227-8w, 455w
TASM 140-1

Bennett, Mr Nicholas, Under-Secretary of State for Wales
Debates etc.
Health services, Mid Glamorgan (14:01:92) 939, 942-4
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 58, 60-3
University Hospital of Wales, Planning permission (20:12:91) 601-4
Questions
Bats, Nature conservation 158-9w
Bridgend General Hospital, Ophthalmic services 620w
Bronglais Hospital Aberystwyth, NHS trusts 504w
Cancer, Medical research 138w
Community charge, Civil proceedings 75w
Council housing, Empty housing 263-4w
Crime prevention, Inner city areas 268-9w
Crime prevention, Wales 270w
Day care of children, Local government social services 507w, 546w
District health authorities, Wales 545w, 691w
Ecstasy, Health education 693-5w
Family doctors, Home visits 619-20w, 694w
Family doctors, Prescriptions 263w
Fluoridation, Wales 694w
Heart diseases, Surgery 505-6w
Homelessness, Wales 264-5w
Hormone treatments, Packaging 508w
Hospital patients, Per capita costs 364-7w
Hospitals, Capital investment 509w
Hospitals, Cardiff 507-8w
Hospitals, South Glamorgan Health Authority 508w, 619w
Housing associations, Repossession orders 360-1w
Housing revenue accounts, Housing subsidies 159w
Kidney patients, Wales 362w
Leukaemia, Medical research 692w
Lung diseases, Medical equipment 269-71w, 506w
Mortgage defaulters, South Wales 507w
Multiple occupation, Wales 133w
National Rivers Authority Advisory Committee for Wales 272w
NHS, Cost effectiveness 618-9w
NHS finance, Wales 137-8w, 363-4w
NHS treatment centres, Wales 618w
NHS trusts, Wales 135w, 546w
Planning appeals, Wales 692w
Prescription charges, Wales 510w, 547-8w, 585w
Prescription drugs, Wales 617w
Prescriptions, Wales 547-8w
Prince of Wales Hospital Cardiff, Orthopaedics 619w
Residential care of children, Wales 359-60w
River Ely, Water pollution 137w
River pollution, Coal mining 619w

Bennett, Mr Nicholas*—*continued
St David's Hospital Cardiff 616w
Sewage, Ynys Mon 74-6w
Smoking, Hospitals 138w
Sports facilities, Rate rebates 74w
Sunday trading, Wales 265w
Transplant surgery, Hospital waiting lists 615w
Water pollution, Wales 616w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Offices 136-7w
Welsh Water, Electricity supply industry 136w
Welsh Water, LEK Partnership 136w

Berkshire
School admission (20:12:91) 628-34

Betting & gaming duties
440-2w
Football pools 336w, 612-3w, 621-2w

Betting shops
Opening hours 10w, 197w

Bible
(20:12:91) 612-9

Bicycles
China 188w

Bidwell, Mr Sydney
Questions
Curriculum, Ealing 114w
Railway transport, Privatisation 807-8

Biffen, Rt Hon John
Questions
APEX Trust 966
Standard spending assessments, Shropshire 422w

Billing
Nuclear power 569w
PSA Services 419-20w

Bingham Inquiry
see Bank of Credit & Commerce International Inquiry

Birmingham pub bombings
464w, 632w

Birmingham City Council
Banks 539w

Biscuit Cake Chocolate & Confectionery Alliance
299w

Black, John
Death 186w

Blair, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 282
Questions
APEX Trust, Bankruptcy 963-5
Training 800

Blakenhurst Prison
Prisoners' transfers 683w

Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 493-4

Blood transfusions
HIV infection (20:12:91) 620-7

Blunkett, Mr David
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 75, 88, 91-7, 104
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 155-9, 162, 167, 181, 185, 238-40
Questions
Council tax, Publicity 642w
Housing revenue accounts 644-5w
Local government borrowing, Fixed interest securities 117w
Local government expenditure, Standard spending assessments 172-4w

Blunkett, Mr David*—*continued
Local government finance 107w
Local government services, Contracts for services 539w
Local government stocks & bonds 106w, 644w
Parking offences, Contracts 568w
Public sector, Opinion polls 120w
Public Works Loan Board, Interest rates 120w
Unpaid taxes 224w
Water pollution, Pollution control 434w

BNFL
see British Nuclear Fuels

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

Body, Sir Richard
Questions
Animal experiments, Pesticides 249w

Body Shop
Animal experiments 188w

Bomb disposal
Cambodia 711w

Bombing
Lockerbie 435w, 469w, 534w, 712w

Books
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults 423w

Boscawen, Mr Robert
Questions
Warships 134

Boswell, Mr Tim, An Assistant whip
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 548

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1221, 1230, 1235, 1239, 1279-81
Questions
Betting & gaming duties 440-2w
Christchurch School, Capital investment 446-7w
Civil service, Equal opportunities 416w
Council tenants, House purchase 424w
Drinking & driving, Death 491w
Gambling 458w
Gambling, EC action 459w
Gambling, Retail price index 441w
Gambling, Television advertising 459w
Lotteries 458-60w
Mobility of disabled, EC action 46-7w
Private investment, Public sector 458w
Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital, Hospital patients 149w
St Thomas More School Greenwich, Capital investment 449w
Speed governors, EC action 535w
Tax reform, Retrospective legislation 1082
Television licences, Video equipment 459-60w
Tobacco duties, Retail price index 441w
Woolwich Common Estate, Expenditure 423-4w

Bottomley, Mrs Virginia, Minister of State, Department of Health
Debates etc.
Adoption (19:12:91) 562-6
HIV infection, Blood transfusions (20:12:91) 623-7
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 696-702, 706, 716, 719-22
Questions
Abortion, Medical ethics 355w
AIDS, Screening 524-5w
Arachnoiditis, Medical research 355w
Aspartame, Health hazards 525w
Babies, Mentally handicapped 129-30w
Breast cancer, Medical treatments 627w
Cancer, Publicity 523w
Carers 131w

Bottomley, Mrs Virginia—continued
Childbirth, Hertfordshire 520w
Childbirth, Statistics 519-20w
Children Act 1989, Expenditure 52w
Children in care, Refugees 354w
Community care, Expenditure 52w
Community care, Local government finance 522w
Community care, Performance targets 521-2w
Community care, Ringfenced funding 522w
Dept of Health, Official engagements 525w
Diabetes, Medical equipment 256w
Eye tests, Optical charges 129w
Eye tests, Optical charges exemptions 129w
Eye tests, Pensioners 129w
Family doctors, Contracts of employment 557-8w
Family doctors, Pay 155w
Family planning, Young people 526w
Foreign adoptions, Fees & charges 155w
Freeman Hospital NHS Trust, Directors 155-6w
Genetic engineering, Medical ethics 673w
Health service staff, Industrial health & safety 674-5w
Health service staff, Manpower 523-4w
HIV infection, Immigration controls 524w
Hormone treatments, Packaging 526-7w
Hospital consultants, Job description 555w
Hospital patients, Social security benefits 676w
Hospital waiting lists, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 51w
Medical audit 556-7w
Medical certificates, Social security claims 676w
National Health Service (General Medical & Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992 676-7w
NHS & private practice, Contracts for services 52w
NHS charges exemptions 519w
NHS charges exemptions, Expenditure 672w
NHS numbers 132w
NHS trusts 356w
North East Thames Regional Health Authority, Public appointments 357w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Directors 156w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Public appointments 522-3w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Retirement 156w
Nurses, Career structure 523w
Ophthalmic services, Hospitals 356w
Personal social services, Fees & charges 51-2w
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 255w
Pharmacists, Pay 255-6w
Pregnant women, Standard of living 50w
Prescription charges 522w, 589-90w
Prescription charges, Packaging 527w
Prescriptions 626-7w
Prescriptions, Family health services authorities 552-6w
Prescriptions, Regional health authorities 555w
Residential care of children, Child safety 352w
Residential care of children, Managers 252-3w
St Charles' Youth Treatment Centre, Security 256w
Spectacles, Optical charges exemptions 356-7w
Stillbirths & Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry 520w
Surgery, Hospital waiting lists 51w
Tattooing, Plastic surgery 51w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
Northern Ireland 597w

Bovine tuberculosis
Badgers 446w, 638w
Cattle 446w
Compensation 616-7w

Bovine tuberculosis—continued
Deer 446w

Bowden, Mr Andrew
Questions
Community care, Local government finance 522w
Community care, Performance targets 521-2w
Community care, Ringfenced funding 522w
Divorce settlements 205w
Eye tests, Optical charges 129w
Eye tests, Optical charges exemptions 129w
Eye tests, Pensioners 129w
Housing benefits, Pensioners 146w
Loft insulation 671w
Occupational pensions, Divorce 84w
Pedestrian areas, Priority routes 655w
Pensioners, Income support 143-4w

Bowden, Mr Gerald
Questions
Child benefit 4
Crossrail 536w
European Commission, Complaints 172w
Planning appeals, Costs 67-8w
Underground railways, South London 652

Bowis, Mr John
Debates etc.
Bible (20:12:91) 612-6
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 26, 58-60, 74, 76-7, 101
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 166-70, 221
Questions
APEX Trust 967-8
Design Museum, Government grants 663-4
Playing fields, Land acquisition 215-6w
Railway transport, Security 656
St Thomas' Hospital, Upper Waiting Hall 157w
Shipping safety, Inquiries 237w
Urban programme 642-4w
Yugoslavia, Recognition of states 184w

Boyes, Mr Roland
Questions
Warships 134

Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 224-7

BP
see British Petroleum

BR
see British Rail

Bradley, Mr Keith
Questions
Social Fund 8

Bradwell power station
Nuclear accidents 96-7w

Brain injuries
Medical rehabilitation 625-6w

Bramley
Defence land 131

Brandon-Bravo, Mr Martin M
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 999-1003, 1007
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 74
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 168, 193-4, 197, 203-6, 217

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Ravenscraig steelworks, Standing Order No 20 applications (13:01:92) 693
Questions
Advisory Council on Science & Technology, Public appointments 658-60w
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 672-3

Bray, Dr Jeremy—continued
Research councils, Public appointments 660-4w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 854, 878-80
Questions
Genetic engineering, Medical ethics 673w
Tactical nuclear weapons 141

Brazil
British embassies 259-60
Diplomatic service 260
Foreign policy 180w
Nuclear safeguards 569w

Breast cancer
Medical treatments 627w

Breathalysers
Police powers 465w

Bridgend General Hospital
Ophthalmic services 620w

Bridges
Isle of Skye 602w
River Dee 361w, 545-6w

Bridging allowances
Coventry 456w

Brierley, Mark
(18:12:91) 428-34

Britannia Life Assurance
Business premises 531w
Government assistance 531w

British Aerospace
Ministers' domestic visits 618w

British Coal Corporation
473-4w, (15:01:92) 985-1063
Directors 473w
Mineworkers' pension scheme 17w
Privatisation 377w

British Crime Survey
465w

British embassies
Brazil 259-60

British Gas
340w

British Nuclear Fuels
615w

British Petroleum
Exhibitions 109w

British Rail
239w, 337-8w, 656w, (13:01:92) 723-63, 784-92
Citizen's Charter 494w
Investment 503w
Privatisation 492w

British Railways (No 3) Bill (HL) 1989/90
Debates etc.
Rep* (15:01:92) 945

British residents abroad
Abu Dhabi 181w
Handicap benefits 550w
Invalid care allowances 550w
National insurance contributions 291-2w

British Steel Corporation
112-3w, 389-90w, 669-72, (13:01:92) 693
Overseas investment 112-3w

British strategic nuclear force
(14:01:92) 817-911

British Telecom
(16:01:92) 1114-206
Privatisation 543-4w

British Transport Police
463w

Brittain, Simon
Armed forces retirement 696w

Broadcasting complaints
Historic buildings 344w

Broadcasting Council for Wales
Public appointments 462w

Broadcasting Etc Select Committee
(20:12:91) 642

Broadcasting (Programme Contractors Additional Payments) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(16:12:91) 118

Broadcasting reception
621w

Brockley-Nunhead railway line
493w

Bronglais Hospital Aberystwyth
NHS trusts 504w

Brown, Mr Gordon
Questions
Industrial development, West Midlands 958

Brown, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 985
Questions
Kimberly Clark, Foreign investment in UK 810

Brown, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Capital investment 165-6w
Child benefit 80w
Child benefit, Social security benefits rates 58w
Corporation tax, Taxpayers 6w
ESOPs 1092
Local government finance 108w
Magistrates, Newcastle upon Tyne 205w
Meadowell Estate, Urban programme 167w
National insurance contributions 85w
National insurance contributions, Northern Ireland 58-9w
Navy, Defence procurement 149-50w
One parent benefit, Northern Ireland 333w
One parent benefit, Social security benefits rates 374-5w
Personal tax allowances 7w
Personal tax allowances, Tax rates & bands 123-4w
Personal taxation, Tax burden 121-4w
Police authorities, Finance 161w
Retail price index, Sunday trading 6w
Royal Fleet Auxiliary 149w
Taking & driving away, Young offenders 161-2w

Brown, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 474
Questions
Bombings, Lockerbie 469w
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 299w
Defence industries 147w
Industrial relations law 797
Leith 144

Browne, Mr John
Debates etc.
Armed Forces (Liability for Injury) Bill, 1R (17:12:91) 152-4
Business statements (19:12:91) 471
Questions
Armed forces, Operating costs 58w
Armed forces casualties, Accident insurance 696w
Business statements 1109-10
European currency unit 610w
Railway signals, Safety equipment 49w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1141, 1199-201
Questions
Business statements 1108

Bruce, Mr Ian—continued
Family doctors, Budgeting 142
Ministry of Defence, Dorset 139

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 71-2
Questions
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 675-6

Buck, Sir Antony
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 879
Questions
Trident 140

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 288-90, 331, (19:12:91) 518
Questions
Exchange rate mechanism 1086

Budget
Tax reform 808-9

Budgeting
Family doctors 142
School administration 114-6w, 133-4w

Building industry
Company liquidations 8-9w
Economic recession 571w
Industrial health & safety 3w

Building repairs
Armed forces housing 385w
School buildings 453-4w

Building Research Establishment
157-8w, 417-9w, 421w

Buildings
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 455w
Crown Office for Scotland 430w

Bulgaria
Nuclear safety 243-4w

Burglary
Young offenders 161-2w

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1227, 1257-60
Questions
Animal welfare, EC action 300w
Arms exports, Export licensing 230-1w
Beer, Measurement 387-8w
Chelmsford Prison 14-5w
Chelmsford Prison, Prison population 15w
Civil servants, Clothing 665-6
EC Finance Council 222-4w
EC Finance Council, Direct taxation 120w
EC Internal Market Council 595-6w
EC Telecommunications Council 456-7w
Enterprise zones, Tax allowances 7-8w
Industrial training, Chelmsford 794-5
Liverpool Street-Chelmsford railway line, Railway travel 660
North East Thames Regional Health Authority, Expenditure 256-60w
Speed limits, Danbury 608-9w

Burt, Mr Alistair
Questions
Rochdale Borough Council, Investment returns 328w

Bus priority schemes
655w

Bus services
336w, 609w
Finance 655w
Greater London 494w, 651
Transport supplementary grants 655w

Buses
Exhaust emission controls 240w
Motor industry 395w

Buses—continued
Northern Ireland 480w

Business
947
East Midlands 125w

Business & the Environment Advisory Committee
119w

Business premises
Britannia Life Assurance 531w

Business questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (19:12:91) 470

Business sponsorship incentive scheme
417w

Business statements
(19:12:91) 469-76, 1099-113

Butcher, Mr John
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 519-21
Questions
AIDS, Curriculum 447-8w
Coventry City Council, Government grants 538w
Direct labour departments, Contracts for services 417w
Rapid transit systems, Coventry 426-7w

Butler, Mr Chris
Questions
Cancer, Children 254-5w
Channel tunnel, North West region 493w
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 299w
Espionage, Eastern Europe 629w
House of Commons times of sittings 17
Lorries, Speed limits 654w
Manufactured exports 610w
Science & technology, Germany 27w

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
Environmental health, EC law 109-10w
Tourist industry, Manpower 564w
Trade competitiveness 592w

Buy British
Labour Party 951

Buying Agency
417-9w, 421w

Bypasses
A36 568w
Peak District National Park 503w
Road construction 503w

CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments
Disabled workers 358w

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Questions
Homelessness, Government grants 423w
Industrial development, Rochdale 457w
Magistrates' courts, Rochdale 463w
River pollution, Rochdale 570w
Training, Heywood 454w

Calling of Members
Speaker's rulings & statements (19:12:91) 473, 477, (13:01:92) 653, 678, 695, (14:01:92) 817, (17:01:92) 1221

Cambodia
Bomb disposal 711w

Cambridgeshire
Educational finance 141-2

Cambuslang
Public petitions (16:12:91) 119

Campaign for cold weather credits
429w, 472w, 635w, 648w

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 593
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 842, 850-5, 872, 901

Campbell, Mr Menzies—continued
Questions
Ammunition, Waste disposal 557-9w
Armed forces civilians, Manpower 386w
Armed forces discharges, Removal expenses 386w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service redundancies 387w
Ministry of Defence, Redundancy pay 386-7w
NATO, Nuclear test ban 148w
Trident 140

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1000, 1013, 1017, 1020, 1049-51
Questions
Coal, Production 473w
Industrial development, North East region 951
Opencast mining, Northumberland 474w

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 592
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 969
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 284
RECHAR, Points of order (17:12:91) 149
Questions
Business statements 1112
Civil service unions, Job satisfaction 416w
Defence land 131
House of Commons debates, Select Committees 54w
House of Commons times of sittings 17
Set-aside schemes 302w
Theatre, Northern region 416w
Unemployment, Cumbria 801

"Campus Connection"
605w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Questions
Animal welfare 300w
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 1096
Trident 139

Cancer
Children 254-5w
Medical research 138w
Nuclear weapons tests 282w
Publicity 523w
Skin disorders 352-3w

Cancer hazards
Ozone layer 327w

Cannabis
Law reform 1093

Capital investment
165-6w, 610w, 1086

Car allowances
Voluntary work 119w

Car tax
800

Caravan sites
Basingstoke 226w

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 103w
Climate 62-3w

Carbon tax
222-4w, 327-8w

Cardiff
Hospitals 507-8w
Opera houses 507w

Cardiff Bay barrage
269-70w
Advertising controls 73w
Departmental correspondence 361w
Ground water 73-4w, 267w, 509w
Housing compensation 361-2w

Cardiff Bay barrage—continued
Misleading advertising 268w
Water resources 267-8w

Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill 1991/92
Questions
73-4w, 361-2w

Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill Select Committee
(19:12:91) 556

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
73w, 267-8w
Vocational training 73w

Cardiff Institute for the Blind
Defence contracts 387w

Cardiff University
see University College Cardiff

Cardiff-Paddington railway line
Railway safety 654

Career structure
Nurses 523w

Carers
131w
Unemployment benefits 370w

Carers' premium
Social security benefits rules 84-5w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1132-3, 1160-1, 1166-9, 1172
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 686
Questions
Bats, Nature conservation 136w, 158-9w
Bicycles, China 188w
Confederation of British Industry, Maastricht summit 593w
Financial services, European currency unit 945-6
House of Fraser, Takeovers 596w
Takeover Panel, Defamation 567w

Carlisle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 474
Questions
Sports 211-2w

Carlisle, Mr Kenneth, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces
Questions
Ammunition, Waste disposal 557-9w
Atomic Weapons Establishment, Nuclear disarmament 286w
AWE Aldermaston, Recruitment 282w
"Campus Connection" 605w
Cardiff Institute for the Blind, Defence contracts 387w
Clyde submarine base, Defence contracts 387w
Defence research 135
Defence research, Competition 134-5
HMS Challenger, Decommissioning 150w, 512w
HMS Warspite 641w
Low flying, Armed forces training 380w
Ministry of Defence, Annual reports 56w
Ministry of Defence, Day nurseries 56w
Ministry of Defence, Directors 56-7w
Ministry of Defence, Dorset 139
Ministry of Defence, Higher civil servants 55w
Navy, Defence procurement 149-50w
Royal Fleet Auxiliary 149w
Tornado aircraft, Air accidents 380w
Trident, Defence procurement 57w
Upholder class submarines, Repairs & maintenance 380w
Warships, Defence procurement 133-4, 385-6w

Carr, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
RU486, Public petitions (19:12:91) 558
Questions
A6119, Road works 607-8w

Carrington, Mr Matthew
Questions
Aid financed trade 560w
Art works, Export licensing 416w
Bus services, Greater London 651
Foreign investment in UK 593-4w
Pensioners, Central heating 10
Redundant churches 15

Cars
608w
EC internal trade 9w
Instalment credit 593w
Motor vehicle safety 403-4w

Cartwright, Mr John
Debates etc.
Child abuse, Teachers (16:01:92) 1207-10
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 871-3
Questions
Telephone systems, Standardisation 542w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 324, (19:12:91) 483

Castlereagh
Council house tenant selection 597-8w
Detention centres 141w

Casualties
Croatia 184w
Organ donors 624w

Catalytic converters
800

Category A prisoners
13-4w, 631-6, 1096-7

Cattle
Bovine tuberculosis 446w

CBI
see Confederation of British Industry

Census of population
Disclosure of information 254w

Central Africa
Road construction 470w

Central Computer & Telecommunications Agency
165w

Central heating
Pensioners 10

Central Office of Information
117-9w

Central Statistical Office
117-9w, 219w

Cetaceans
Drift nets 78w
Nature conservation 65w
Pollution monitoring 66w
Research 65-6w

CFE Treaty
Baltic states 218w

Chalker, Rt Hon Lynda, Minister for Overseas Development
Questions
Africa, Democracy 269-70
Africa, Foreign aid 677w
Africa, Overseas aid 588w
Aid financed trade 560w
Central Africa, Road construction 470w
Croatia, Refugees 42-3w
Czechoslovakia, Overseas aid 678-83w
Developing countries, Hand tools 588w
Eastern Europe, Know-how Fund 677-8w
Ghana, Contraceptives 470w
Iraq, Overseas aid 232w
Kenya 266-8
Kenya, Human rights 330w
Kenya, Judges 102-3w
Latvia, Know-how Fund 470-2w
Marie Stopes International, Government grants 470w

Chalker, Rt Hon Lynda—continued
Natural Resources Institute 588-9w
Overseas aid, Arms trade 331w
Overseas aid, Economic policy 330w
Overseas aid, Natural resources 232w
Overseas aid, Treaty of Rome 331w
Rain forests, Soya beans 677w
Somalia, Armed conflict 330-1w, 584w
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 740w
UN Centre for Social Development & Humanitarian Affairs 588w
UNCTAD 43w
Vietnam, Overseas aid 231-2w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel
493w
Earthquakes 94w
High speed trains 568w
North West region 493w
Railway freight transport 493-4w
Railway network 653
Rolling stock 657w
Stratford station 493w
Waterloo Station 493w

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Questions
Rateable value, Appeals 420w
Uniform business rate, Appeals 537w

Charing Cross Hospital
Hospital beds 354w
Hospital waiting lists 354w

Charities
EC integration 468w
Foundation for Business Responsibilities 349w
Sikhs 461w

Charity Commission
461w

Chelmsford
Industrial training 794-5
Unemployment 795

Chelmsford Prison
14-5w
Prison population 15w

Chemicals
Industrial accidents 337w

Cheques Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R* (17:01:92) 1286

Chernobyl
584-5w
Nuclear accidents 265-6w

Chief Adjudication Officer
see Office of the Chief Adjudication Officer

Child abuse
Teachers (16:01:92) 1207-16

Child benefit
4-5, 80w
Northern Ireland 58w
Social security benefits rates 58w

Child care
Mother & baby units 341w

Child safety
Residential care of children 352w

Child Support Act 1991
Questions
Orders & regulations 81w

Child Support Agency
510w

Childbirth
Hertfordshire 520w
Statistics 519-20w

Children
Agricultural education 438
Arts 668

Children—continued
Cancer 254-5w
Maintenance 510w

Children Act 1989
Questions
Expenditure 52w

Children & Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991
Questions
465-6w

Children in care
Refugees 354w

China
Bicycles 188w
Nuclear test ban 436w

Chlorine
Chlorofluorocarbons 329w

Chlorofluorocarbons
Chlorine 329w

Chope, Mr Christopher, Under-Secretary of State for Transport
Debates etc.
M20, Road construction (17:01:92) 1290-4
Questions
A13, Road construction 491-2w, 658-9
A27, Road construction 164-5w
A36, Bypasses 568w
A6119, Road works 607-8w
Bedford bypass, Road construction 608w
Bypasses, Road construction 503w
Cars, Motor vehicle safety 403-4w
Crash helmets 48w
Demolition, Leyton 403w
Diesel vehicles, Exhaust emission controls 397w
Drinking & driving, Death 491w
Exeter bypass, Consultants 164w
Exhaust emission controls 492w
Exhaust emission controls, Greater London 403-4w
Highway assessment programme 49w
Ilkley bypass, Road construction 48-9w
Lorries, Road accidents 499w
Lorries, Road damage 661
Lorries, Speed limits 398w, 654w
M4, Road closures 49w
M20, Road construction 164w
M25 502w
M25, Environmental impact assessment 501w
M66, Road construction 492w
Motor vehicle theft, Crime prevention 44w
Motor vehicles 608w
Motor vehicles, North West region 47w
Motorcycles, Leg protectors 498w
Motorways, Lancashire 387-8w
Orange badge scheme, Orders & regulations 498w
Parking offences, Contracts 568w
Pedestrian areas, Priority routes 655w
Polegate bypass 397w
Road accidents, Motorways 654-5w
Road construction, Environmental impact assessment 499-500w
Road construction, Expenditure 658
Road construction, Property transfer 657-8w
Road tax, Handicapped drivers 396w
Road tax, Law enforcement 657w
Road tolls, Urban areas 402w
Road traffic 404w, 491w
Road traffic, Greater London 404w
Road traffic, Nottingham 491w
Road works 500-1w
Road works, East Sussex 397w
Road works, Environmental impact assessment 501w
Road works, Local government expenditure 44w
Road works, Public utilities 655w
Roads, Pennines 503w
Speed governors, EC action 398w, 535w
Speed limits 501w
Speed limits, Danbury 608-9w

Chope, Mr Christopher—continued
Speed limits, Exhaust emissions 535w
Speed limits, Rural areas 655-6w
Tyres, Road safety 567-8w

Chorlton School
Special education 447w

Christchurch School
Capital investment 446-7w

Christmas
Social security payments 636w

Christmas Island
282w, 381w

Church buildings
14

Church Commissioners
Investment 13

Church of England
447w
Southwark 709w

Church property
Theft 14-5

Churchill, Mr Winston
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 832
Questions
Territorial Army 147w

Citizen's Charter
521-2w
Airlines 240w
British Rail 494w

City action teams
Administrative costs 390-1w

City of Edinburgh District Council Order Confirmation Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Royal assent (19:12:91) 476

Civil defence
Communication engineering 16w
Local government functions 16-7w
Nuclear accidents 16-7w

Civil proceedings
Community charge 75w
Percy, Lindis 605w

Civil servants
Clothing 665-6
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 690w
Prime Minister 660w

Civil servants' background
Factory Inspectorate 2w

Civil servants' secondment
Training & enterprise councils 4w

Civil servants' visits abroad
Dept of Trade & Industry 230w

Civil service
Equal opportunities 416w
Women 667
Working conditions 439w

Civil service agencies
Annual reports 56w, 298w, 419w
Civil service manpower 297w, 418w
Day care of children 297w, 421w
Day nurseries 56w
Dept of the Environment 419w
Directors 50w, 56-7w, 117w, 297-8w, 418w, 421w
Higher civil servants 55w, 298w, 418-9w
Pay incentives 297w, 419w
Performance indicators 117-9w, 296-7w, 417-8w
Publicity 297w, 418w
Working hours 298w, 421w

Civil Service College
Cost effectiveness 95w
New Members 330w

Civil Service College—continued
Operating costs 330w

Civil service dispersal
Petroleum Engineering Directorate 472w
Treasury 165w

Civil service manpower
Civil service agencies 297w, 418w
Cruelty to Animals Inspectorate 345w
Dept of the Environment 418w
Scottish Office 297w

Civil service recruitment
Travelling expenses 657w

Civil service redundancies
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 193-4w
Ministry of Defence 387w

Civil service unions
Job satisfaction 416w

Clackmannan District Council (Vesting of Central Regional Council Land) (Scotland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(16:12:91) 118

***Clark, Rt Hon Alan**, Minister of State for Defence Procurement*
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 831, 833
Questions
Armed forces civilians, Manpower 386w
Arms trade, Indonesia 640-1w
Defence equipment 382w
Defence industries 129-30, 147w
Defence industries, North West region 129
Defence procurement, Competition 147w
Defence procurement, Costs 382w
Guided weapons 284w
Higher civil servants, Women 146w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service redundancies 387w
Ministry of Defence, Redundancy pay 386-7w
Trident missiles, Defence research 283w
Walter Somers, Departmental correspondence 383w
Weapons, Testing 381w

Clark, Dr David
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 971-3
Questions
Agriculture, Czechoslovakia 690w
Beef 438
Cetaceans, Drift nets 78w
Cetaceans, Nature conservation 65w
Cetaceans, Pollution monitoring 66w
Cetaceans, Research 65-6w
Common agricultural policy 440-1
Czechoslovakia, Overseas aid 678-83w
Food additives, Food standards 194w
Food contamination 309w
Food contamination, Plastics 194w
Fruit, Agricultural production 76w
Fruit, Intervention stocks 76-7w
Irradiated food, Food labelling 143w
Marine animals, Research 151w
Marine animals, Sea pollution 151-2w
Mineral waters, Labelling 307w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Civil servants 690w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Government department reorganisation 193-4w
Regional panels, Public appointments 191-3w
Salmonella, Poultry meat 307w
Set-aside schemes, Fraud 412w
Set-aside schemes, Scotland 89-90w
Set-aside schemes, Sports facilities 302-6w, 411-4w
Vegetarianism, Nutrition 143w
Vegetarianism, Research 142w
Veterinary Investigation Service 194w

Clark, Dr Michael
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 994
Questions
Defence research, Competition 134-5
Piper B platform, Upper Waiting Hall 157w

Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Debates etc.
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 458
Questions
Foreign investment in UK 1087

***Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth**, Secretary of State for Education & Science*
Questions
Degrees 31-3w
Education, EC law 207w
Grammar schools 207-8w
Higher education colleges 580-1w
Higher Education Funding Council for England, Public appointments 667-8w
Local education authorities, Capital investment 208-11w
Ministers' visits abroad, Mexico 665-6w
Science & technology research, Research finance 33-4w
Voluntary schools, Capital investment 34-42w

Clarke, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 60
Questions
Exports 1088
Income tax, Tax allowances 221w, 443-4w
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 221-2w
Personal tax allowances 220-1w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits rates 368-70w
Stoneyetts Hospital, Hospital closures 150w
Tax allowances, Health insurance 221w
Taxpayers 219-20w
Taxpayers, Personal income 220w

Clenbuterol
Northern Ireland 598w

Cleveland
"Your Child & the National Curriculum" 27w

Climate
Carbon dioxide 62-3w
International conferences 66w

Clinical Standards Advisory Group
625w

Clinical wastes
653w

Closed circuit television
Crime prevention 246-7w, 343w

Clothier Committee
see Gene Therapy Ethics Committee

Clothing
Civil servants 665-6

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Questions
Ghana, Contraceptives 470w

Clyde Port Authority
Privatisation 608w

Clyde submarine base
Defence contracts 387w

CNAA
see Council for National Academic Awards

Coal
Electricity supply industry 474w
Imports 97w

Coal—continued
Prices 474w
Production 473w

Coal Industry Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Rep* & 3R (15:01:92) 985-1063

Coal mining
Manpower 473w
River pollution 619w

Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991
Questions
Orders & regulations 376w

Coalite Chemicals
171w, 435

Coalite Group
Dioxins 171w

Coastal areas
Radioactivity 90w

Codes of practice
Environment Protection Act 1990 108-9w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 105
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 173-6, 182-3
Offensive weapons (20:12:91) 605-8
Questions
Armed forces housing, Empty housing 512w
Demolition, Leyton 403w
Infant mortality 126-9w
Intelligence services, Disclosure of information 460w
Metropolitan Police, Police discipline 250-1w
Ministry of Defence, Empty property 148w
Pension funds, Fraud 374w
Prescription charges 522w
Tax burden 611w

Cold weather payments
6, 10, 79-80w, 82w, 146, 290w, 309w, 635w, 654w
Disclosure of information 372-3w
Scotland 648w
Social security benefits rules 373-4w
Social security recipients 373w, 515w

Coleraine
Hospitals 312w

Collections
Inner London Education Authority 213w
Museums & galleries 662-3

Colleges of education
452w
Manpower 451w
Ministers' domestic visits 451-2w

Collins Committee
see Business & the Environment Advisory Committee

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 540
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 782
Questions
A36, Bypasses 568w
Air fares, EC law 500w
Disabled workers, Government departments 95w
Food contamination 435-6
Kenya 267
Tax yields, Spirits 165w

COMARE
see Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment

Commercial & Private Bank Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Royal assent (19:12:91) 476

Commercial television
Taxation (16:12:91) 118

Commission for Racial Equality
Asylum Bill 1991/92 461w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment
254-5w

Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy
see Gene Therapy Ethics Committee

Common agricultural policy
440-1, 446
Agricultural subsidies 77w
EC reform 299w, 439-40, 446
Expenditure 78-9w, 299w
Wales 546-7w

Common sheep meat regime
305-6w

Commonwealth of Europe Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R order read (17:01:92) 1286

Commonwealth of Independent States
810
ABM Treaty 582w
Defence 605-6w
Nuclear test ban 582w
Nuclear weapons 259, 549w, 606w
Radiation hazards 606w

Communication engineering
Civil defence 16w

Community care
Council housing 104w
Expenditure 52w
Local government finance 522w
Performance targets 521-2w
Ringfenced funding 522w
Sheltered housing 538w

Community care grants
85-6w
Drug abuse 550-1w
Liverpool 83w
Social security claims 552w

Community charge
Administrative costs 429w
Bailiffs 66-7w
Civil proceedings 75w
Easington 429w
Income support 67w
Magistrates 22w
Non-payment 342w, 687-8w
Publicity 326w, 531w
Social security benefits reductions 372w
Tax collection 342w
Wales 75w

Community charge benefits
Concessionary coal 291w
Income support 201w

Community charge exemptions
Residential care 570-1w

Community charge reduction scheme
(13:01:92) 680-91

Community development
Training 798-9

Community Transport Association
494w

Company cars
Income tax 707-9w
National insurance contributions 707-9w
Taxation (20:12:91) 568-76

Company liquidations
437w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (13:01:92) 692
Building industry 8-9w

Company liquidations—continued
Furniture industry 8-9w
Scottish Development Agency 405w
Tax collection 1092

Competition
Defence procurement 147w
Defence research 134-5
Electricity generation 377-8w
Electricity supply industry 179w
Navy Army & Air Force Institutes 511w

Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1114-206
Questions
110-1w

Complaints
European Commission 172w
Immigration controls 100-1w

Compton School Ealing
(17:01:92) 1218

Comptroller & Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Compulsorily detained mental patients
Police powers 676w, 686w

Computer applications
Crime 251w
Income support 81w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive 312w
Northern Ireland Social Security Agency 312w

Computer privacy
Election forecasting 576w

Concessionary coal
Community charge benefits 291w
Social security benefits rules 204w

Conditions of employment
Welsh Development Agency 695w

Confederation of British Industry
951, 957, 1082-3
Industrial relations 796-7
Interest rates 611w
Maastricht summit 593w
Training 563w
West Midlands 591w

Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe
see European Security Conference

Confiscation orders
Sunday trading 10-1w, 576w
Terrorism 462w

Congo
Visas 186w

Conservation areas
Demolition 538w

Consolidated Fund Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Royal assent (19:12:91) 476

Constituency size
542w

Constitutions
Fiji 217w

Consultants
Exeter bypass 164w
Radioactive wastes 597w

Consumer expenditure
517-20w

Consumer protection
Mortgages 388w

Contingencies Fund
(14:01:92) 793

Contraceptives
Ghana 470w

Contracts
Parking offences 568w
Training & enterprise councils 634w

Contracts for services
Bail hostels 12w
Direct labour departments 417w
Health authorities 50-1w
Local government services 539w
NHS & private practice 52w
Royal parks 672w, 700w
St James' Park 672w

Contracts of employment
Family doctors 557-8w

"Control of Aircraft Noise Consultation Paper"
492-3w

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988
Questions
Buildings 455w

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
Indonesia 420w

Conventional weapons
Arms trade 340w

Convictions
Army 641w

Conway, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1222
Questions
Bail hostels 11-2w
Bail hostels, Contracts for services 12w

Cook, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Child abuse, Teachers (16:01:92) 1210
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 285, (19:12:91) 480-1
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 915, 922

Cook, Mr Robin
Questions
Family doctors, Contracts of employment 557-8w
Hospital consultants, Job description 555w
Medical audit 556-7w

Cook-chill catering
Hospital catering 676w

Coombs, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 476
Questions
Degrees 31-3w
Government assistance to industry, EC action 187w
Higher education colleges 580-1w
Higher Education Funding Council for England, Public appointments 667-8w
Natural Environment Research Council, Annual reports 196w
Pensioners 10-1
Science & technology research, Research finance 33-4w
Textile industry, Government assistance 187w

Coombs, Mr Simon
Questions
Food labelling 300w
Health & Safety Executive 805
Income support, Mortgages 371w
Iran, Foreign relations 185w
Parliamentary security, Parliamentary recess 55w
Residential care, Social security benefits 82w
Territorial Army 147w
Training, Take-up 799-800

Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte
Prime Minister 469w

Copeland Borough Council
Investment returns 328w

Coral
571-2w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1246
Questions
Death, Diagnosis 627w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Fire services, Greater London (20:12:91) 637-9
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 729, 734, 740, 742, 751-7, 761
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 827, 841, 891-3
Questions
China, Nuclear test ban 436w
London Ambulance Service 526w

Cormack, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1222, 1239
Questions
Church buildings 14
Lotteries 665
Yugoslavia 262

Cornelis Johanna BM 204
Compensation 93w

Corporate plans
Ordnance Survey 328w

Corporate Safety & Environmental Information Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R order read (17:01:92) 1286

Corporation tax
Self-employed 225w
Tax rates & bands 225w
Taxpayers 6w

Cosmetics
Animal experiments 188w

Couchman, Mr James
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 102
Questions
Dental health, Health education 54w

Council for National Academic Awards
31-3w

Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
450-1w

Council house sales
Defective housing 422w
Local government revenue 437-8w

Council house tenant selection
Castlereagh 597-8w

Council housing
450-1
Community care 104w
Empty housing 263-4w
Newtownards 598w

Council housing finance
Manchester 425w

Council of Europe Cooperation Group to Combat Drug Abuse
Ecstasy 685w

Council of Ministers
413-4w, 437w
Greenhouse effect 62w

Council on Tribunals
110-1w

Council tax
(16:12:91) 22-118, (17:12:91) 155-245, 642w
Administrative costs 425w

Council tax—continued
Discounts 424w
Liability 425w
Multiple occupation 424w
Property values 323-4w
Publicity 642w
Scotland 292w
Students 424w

Council tax exemptions
Student accommodation 424w

Council tenants
House purchase 424w
London boroughs 424w

Councillors' attendance allowances
Income tax 441w
Social security benefits rules 515w

Counter inflation policy
612w

Countryside Council for Wales
73w, 269-70w

County councils
428-9w

Court of appeal
Hong Kong 43w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte, Prime Minister 469w
Freeman Hospital NHS Trust, Directors 155-6w
Local government revenue, Newcastle upon Tyne 324w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Directors 156w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Retirement 156w

Coventry
Bridging allowances 456w
Magistrates 22w
Rapid transit systems 426-7w

Coventry City Council
Government grants 538w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 712w
London Underground, Escalators 494-5w
Prisons, Private sector 631w
Unemployment, Greater London 565w, 634w
Wandsworth Prison 11w
Wolds Remand Prison, Prisoners' transfers 683w

Crabb, Lionel
Disclosure of information 381w

Cran, Mr James
Questions
Age discrimination 564w
Counter inflation policy 612w
Pension funds, Law 81w
Road traffic 491w

Cranage Hall Hospital
132w

Crash helmets
48w

Cremation
Air pollution control 645w

Crewe
Youth training 455w, 802

Crime
465w
Computer applications 251w
Scotland 292-4w

Crime prevention
Closed circuit television 246-7w, 343w
Inner city areas 268-9w

Crime prevention—continued
Motor vehicle theft 44w
Wales 270w

Crimes outside national territories
Sexual offences 350w

Criminal damage
Compensation 310-1w

Criminal injuries compensation
Northern Ireland 310-1w, 333-4w, 477w
Sexual offences 477w

Criminal injuries compensation scheme
351w, 683-4w

Criminal Justice Act 1991
Questions
251w

Criminal liability
Minors 459w

Criminal proceedings
Republic of Ireland 179-80w
Terrorism 179-80w

Crisis loans
371w, 537w

Croatia
101w
Casualties 184w
Refugees 42-3w

Crops
Alternative energy 444-5w
Set-aside schemes 153w

Crossrail
536w, 651

Crown immunity
NHS trusts 252w

Crown Office for Scotland
Buildings 430w

Cruelty to Animals Inspectorate
Civil service manpower 345w

Cryer, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1199
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 732, 735, 739, 755-60
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 276
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1267
Oral question time point of order (17:12:91) 133
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 916, 917
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1066, 1070-3
Questions
Ambrosia, Industrial accidents 22w
Business statements 1111
Drake, Lewis, Industrial accidents 241w
East coast railway line, Railway electrification 401w
East coast railway line, Railway signals 401w
Exports, Iraq 389w
Military vehicles, M25 382w
Nuclear submarines 381-2w
Nuclear weapons, Safety standards 381w
Nuclear weapons deployment 469w
Nuclear weapons tests 469w
Nuclear weapons tests, USA 469w
Ozone layer, Cancer hazards 327w
Peace, International conferences 286w
Polaris submarines 132
Railway electrification, Scotland 401w
Rolling stock, Railway safety 401w
Uruguay round, Textiles 959

CSCE
see European Security Conference

Cuba
Foreign policy 185w

Cumbernauld
Dept of Social Security local offices 5

Cumbria
Unemployment 801

Cummings, Mr John
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Directors 473w
Community charge, Administrative costs 429w
Council tax, Administrative costs 425w
Homelessness, Easington 429w
Housing construction, Easington 426w
Motor vehicle theft, Seaham 464w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Public appointments 522-3w
Police, Seaham 464w
Prisoners on remand, Durham 540w
Youth training scheme, Seaham 454w

Cunningham, Dr John
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 469
Questions
Business statements 1099-100
City action teams, Administrative costs 390-1w

Cunninghame
Dept of Social Security local offices 370w

Curriculum
AIDS 447-8w
Ealing 114w
Science education 28w

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 464
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 293, 302, 364-7
Questions
Defence land, Land acquisition 148w
Electricity supply industry, Coal 474w
NHS, Capital investment 355-6w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 355w
NHS trusts 356w
Railway network, East Midlands 536w
Treasury, Civil service dispersal 165w
Yugoslavia 263

***Curry, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture*
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council, Ministerial statements (20:12:91) 587-95
Poultry (16:12:91) 123-8
Questions
Agricultural education 438-9
Agricultural education, Children 438
Agriculture, Expenditure 301w
Beef 437-8, 443-4
Beef, Food exports 437
Beef premiums, Markets 639w
Biscuit Cake Chocolate & Confectionery Alliance 299w
Common agricultural policy, Agricultural subsidies 77w
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 299w
Crops, Alternative energy 444-5w
Drift Net Fishing Inquiry 190w
Farm woodland premium scheme 606w, 641w
Farmers 306-7w
Fishery protection, Law enforcement 308w
Fishing catches, Prosecutions 308w
Fishing gear, English Channel 689w
Fishing quotas 76w
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 305w
Fishing vessels, Inspections 689w, 691w
Food aid, Eastern Europe 445w
Gas pipelines, Northern Ireland 688-9w
Horses 443
Horses, Animal breeding 442-3
Intervention stocks 446-7
Salmon, EC external trade 445w
Set-aside schemes 77w

***Curry, Mr David**—continued*
Shellfish, Food contamination 689-90w
Shellfish, Food hygiene 639w
Tobacco, Intervention stocks 190w

Custodial treatment
Young offenders 466w

Customer service committees
(16:01:92) 1114-206

Cycling
Royal parks 226w

Cyprus
Foreign relations 185w
Peace negotiations 712w

Czechoslovakia
Agriculture 690w
Overseas aid 678-83w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 978-9
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 317-21, 420, 426
Oral question time point of order (15:01:92) 950
Questions
Asbestos, Industrial health & safety 804-5
Bombings, Lockerbie 435w, 534w
Business statements 1109
Central Africa, Road construction 470w
Falkland Islands, Sovereignty 614w
Libyan Arab Republic 148w
RECHAR 948
Research, Switzerland 388w

Dalzell
Iron & steel industry 676

Damages
Defamation 144

Danbury
Speed limits 608-9w

Dance
Lyceum Theatre 705w

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991
Questions
99w

Dangerous premises
(18:12:91) 428-34

Darling, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 394-9, 424
Questions
Political refugees, Immigration applications 349-50w
Road tolls, Urban areas 402w

Dartmoor National Park
Armed forces training 160w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1029-32
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 379-82
Questions
Debts, USSR 439-40w
EC integration, Treaties 435w
EC social charter, UK contributions to EC budget 439w
National income, EC countries 440w
Public sector debt 544-5w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 403, 409, (19:12:91) 488-9, 498-503
Questions
Industry 955

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 689
Points of order (13:01:92) 684

***Davies, Mr Ron**—continued*
Questions
Badgers Act 1991, Licensing 75-6w, 142w, 189-90w, 308w
Bovine tuberculosis, Badgers 446w, 638w
Bovine tuberculosis, Cattle 446w
Bovine tuberculosis, Deer 446w
House of Commons catering, Veal 642w
Livestock, Waste disposal 307w, 309w
Papain, Slaughterhouses 191w
Poultry 437
Slaughterhouses, Rendering industry 308w
Slaughterhouses, Waste disposal 308w

Davis, Mr Terry
Questions
Dentists, NHS & private practice 252w
Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution, Prisoners' transfers 100w, 246-7w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Safety standards 657
Social Fund inspectors 144-5w

Day, Mr Stephen
Questions
Business statements 1105-6
Cars, Motor vehicle safety 403-4w

Day care of children
Civil service agencies 297w, 421w
Dept of the Environment 421w
Employment training 338w
Local government social services 507w, 546w
Scottish Office 297w
Wales 507w, 546w

Day nurseries
Civil service agencies 56w
Ministry of Defence 56w

Death
(15:01:92) 983-4
Accidents 526w
AIDS 139w
Black, John 186w
Diagnosis 627w
Drinking & driving 491w
Drug prevention schemes 684-6w
Hypothermia 131w

Death rate
Greater London 627-30w

Debts
USSR 439-40w

Debts written off
Banks 438w

Decommissioning
Fishing vessels 305w
HMS Challenger 150w, 512w

Deer
Bovine tuberculosis 446w

Deeside Industrial Park
Road construction 357-8w

Defamation
Damages 144
Takeover Panel 567w

Defective housing
Council house sales 422w
Government grants to local authorities 574-5w
London boroughs 422w
Rowner housing estate 641w, 644w

Defence
1097-8
Commonwealth of Independent States 605-6w

Defence contracts
Cardiff Institute for the Blind 387w
Clyde submarine base 387w

Defence equipment
382w

Defence industries
129-30, 147w
North West region 129

Defence industries—continued
Redundancy 1096

Defence land
131-2
Land acquisition 148w

Defence procurement
Competition 147w
Costs 382w
Navy 149-50w
Trident 57w
Warships 133, 385-6w

Defence research
135
Competition 134-5
Nuclear weapons 606w
Trident missiles 283w

Defence review
136, 148w, 150w, 386-7w
Armed forces housing 137-8

"Degree Awarding Powers & University Title Consultation Paper"
31-3w, 580-1w

Degrees
31-3w

Democracy
Africa 269-70

Demolition
Conservation areas 538w
Leyton 403w

Dental health
Health education 54w

Dentists
NHS & private practice 252w

Departmental correspondence
517w
Administrative delays 124-5w
Cardiff Bay barrage 361w
Greater London 468w
Singh, Partap 469w
Walter Somers 383w
Wentloog Lagoon 73w

Departmental forms
Hill livestock allowances 705w

Departmental leaflets
Waste disposal 167w

Dept of Education & Science
EC integration 113-4w
Small businesses 196w

Dept of Employment
Small businesses 178w

Dept of Energy
EC integration 98w

Dept of Health
Directors 50w
Official engagements 525w
Small businesses 157w

Dept of Social Security
Official engagements 517w

Dept of Social Security local offices
Cumbernauld 5
Cunninghame 370w
Manpower 514w
Newcastle upon Tyne 514w
Social Fund 515w
Social security claims 84w
Translation services 144w

Dept of the Environment
467w, 499-500w
Advertising 70w
Civil service agencies 419w
Civil service manpower 418w
Day care of children 421w
Directors 418w, 421w
Higher civil servants 418-9w
Pay incentives 419w

Dept of the Environment—continued
Performance indicators 417-8w
Publicity 418w
Small businesses 433w
Working hours 421w

Dept of the Registers of Scotland
296-7w

Dept of Trade & Industry
390-1w
Civil servants' visits abroad 230w
EC integration 621w
Small businesses 392-6w

Dept of Transport
657w
Small businesses 164w

Design Museum
Government grants 663-4

Detention centres
Castlereagh 141w

Developing countries
Hand tools 588w

Development Board for Rural Wales
Pay 506w

Development plans
169-71w

Devlin, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Ports, Points of order (17:12:91) 148
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 921-3
Questions
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Privatisation 162-3w
Visas, Medical students 249w
"Your Child & the National Curriculum", Cleveland 27w

Devon
Government assistance to industry 953

Devon & Cornwall Development Company
Government assistance 962

Dewar, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 30-7, 42, 44
Questions
Council tax, Scotland 292w
EC social charter 180w
Mortgage defaulters, Scotland 602-3w
Privatisation, Income 119w
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 669-72
Student numbers, Scotland 532w

Diabetes
Medical equipment 256w

Diagnosis
Death 627w

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey
Questions
Business statements 1109
Motor vehicle theft, Crime prevention 44w
Police Complaints Authority, Upper Waiting Hall 686-7w
Urban development corporations, Tameside 798

Dicks, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1223

Diesel vehicles
Exhaust emission controls 397w

Dioxins
309w, 436
Coalite Group 171w
Milk 435

Diplomatic relations
Syrian Arab Republic 270
Ukraine 183w

Diplomatic service
548-9w
Brazil 260

Dir85/337/EEC
172w

Dir89/106/EEC
571w

Dir89/618/EURATOM
455w

Dir90/396/EEC
187w

Direct labour departments
Contracts for services 417w

Direct mail
593w

Direct taxation
EC Finance Council 120w

Director General of Electricity Supply
see Office of Electricity Regulation

Director General of Electricity Supply for Northern Ireland
see Office of Electricity Regulation for Northern Ireland

Director General of Fair Trading
see Office of Fair Trading

Director General of Gas Supply
see Office of Gas Supply

Director General of Telecommunications
see Office of Telecommunications

Director General of Water Services
see Office of Water Services

Directors
British Coal Corporation 473w
Civil service agencies 50w, 56-7w, 117w, 297-8w, 418w, 421w
Dept of Health 50w
Dept of the Environment 418w, 421w
Freeman Hospital NHS Trust 155-6w
Ministry of Defence 56-7w
Northern Regional Health Authority 156w
Northumbria Ambulance NHS Trust 155-6w
Pay 231w
Scottish Office 297-8w
Treasury 117w

Disability living allowance
83-4w, 634w, 653-4w, 697-8w
Northern Ireland 698w
Social security claims 514w

Disability working allowance
83-4w, 697-8w
Northern Ireland 698w
Social security benefits rules 291w
Social security claims 514w

Disabled workers
3-4w
CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments 358w
Government departments 95w
Income support 653w
Training 563w
Welsh Office 358w

Disease control
Anthrax 367w

District councils
428-9w

District health authorities
Wales 545w, 691w

Divorce
Occupational pensions 84w

Divorce settlements
205w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 988-99, 1058

Dock labour scheme
536w

Dockyards
Portsmouth 242w
Ventilation 242w

Doctors' & Dentists' Remuneration Review Body
Junior hospital doctors 26w

Dog fighting
683w

Doherty, Daniel
Terrorism 59w

Domestic electrical appliances
Plugs & sockets 542w

Domestic energy conservation
Labelling 157-8w
Low incomes 421-2w

Domestic energy consumption
Personal income 473w

Doncaster
Handicapped children 129-30w

Doncaster Royal Infirmary
129-30w

Doran, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 593-4
Questions
Census of population, Disclosure of information 254w
Community charge, Non-payment 342w
Community charge, Publicity 326w, 531w
Community charge, Social security benefits deductions 372w
Community charge, Tax collection 342w
Government data network 438w
Police national computer 341w

***Dorrell, Mr Stephen**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Accidents, Death 526w
Cancer, Children 254-5w
Cancer, Skin disorders 352-3w
Census of population, Disclosure of information 254w
Charing Cross Hospital, Hospital beds 354w
Compulsorily detained mental patients, Police powers 676w
Cranage Hall Hospital 132w
Death, Diagnosis 627w
Death rate, Greater London 627-30w
Dental health, Health education 54w
Dentists, NHS & private practice 252w
Dept of Health, Directors 50w
Dept of Health, Small businesses 157w
Drug prevention schemes 674w
Drug prevention schemes, Medical research 674w
Drug prevention schemes, Medical treatments 674w
Dysentery 130w
Fluoridation 673-4w
Fluoridation, Health hazards 624w
Food consumption 625w
Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991 130-1w
Foreign patients 131w
Haemoglobinopathies Working Party, Public appointments 590w
Health authorities, Contracts for services 50-1w
Health hazards, Ozone layer 353-4w
Health insurance 523w
Hearing aids 520-1w
Hospital catering, Cook-chill catering 676w
Human organs, Regional health authorities 521w
Hypothermia, Death 131w
Infant mortality 126-9w
London Ambulance Service 526w

***Dorrell, Mr Stephen**—continued*
London Ambulance Service, Emergency calls 558w
Lung diseases, Medical equipment 589w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 52w
Mental health community care 256w
Mental patients, Ethnic groups 156w
Mental patients, Hospital admissions 156w
NHS, Energy conservation 675w
NHS, Expenditure 53w, 253-4w
NHS finance 590-2w
NHS numbers 132-3w
NHS reciprocal arrangements 131-2w
NHS trusts 526w, 675w
NHS trusts, Crown immunity 252w
North East Thames Regional Health Authority, Expenditure 256-60w
Oral tobacco, EC law 129w
Organ donors, Casualties 624w
Patients, Personal savings 50w
St Thomas' Hospital, Upper Waiting Hall 157w
Sickle cell disease, Medical education 527-8w
Sickle cell disease, Medical treatments 528w
Teenage pregnancy, Illegitimate children 525w
Tobacco advertising, Advertising controls 521w
Transplant surgery, Hospital waiting lists 624w
Westminster & Chelsea Hospital, Construction 253w

Dorset
Ministry of Defence 139

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Czechoslovakia) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(18:12:91) 255

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Denmark) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(18:12:91) 255

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Finland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(18:12:91) 255

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Iceland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(18:12:91) 255

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Isle of Man) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(18:12:91) 255

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Morocco) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(18:12:91) 255

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Papua New Guinea) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(18:12:91) 255

Douglas, Mr Dick
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 25-6, 42-9, 55, 75-7, 81, 85
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 163-4, 197, 208, 238
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 821, 852, 855, 868, 884-6
Questions
Armed forces strength, Scotland 512w
Army strength, Scotland 148w
Exservicemen, Housing 150w
HMS Challenger, Decommissioning 150w, 512w
Iron & steel industry, Scotland 807
Local government finance, Scotland 560-1w
Local government revenue, Scotland 199-200w

***Douglas, Mr Dick**—continued*
Millan, Bruce, RECHAR 949-50
Nuclear weapons 132-3
Yugoslavia 260-1

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
Bail, Habitual offenders 197w
Betting shops, Opening hours 197w
Bombings, Lockerbie 534w
Bridges, Isle of Skye 602w
Crime, Scotland 292-4w
Electoral register, Scotland 702-4w
Fish farming, Scotland 411w
Holyrood House, Security 532w
Housing insulation, Scotland 561-2w
Police, Scotland 292w
Ports, Accounting 405-6w
Radioactive waste disposal, Dounreay 648w
Radioactivity, Coastal areas 90w
Rents to mortgages scheme, Scotland 295w
Royal parks, Contracts for services 700w
Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh 413-4w
Scottish National Liberation Army 533-4w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Public appointments 533w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Research 533w
Sheriffs, Scotland 532w
Sites of special scientific interest, Management agreements 533w

Dounreay
Radioactive waste disposal 648w
Radioactive wastes 17w, 474-5w
Uranium 376w

Dover, Mr Den
Questions
Defence industries 130

Drake, Lewis
Industrial accidents 241w

Drift Net Fishing Inquiry
190w

Drift nets
Cetaceans 78w

Drinking & driving
Death 491w

Drinking Water Inspectorate
616w

Drinks
445

Drug abuse
Community care grants 550-1w

Drug prevention schemes
674w
Death 684-6w
Ecstasy 685-6w
Government grants 351w
Health education 665w
Medical research 674w
Medical treatments 674w
Youth clubs 684w

Drug seizures
1093
Ecstasy 685w

Drugs
Packaging 585w, 589-90w

Drumadd Barracks
Flags 695w

Duchy of Cornwall
160w

Duffy, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 473
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 820, 844-6
Questions
Horses 443

Duffy, Sir Patrick—continued
Royal Naval Reserve 136

Dundee Institute of Technology
603w

Dundee University
Student numbers 699w

Dunn, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 470
Questions
Business statements 1107
Labour Party, Buy British 951
Railway travel, Kent 652-3

Dunnachie, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Cold weather payments 146
East Timor 181w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 726-7
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 304, 356-8, 385, (19:12:91) 538
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 698, 706, 709, 713-4, 720
Rolls-Royce (20:12:91) 577-82, 583, 585
Questions
Accidents, Death 526w
Africa, Foreign aid 677w
Balance of trade 543w
Breathalysers, Police powers 465w
Cancer, Publicity 523w
Educational finance 668w
Food consumption 625w
Health insurance 523w
Health service staff, Manpower 523-4w
Higher education admission 449w
HIV infection, Immigration controls 524w
Local Government Commission for England, Expenditure 671w
Middle East, Terrorism 270
NHS trusts 526w
Nurses, Career structure 523w
Oil revenues, North Sea oil 575w
Parent's Charter 450w
Railway signals, Railway safety 659
Railway workers, Alcoholism 499w
Schools & parents 559w
Teachers 449w
Tobacco advertising, Advertising controls 521w
Training, Europe 456w
Youth training, Crewe 802
Youth training, School leaving 455w

Durant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 869-71
School admission (20:12:91) 628-9, 631-2, 634
Questions
Railway transport 662

Durham
Prisoners on remand 540w
School meals 195w

Durham City Council
Standard spending assessments 62w

Durham Prison
Prisoners on remand 540w

Dyfed
Employment opportunities 362w
Repossession orders 586-7w
Unemployment 362w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 313-7, 394
Questions
Channel tunnel 493w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 339-40w

Dysentery
130w

Eadie, Mr Alexander
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 986-7
Questions
Intervention stocks 446-7
RECHAR 948-9

Ealing
Curriculum 114w
Education (17:01:92) 1218
Grant maintained schools 208w
School administration 208w

Early retirement
Police discipline 250-1w

Earnings limits
National insurance contributions 1095-6

Earnings rules
Family credit 81w
Unemployment benefits 374w

Earthquakes
Channel tunnel 94w

Easington
425w
Community charge 429w
Homelessness 429w
Housing construction 426w

East coast railway line
Railway electrification 401w
Railway signals 401w
Vandalism 241w, 659

East Midlands
Business 125w
Railway network 536w

East Sussex
Road works 397w

East Timor
181w
EC action 614w
Human rights 614w
Portugal 614w

Eastern Europe
EC external relations 183w
Embassies 711-2w
Espionage 629w
Exports 594w
Food aid from EC 445w
Know-how Fund 677-8w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 569w

Eastern Health & Social Services Board
332w
Capital investment 332w
Public expenditure controls 334w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Questions
Council housing finance, Manchester 425w
Myanmar, Foreign policy 183w

EC action
Animal welfare 300w
East Timor 614w
Ecstasy 685w
Gambling 459w
Government assistance to industry 187w
Industrial health & safety 633w
Mobility of disabled 46-7w
Postal services 186w
Profit sharing 566w
Speed governors 398w, 535w
VAT zero rated goods 706-8w
Working conditions (19:12:91) 556
Working hours 563w

EC Agriculture Commissioner
546-7w

EC Agriculture Council
437w

EC budget contributions
6w

EC Cohesion Fund
613-4w

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC Committee of the Regions
Scotland 705w
Wales 615w

EC countries
Average earnings 241w
Flue gas desulphurisation 243w
Foreign investment in UK 120-1w
National income 440w
National parks 227w
Pre-school education 323w
Retirement pensions 550w
Shipbuilding 111-2w
Unemployment 652w
Visas 217w

EC defence policy
217-8w

EC Draft 4713/91
188w

EC Draft 8046/91
535w

EC energy policy
474w

EC enlargement
255-6

EC Environment Council
104-6w

EC environmental policy
EC law 328-9w

EC external relations
182w, 255-7
Eastern Europe 183w
Iran 257
Syrian Arab Republic 257

EC external trade
Salmon 445w

EC Finance Council
222-4w, 334w, 437w
Direct taxation 120w

EC Fisheries Council
Ministerial statements (20:12:91) 587-95

EC Foreign Affairs Council
257, 339-40w, 436-7w, 583w, 712-3w

EC grants & loans
Northern Ireland 1093-4
Shipbuilding 112w
Textile industry 541-2w
Wales 70-1w, 359w

EC integration
Charities 468w
Dept of Education & Science 113-4w
Dept of Energy 98w
Dept of Trade & Industry 621w
European parties 468w, 658w
Home Office 100w
Subsidiarity 185w
Treaties 233w, 435-6w

EC Internal Market Council
595-6w

EC internal trade
Cars 9w

EC labour policy
Foreign investment in UK 945, 950
Trade competitiveness 946

EC law
Air fares 500w
Animal experiments 188w
EC environmental policy 328-9w
Education 207w
Environmental health 109-10w
Fire prevention 571w, 683w
Gas heaters 187w
Oral tobacco 129w
Water treatment 430w

EC presidency
181w

EC reform
Common agricultural policy 299w, 439-40, 446

EC social charter
3w, 102w, 125w, 177w, 180w, 242w, 562w
UK contributions to EC budget 439w

EC social policy
565-6w
Employment protection 806

EC Telecommunications Council
456-7w

EC Transport Council
399-400w, 568w

Economic & monetary union
448-9

Economic & Social Research Council
660-4w

Economic Commission for Europe
see UN Economic Commission for Europe

Economic growth
612w, 1087-8

Economic policy
1081-2, 1084-5
Overseas aid 330w

Economic recession
Building industry 571w

Economic situation
North Down 315w
Statistics 219w
USSR 441-2w

Ecstasy
Council of Europe Cooperation Group to Combat Drug Abuse 685w
Drug prevention schemes 685-6w
Drug seizures 685w
EC action 685w
Health education 693-5w, 700w
Scotland 700w
Wales 693-5w

Edinburgh
Museums & galleries 662-3
Scottish Arts Council 413-4w

Education
Ealing (17:01:92) 1218
EC law 207w
Northern Ireland 310w
Public petitions (17:01:92) 1218

Education Act 1944
Questions
447w

Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989
Questions
310w

Education (School Government) Regulations 1989
Questions
450w

Education Science & Arts Select Committee
211-2w

Education Support Grants (Amendment) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(16:12:91) 118

Educational assessment
Primary education 208w, 669-71w
Reading 578-80w
Special education 321-2w

Educational finance
668w
Cambridgeshire 141-2

Educational finance—continued
Lewisham (19:12:91) 558
Open University 668w
Public petitions (19:12:91) 558

Educational policy
665w

Educational standards
Reading 322w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Questions
Beef 444
Myanmar 268-9

EFTA
see European Free Trade Association

***Eggar, Mr Tim**, Minister of State, Dept of Education & Science*
Questions
Adult education 206-7w
Curriculum, Ealing 114w
Dept of Education & Science, Small businesses 196w
Educational assessment, Primary education 208w, 669-71w
Educational policy 665w
English education, Teacher training 212w, 322w
General certificate of secondary education 28w, 321w, 449w
Grant maintained schools 28-30w
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 448w
Grant maintained schools, Ealing 208w
HM Inspectorate of Schools 322w
Inner London Education Authority, Collections 213w
Parent's Charter 450w
Pre-school education, School population 214-6w
Reading, Educational assessment 578-80w
Reading, Educational standards 322w
Schools, Inspections 323w
Schools, Voluntary work 207w
Schools & parents 559w
Science education, Primary education 28w
Special education, Educational assessment 321-2w
Special education, Further education colleges 27w
"Your Child & the National Curriculum", Cleveland 27w

Eggs
Food labelling 189w

Election forecasting
Computer privacy 576w

Elections
Fiji 217w

Electoral register
632w
Scotland 702-4w

Electricity Consumers' Council
(16:01:92) 1114-206

Electricity distribution
376-7w

Electricity generation
377w
Alternative energy 18w
Competition 377-8w
Methane 17w

Electricity (Non-Fossil Fuel Sources) (England & Wales) Order 1990
Questions
17-8w

Electricity supply industry
Coal 474w
Competition 179w
Welsh Water 136w

Embassies
Eastern Europe 711-2w

Emergency calls
London Ambulance Service 558w

Emergency planning
Nuclear accidents 327w

Emigration
Northern Ireland 331-2w

Employment agencies
Health & Safety Executive 2w

Employment opportunities
Dyfed 362w
Foreign investment in UK 388w
Tameside 797-8
Textile industry 793-4

Employment protection
EC social policy 806
Part-time employment 803-4

Employment schemes
Fishguard 362w
Older workers 563w

Employment Service local offices
801-2

Employment training
451-2, 963-5
Day care of children 338w
Housing benefits 637-8w
Scotland 530w

Empty housing
Armed forces housing 160-1w, 512w
Council housing 263-4w
Wales 263-4w

Empty property
Ministry of Defence 148w

Energy conservation
227w
Energy research 243w
Housing construction 421w
NHS 675w

Energy consumption
Taxation 708w

Energy management assistance scheme
713-4w

Energy research
Energy conservation 243w
Photovoltaics 99w

Enforcement notices
Planning permission 68w

English Channel
Fishing gear 689w

English education
Teacher training 212w, 322w

English National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting
(13:01:92) 696-722

English Tourist Board
Marketing 587-8w

Enright, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1047-9
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 104
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 389-92, 425, (19:12:91) 535
RECHAR, Points of order (17:12:91) 149
Questions
RECHAR 1091

Enterprise zones
Tax allowances 7-8w

Environment
Investment 597w

Environment Agency
National Rivers Authority 64w
Waste management 63-4w

Environment protection
577w
Expenditure 169-70w

Environmental health
EC law 109-10w

Environmental impact assessment
164-5w, 244-5w, 500-1w
European Commission 172w
M25 501w
Road construction 499-500w
Road works 501w

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
Codes of practice 108-9w
Small businesses 168w, 63w, 573-4w

Environmentally sensitive areas
447
Ministerial statements (15:01:92) 969-82

Equal opportunities
Civil service 416w
Permanent secretaries 666

Escalators
London Underground 494-5w
Railway Inspectorate 337-8w
Safety standards 337-8w

ESOPS
1091-2

Espionage
Eastern Europe 629w

Estate Action
59-62w, 167w, 423-4w
West Yorkshire 67w

Ethnic groups
Mental patients 156w

Ethnic minorities
Government grants to local authorities 100w, 466w
Yugoslavia 262-3

Euratom
Nuclear weapons 217-8w

Europe
Training 456w

European Assembly
see European Parliament

European Atomic Energy Community
see Euratom

European central bank
610w, 1090
Manchester City Council 125w

European Commission
102w, 500w
Complaints 172w
Environmental impact assessment 172w

European Council
255-6, (18:12:91) 275-427

European Court of Justice
102w, 320w, 328-9w, 347-8w
Sunday trading 415w, 567w

European currency unit
610w
Financial services 945-6

European economic area
Regional aid 388w

European Energy Charter
242-3w

European Free Trade Association
388w

European Parliament
43-4w

European Parliament constituencies
Scotland (19:12:91) 556

European Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991

European Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991*—*continued
Debates etc.
(19:12:91) 556

European Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(19:12:91) 556

European parties
EC integration 468w, 658w

European Regional Development Fund
70-1w, 359w

European Security Conference
Baltic states 218w
UK contributions 44w

European Social Fund
70-1w

European Standing Committees
20

Eurotunnel
94w, 493w

Evans, Mr David
Questions
PSA Services, Billing 419-20w
USSR, Nuclear weapons 257-8

Evennett, Mr David
Questions
Defence 1097-8
Domestic energy conservation, Labelling 157-8w
Food labelling 300w
Local government constituencies, Thamesmead 645w
Occupational pensions 5-6
Training 799

Evidence
Social security appeals 654w

Ewing, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 468
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 931, 932

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 471
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 591-2
Poultry (16:12:91) 124
Ravenscraig steelworks (13:01:92) 694
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Tax harmonisation 442-3w
Business statements 1105
Income support, Social security benefits reductions 516w
Pensioners 11
Sheriffs, Scotland 532w

Exchange rate mechanism
1086

Exeter bypass
Consultants 164w

Exhaust emission controls
492w
Buses 240w
Diesel vehicles 397w
Greater London 403-4w

Exhaust emissions
Speed limits 535w

Exhibitions
British Petroleum 109w
Food & Drink Federation 445w

Explosions
Belfast Prison 646w

Export credit guarantees
9-10w
Fees & charges 961-2

Export Credits Guarantee Department
9-10w, 954-5, 961-2

Export licensing
Arms exports 230-1w
Art works 416w

Export of live animals
Sheep 639w

Exports
1088
Eastern Europe 594w
Iraq 389w
Poultry meat 189w

Exservicemen
Housing 150w, 285-6w
Nuclear weapons tests 381w

Extradition
686w
Libyan Arab Republic 712w

Eye tests
Optical charges 129w
Optical charges exemptions 129w
Pensioners 129w

Facsimile transmission
House of Commons stationery 378w

Factories
Inspections 2w

Factory closures
Glenesk Foods 152w
Ravenscraig steelworks 669-79, 1096
Regional development grants 269w

Factory Inspectorate
2w
Civil servants' background 2w
Training 2w

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 474
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 48-50, 52
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 159-60, 199-200, 202, 233-4
Questions
Family doctors, Pay 702w
Redundant churches 15

Falkland Islands
Sovereignty 614w

***Fallon, Mr Michael**, Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Education & Science*
Debates etc.
Child abuse, Teachers (16:01:92) 1211-6
Questions
Chorlton School, Special education 447w
Christchurch School, Capital investment 446-7w
Colleges of education 452w
Colleges of education, Manpower 451w
Colleges of education, Ministers' domestic visits 451-2w
Educational finance 668w
Free school meals 27-8w
Further education colleges, Capital investment 28w
International Information Centre on Special Needs Education 113w
Pre-school education, EC countries 323w
Primary education 667w
Primary Education Inquiry 114w
Private education, Trafford Park 27w
Pupil-teacher ratios, Staffordshire 668-9w
St Thomas More School Greenwich, Capital investment 449w
School administration, Budgeting 114-6w
School buildings, Building repairs 453-4w
School governors 450w
School meals, Durham 195w
Special education, Performance targets 321w
Teacher training 450-1w, 559-60w
Teachers 449w
Teachers, Medical examinations 578w

Family credit
5
Administrative delays 11-2
Earnings rules 81w
One parent families 81w
Social security recipients 81w

Family doctors
Budgeting 142
Contracts of employment 557-8w
Home visits 619-20w, 694w
Pay 155w, 702w
Prescriptions 263w
Scotland 702w
Wales 263w, 619-20w, 694w

Family health services authorities
Prescriptions 552-6w

Family [illegible]
Overseas aid 470w
Young people 526w

Farm buildings
Housing tenure 434w

Farm incomes
Wales 71-2w

Farm woodland premium scheme
295-6w, 606w, 641w

Farm woodland scheme
295-6w

Farmers
306-7w

Farms
Radioactive fallout 584-5w

Farr, Sir John
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1255-7
Questions
Agricultural subsidies 301-2w
Machine tools industry, Industrial development 960
Planning permission 104w
Road tax, Handicapped drivers 396w
Textile industry, Government assistance 794
Tobacco duties, Income 1083-4
Ukraine, Recognition of states 182w
Warships, Defence procurement 133

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Questions
Free school meals 27-8w
Further education colleges, Capital investment 28w
General certificate of secondary education 28w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 52w
Science education, Primary education 28w
Training, School leaving 803

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Questions
Children & Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 465-6w
Domestic electrical appliances, Plugs & sockets 542w
Sunday trading 810-1

Favell, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 316, 325
Questions
Access to Parliament 18
APEX Trust 968
EC labour policy, Trade competitiveness 946
Pensioners 11
Yugoslavia 261-2

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Anchor Housing Association, Sheltered housing 104w
Bus services, Finance 655w

Fearn, Mr Ronnie—continued.
Bus services, Transport supplementary grants 655w
Children Act 1989, Expenditure 52w
Community care, Council housing 104w
Community care, Expenditure 52w
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, Buildings 455w
Crabb, Lionel, Disclosure of information 381w
Crash helmets 48w
Highway assessment programme 49w
Housing construction, Energy conservation 421w
Ilkley bypass, Road construction 48-9w
London Underground, Passengers 656
Lorries, Road accidents 499w
Lorries, Speed limits 398w
Motor vehicles, North West region 47w
Motorways, Lancashire 387-8w
Polegate bypass 397w
Public sector housing, Young people 66w
Railway transport, Sound insulation 396w
Residential care, Income support 80w
Road works, East Sussex 397w
Road works, Public utilities 655w
Single homeless, Housing associations 173w
Spastics Society 85w
Tourist industry, Southport 564w

Feldman, Basil
Sunday trading 347w

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 977-8
Standing Order No 20 applications, Points of order (17:12:91) 149-50
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 653
Railway freight transport, Isle of Grain 607w

Ferries
Shipping safety 657-8

Field, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 925-6, 929
Questions
Armed forces officers, Armed forces pensions 159-60w, 282-4w
Cars, EC internal trade 9w
Tax reform 119w
Tourism 796

Field, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1278-9
Questions
Income support 9
Mortgage defaulters 2-3
Nuclear accidents, Emergency planning 327w
Redundant churches 14

Fields, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1257-8
Questions
British Steel Corporation 112-3w
British Steel Corporation, Overseas investment 112-3w
Iron & steel, Production 389w
Iron & steel, Stocks of commodities 390w
Iron & steel industry, Production costs 389-90w

Fiji
Constitutions 217w
Elections 217w

Finance Bill 1991/92
Questions
7-8w

Financial services
European currency unit 945-6

Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Questions
Geneva Conventions 218w

Fire Precautions Act 1971
Questions
683w

Fire prevention
Certification 571w
EC law 571w, 683w

Fire services
Greater London (20:12:91) 635-42
Halons 172w

Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R order read (17:01:92) 1286

Fish conservation
Shellfish 135w

Fish farming
Salmon 311w, 405w
Scotland 411w

Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland
313-6w

Fishery protection
Law enforcement 308w
Scotland 197-8w

Fishguard
Employment schemes 362w

Fishing catches
Lough Foyle 312-4w
Northern Ireland 313-6w
Prosecutions 308w

Fishing gear
English Channel 689w

Fishing quotas
76w

Fishing vessels
Decommissioning 305w
Inspections 689w, 691w

Fixed interest securities
Local government borrowing 117w

Flags
Drumadd Barracks 695w

Flood control
River Usk 269w

Flue gas desulphurisation
243w
EC countries 243w

Fluoridation
673-4w
Health hazards 624w
Wales 694w

Flynn, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 980
Intelligence services, Points of order (17:12:91) 150-1
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 688
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 848, 888-90
Questions
Access to Parliament 18, 548w
Africa, Overseas aid 588w
Air pollution control, Cremation 645w
Air pollution control, Local government functions 573-4w
Arms control, Conferences 217w
Arms trade, Iraq 709w, 716w
Arms trade, Television programmes 395w
Atomic Weapons Establishment, Nuclear disarmament 286w
Baltic states, CFE Treaty 218w
Baltic states, Technical assistance 232-3w

Flynn, Mr Paul—continued
Broadcasting Council for Wales, Public appointments 462w
Building industry, Industrial health & safety 3w
Cold weather payments, Social Security recipients 515w
Defence, Commonwealth of Independent States 605-6w
Dept of the Environment, Advertising 70w
Developing countries, Hand tools 588w
Disability working allowance, Social security benefits rules 291w
EC energy policy 474w
EC Environment Council 105-6w
EC social charter 3w
Economic situation, USSR 441-2w
Environment, Investment 597w
Environment Agency, National Rivers Authority 64w
Environment protection 577w
Euratom, Nuclear weapons 217-8w
European Parliament 43-4w
European Security Conference, UK contributions 44w
Farm woodland premium scheme 606w, 641w
Foreign investment in UK, Assisted areas 576w
Greenhouse effect 166w
HMS Warspite 641w
HMSO, Packaging 26w
Intelligence services, Parliamentary questions 467w, 630-1w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear safeguards 476w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Radiation hazards 583w
Korea, Nuclear disarmament 218-9w
Kuwait, Missing persons 435w
Lorries, Road damage 661
"Manual of Environmental Policy", UK contributions 672w
MI5, Public appointments 467w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Eastern Europe 569w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, International conferences 44w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, Russia 582w
Nuclear power, Billing 569w
Nuclear safeguards, Brazil 569w
Nuclear test ban, Commonwealth of Independent States, 582w
Nuclear weapons, Commonwealth of Independent States 549w, 606w
Nuclear weapons, Defence research 606w
Nuclear weapons, Iraq 149w
Nuclear weapons, USSR 284w
Nuclear weapons tests, Land reclamation 57w
Oil pollution control, UK contributions 571-2w
Opera, Arts finance 667-8
Plutonium, Air freight transport 609w
Public lavatories 69w
Radiation hazards, Commonwealth of Independent States 606w
Radioactive fallout, Farms 584-5w
Radioactive waste disposal 574w, 577w
Radioactive waste disposal, Dounreay 648w
Radioactive waste disposal, Sellafield 615w
Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee 64w
Radioactive wastes, Consultants 597w
Radioactive wastes, Dounreay 17w, 474-5w
Recycling, Paper 9w
Residential care, Income support 636w
River pollution, Coal mining 619w
Road traffic 404w
Social Fund 576w
Social Fund, Dept of Social Security local offices 515w
Social security appeal tribunals, Pay 289w
Social security payments, Christmas 636w
Somalia, Armed conflict 584w
Tyres, Road safety 567-8w

Flynn, Mr Paul—continued
UN Centre for Social Development & Humanitarian Affairs 588w
UN Conference on Environment & Development 572-3w, 577w, 630w
UN Conference on Environment & Development, UK contributions 572w
UN Economic Commission for Europe 123w
UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission 583-4w
UNCTAD 43w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 125w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Land reclamation 568-9w
United Nations, Iraq 583w
Uranium, International trade 583w
USSR, Human rights 435-6w
"Verification in All Its Aspects" 582-3w
Wages councils 587w
Welsh Office, Public appointments 503w
"Women & the Environment" 577w
World Memorial Day 25-6w
Written questions, Government achievements 468w

Food
Balance of trade 444-5

Food Act 1984
Questions
194w

Food additives
Animal experiments 344w
Food standards 194w

Food aid from EC
Eastern Europe 445w

Food & Drink Federation
Exhibitions 445w

Food consumption
625w

Food contamination
309w, 435-6
Plastics 194w
Shellfish 689-90w, 695w, 699-701w

Food exports
Beef 437, 508w

Food hygiene
Shellfish 639w

Food labelling
300-1w
Eggs 189w
Irradiated food 143w

Food poisoning
Wales 271w

Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991
Questions
130-1w

Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No 13) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(14:01:92) 812

Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No 14) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(14:01:92) 812

Food Safety Act 1990
Questions
194-5w

Food standards
Food additives 194w
Mineral waters 445w
Veterinary drugs 194-5w

Fookes, Dame Janet
Questions
Defence land 132
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Upper Waiting Hall 100w

Fookes, Dame Janet—continued
Veal 442

Football
Public order offences 632-4w

Football Association
Upper Waiting Hall 31w

Football pools
Betting & gaming duties 336w, 612-3w, 621-2w

Football Spectators (Corresponding Offences in Italy) Order 1990
Questions
632-4w

Football Trust
621-2w

Foreign adoptions
(19:12:91) 559-66
Fees & charges 155w
Public petitions (19:12:91) 557

Foreign aid
Africa 677w

Foreign companies in UK
Helicopters 154w

Foreign investment in UK
144-5, 593-5w, 946, 953-4, 1087, 1090-1
Assisted areas 576w
EC countries 120-1w
EC labour policy 945, 950
Employment opportunities 388w
Japan 388w
Kimberly Clark 810
Tax reform 1090
USA 595w, 950-1

Foreign patients
131w

Foreign policy
Brazil 180w
Cuba 185w
Myanmar 183w
Tibet 183w
Tunisia 340w

Foreign relations
Cyprus 185w
Iran 185w
Ukraine 182w

Foreign tourists
795-6

Forestry Commission
134-5w, 151w
Access to countryside 197w
Land acquisition 197w
Land use 197w

Forests
Land acquisition 134-5w
Welsh Office 134-5w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 306-9
Questions
Civil servants' visits abroad, Dept of Trade & Industry 230w

Forsyth, Mr Michael, Minister of State for Scotland
Questions
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, NHS trusts 201w
Campaign for cold weather credits 648w
Cold weather payments, Scotland 648w
Dundee Institute of Technology 603w
Dundee University, Student numbers 699w
Ecstasy, Health education 700w
Family doctors, Pay 702w
Fishery protection, Scotland 197-8w
Forestry Commission, Access to countryside 197w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 197w

Forsyth, Mr Michael—continued
Geriatric patients, Highland Health Board 530-1w
Higher education colleges, Scotland 294-5w
Hill livestock allowances, Departmental forms 705w
Hospital beds, Highland Health Board 602w
Hospital beds, Scotland 406-10w
Liver diseases, Transplant surgery 529w
Livestock, Waste disposal 531w
Marine animals, Research 151w
Marine animals, Sea pollution 151-2w
Salmon, Fish farming 405w
School buildings, Capital investment 534w
Set-aside schemes, Crops 153w
Set-aside schemes, Fraud 412w
Set-aside schemes, Scotland 89-90w, 152w
Set-aside schemes, Sports facilities 411-4w
Shellfish, Food contamination 700-1w
Stoneyetts Hospital, Hospital closures 150w
Tree planting, Government grants 151w

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 467
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 773-6
Questions
Air pollution, Northern Ireland 480w
Housing estates, Heating 479-80w
Local government pensions, Pension funds 489w
Northern Ireland Airports, Pension funds 479w
Northern Ireland Airports, Pension rights 479w

Forth, Mr Eric, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Questions
Asbestos, Industrial health & safety 804-5
Average earnings, EC countries 241w
Building industry, Industrial health & safety 3w
Business, East Midlands 125w
Car tax 800
Catalytic converters 800
Chemicals, Industrial accidents 337w
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, Buildings 455w
Dept of Employment, Small businesses 178w
Dockyards, Ventilation 242w
Drake, Lewis, Industrial accidents 241w
EC social charter 3w, 177w, 242w
EC social policy 565-6w
Employment training, Day care of children 338w
Factories, Inspections 2w
Factory Inspectorate, Civil servants' background 2w
Factory Inspectorate, Training 2w
Foreign tourists 795-6
Gas heating, Gas safety 336-7w
Hairdressing, Minimum wage 587w
Hairdressing, Pay 633w
Health & Safety Executive 805
Health & Safety Executive, Employment agencies 2w
Health & Safety Executive, Inquiries 1w
Health & Safety Executive, Inspections 1-2w
Health & Safety Executive, Retirement age 1w
Industrial health & safety, Compensation 805
Industrial health & safety, EC action 633w
Industrial health & safety, HIV infection 651-2w
Low pay, North West region 174-6w
Low pay, Women 456w
Medical equipment, Waste disposal 653w
Minimum wage 562w
National Dock Labour Board 338w
New businesses 587w
Nuclear accidents, Radiation protection 455w

Forth, Mr Eric—continued
Part-time employment, Pay 175-8w
Profit sharing, EC action 566w
Railway Inspectorate, Escalators 337-8w
Sellafield, Inquiries 227-8w, 455w
Tourism 796
Tourism, Wales 796
Tourist industry, Manpower 564w
Tourist industry, Southport 564w
Wages councils 587w

Fossil fuel levy
98w

Foster, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 905

Foulkes, Mr George
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Belize 549w, 640w
Ayr Hospital 603w
Campaign for cold weather credits 429w, 472w, 635w, 648w
Cold weather payments 635w
Cold weather payments, Scotland 648w
Diplomatic service 548-9w
Domestic energy conservation, Low incomes 421-2w
Domestic energy consumption, Personal income 473w
East Timor, EC action 614w
East Timor, Human rights 614w
East Timor, Portugal 614w
Electoral register, Scotland 702-4w
Home energy efficiency scheme 474w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Government grants 473w
Housing insulation, Scotland 561-2w
Income support, Heating 634-5w
Indonesia, Arms trade 582w, 640-1w
MFV Antares, Shipping accidents 640w
Myanmar 269
Submarines, Shipping safety 640w

Foundation for Business Responsibilities
Charities 349w

Foundation for Sport & the Arts
211-2w, 705w

Fox, Sir Marcus
Debates etc.
Sheltered housing, Water charges (17:12:91) 247-9
Questions
EC Foreign Affairs Council 712-3w

France
Strikes 797
Sunday trading 348w

Franks, Mr Cecil
Debates etc.
Members' speeches (14:01:92) 834
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 817, 834, 853
Questions
Inflation 612w

Fraser, Mr John
Questions
Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1992 319w
Inner London Education Authority, Collections 213w
Kenya, Judges 102-3w
Standard of living 809-10
VAT, Rents 119w

Fraud
Instalment credit 593w
Pension funds 374w, 513w
Set-aside schemes 412w

Free school meals
27-8w

Freeman, Mr Roger, Minister for Public Transport
Questions
British Rail, Citizen's Charter 494w
British Rail, Investment 503w

Freeman, Mr Roger—continued
British Rail, Privatisation 492w
Bus services 609w
Bus services, Finance 655w
Bus services, Greater London 494w
Bus services, Transport supplementary grants 655w
Buses, Exhaust emission controls 240w
Channel tunnel 493w
Channel tunnel, Earthquakes 94w
Channel tunnel, High speed trains 568w
Channel tunnel, North West region 493w
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 493-4w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 653
Channel tunnel, Rolling stock 657w
Channel tunnel, Stratford station 493w
Channel tunnel, Waterloo Station 493w
Community transport 494w
East coast railway line, Railway electrification 401w
East coast railway line, Railway signals 401w
East coast railway line, Vandalism 241w
Freight transport 498-9w
Hastings-Ashford railway line, Railway electrification 608w
Inter-City rail transport 94w
Liverpool Street-Chelmsford railway line, Railway travel 660
London Regional Transport, Investment 495w
London Tilbury & Southend line, Railway travel 654
London Underground, Escalators 494-5w
Midland Metro, Government grants 398-9w
Mobility of disabled, EC action 46-7w
Network SouthEast, Compensation 239w
Network SouthEast, Performance targets 656w
Networker trains, Kent 653
Passenger transport executives, Local government finance 93-4w
Public transport, Greater London 400w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 656w
Railway electrification, Scotland 401w
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 399w
Railway freight transport, Isle of Grain 607w
Railway freight transport, Severn tunnel 45w
Railway network, East Midlands 536w
Railway network, High speed trains 501-2w
Railway network, Privatisation 653
Railway signals, Safety equipment 49w
Railway stations, Ashford 240w
Railway transport 662
Railway transport, Sound insulation 396w
Railway travel, Kent 492w, 652-3
Railway workers, Alcoholism 499w
Rolling stock, Railway safety 401w
Severn tunnel, Ventilation 45w
Stratford station 660
Tunnels, Ventilation 45-6w
Water transport, Government grants 240-1w

Freeman Hospital NHS Trust
Directors 155-6w

Freight transport
498-9w

French, Mr Douglas
Questions
Air pressure gauges, Standards specifications 173-4w
Direct mail 593w
Employment Service local offices 801
Natural Resources Institute 588-9w

Fringe benefits
National insurance contributions 221-2w

Frontiers
Gibraltar 43w

Fruit
Agricultural production 76w
Intervention stocks 76-7w

Fry, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 195, 206-7
Questions
Bus services 336w
Buses, Exhaust emission controls 240w
Buses, Motor industry 395w

Furans
309w

Furniture industry
Company liquidations 8-9w

Further education colleges
Capital investment 28w
Special education 27w

Further Education Funding Council for England
Public appointments 667-8w

Further Education Funding Council for Wales
Public appointments 585-6w

Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 40-3, 47, 92, 103, 106-8
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 217, 232-3
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 697, 715-6, 721
Questions
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 677
Trident, Defence procurement 57w

Gabon
Visas 186w

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Questions
British Rail, Investment 503w
Geriatric patients, Highland Health Board 530-1w
Hospital beds, Highland Health Board 602w
Liver diseases, Transplant surgery 529w

Gale, Mr Roger
Questions
Police, Kent 12w
Sunday trading, Profits 347-8w
Thanet, Upper Waiting Hall 186w

Galloway, Mr George
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (18:12:91) 264
Questions
Yugoslavia, Ethnic minorities 262-3

Gambling
458w
EC action 459w
Retail price index 441w
Television advertising 459w

Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 301, 319, 324-5, 362, 383, 396, 400, 414-5, 419-26
Questions
Brazil, British embassies 259-60
Brazil, Diplomatic service 260
Brazil, Foreign policy 180w
Cuba, Foreign policy 185w
Cyprus, Foreign relations 185w
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 712w
EC Cohesion Fund 613-4w
EC countries, Visas 217w
EC external relations, Eastern Europe 183w
EC integration, Subsidiarity 185w
EC integration, Treaties 435-6w
EC presidency 181w
EC social charter 102w

Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan—continued
Euratom, Nuclear weapons 217-8w
European Parliament 43-4w
Falkland Islands, Sovereignty 614w
Gibraltar, Frontiers 43w
Maastricht summit 182w
Maastricht summit, Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 218w
Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 436w
Switzerland, Upper Waiting Hall 435w

Garrett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 345, 361-3
Questions
Educational finance, Cambridgeshire 141-2
Kidney patients, Social security benefits 290-1w

Garrett, Mr Ted
Questions
Dept of Social Security local offices, Manpower 514w

Gas Consumers' Council
(16:01:92) 1114-206

Gas heaters
EC law 187w

Gas heating
Gas safety 336-7w

Gas pipelines
Northern Ireland 477w, 688-9w

Gas safety
Gas heating 336-7w
Wales 336-7w

GATT
89w, 436-7w, 959
Textiles 109w, 596-7w, 621w

Gene Therapy Ethics Committee
673w

General certificate of secondary education
28w, 321w, 449w

General Medical Services Committee
557-8w, 694w

Genetic engineering
Animal experiments 346w
Medical ethics 673w

Genetics
Maintenance 517w

Geneva Conventions
218w

George, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 507-10
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 880-2

Geriatric patients
Highland Health Board 530-1w
Skye & Lochalsh 530-1w

Germany
Science & technology 27w

Ghana
Contraceptives 470w

Gibraltar
Frontiers 43w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 380
Questions
EC integration, Subsidiarity 185w
Eggs, Food labelling 189w
Food & Drink Federation, Exhibitions 445w
Maastricht summit, Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 218w
Veterinary drugs, Food standards 194-5w

Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Questions
Pre-school education, EC countries 323w

Glasgow
Local government (16:12:91) 119
Railway accidents 656-7

Glenesk Foods
Factory closures 152w

Glyn, Sir Alan
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 890-1

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 593
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 36, 43, 46, 50-2, 62
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 913, 931
Questions
Britannia Life Assurance, Business premises 531w
Britannia Life Assurance, Government assistance 531w
Clyde Port Authority, Privatisation 608w
Defence land 131
European Standing Committees 20
Invalidity benefits, Social security claims 12-3
Museums & galleries, Edinburgh 662-3
Ordination of women 16
Syrian Arab Republic, EC external relations 257
Vibration white finger, Handicap benefits 289-90w

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Questions
Redundant Churches Fund 13-4

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Questions
Access to Parliament, Handicapped 18
Council house sales, Defective housing 422w
Immigration applications, Members' correspondence 15-6w
London Docklands Arena, Expenditure 225-6w
London Docklands Development Corporation, Leisure facilities 166w
Palace of Westminster, Mobility of disabled 379w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 459
Questions
A13, Road construction 491w
Greenhouse effect, Council of Ministers 62w
Greenhouse effect, Meteorological satellites 63w
Higher civil servants, Women 146w
Homicide, Women 319w
House of Commons times of sittings, House of Commons reform 54-5w
Metropolitan Police, Parliamentary security 162w
Overseas aid, Economic policy 330w
Permanent secretaries, Equal opportunities 666
Rents to mortgages scheme, Scotland 295w
Residential care of children, Managers 252-3w
Residential care of children, Wales 359-60w
River Thames, Water transport 46w

Gould, Mr Bryan
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 23-5, 28, 63-5
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 180-1, 191-9, 209, 219-24
Repossession orders, Points of order (16:12:91) 21
Questions
Greater London, Departmental correspondence 468w
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council, Public appointments 645w

Gould, Mr Bryan—continued
Local Authorities Credit Management Advisory Board 103w
Playing fields, Land acquisition 103-4w
Royal parks, Contracts for services 672w, 700w
St James' Park, Contracts for services 672w

Govan Shipbuilders
452

Government achievements
22-5w
Written questions 468w

Government assistance to industry
Devon 953
EC action 187w

Government data network
438w

Government department reorganisation
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 193-4w

Government departments
Disabled workers 95w
Metropolitan Police 162w

Government grants to local authorities
Defective housing 574-5w
Ethnic minorities 100w, 466w

Government securities
Interest rates 120w

Graham, Mr Thomas
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1222, 1225, 1253-5
Questions
Business statements 1108-9
Economic policy 1084-5

Grammar schools
207-8w

Grant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 286, 287, 288
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 457
Questions
Office of the Chief Adjudication Officer, Annual reports 145-6w

Grant, Mr Bernie
Questions
Bombings, Lockerbie 712w
Building industry, Company liquidations 8-9w
Extradition 686w
Libyan Arab Republic, Extradition 712w
Stop & search, Police & ethnic minorities 251w

Grant maintained schools
Ballots 448w, 28-30w
Ealing 208w

Greater London
Ambulance services (20:12:91) 635-42
Assaults on police 464w
Bus services 494w, 651
Death rate 627-30w
Departmental correspondence 468w
Exhaust emission controls 403-4w
Fire services (20:12:91) 635-42
Homicide 463w
Public transport 400w, 652
Road traffic 404w
Unemployment 565w, 634w
Vacancies 565w
Youth training 564w

Greater Manchester
Homelessness 423w
Local government expenditure 69-70w
Railway travel (13:01:92) 784-92

Greenhouse effect
166w
Council of Ministers 62w

Greenhouse effect—continued
Meteorological satellites 63w
Press advertising 326w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Education, Public petitions (17:01:92) 1218
Questions
Arts, Children 668
British Rail, Citizen's Charter 494w
Business statements 1106
Grant maintained schools, Ealing 208w
Horses 309w
House of Commons souvenirs 54w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 611w
Military ceremonies, Horses 147w
New businesses 587w
Official engagements 233w, 543w, 630w
Residential care, Income support 83w
Voluntary schools, Capital investment 34-42w
Women clergy 15-6
Youth training, Greater London 564w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1247-9
Questions
EC external relations 255-6
Foreign investment in UK, USA 595w
Working hours, EC action 563w

Greenwich Park
Public petitions (17:12:91) 246

Gregory, Mr Conal
Questions
Army, York 150w
Biscuit Cake Chocolate & Confectionery Alliance 299w
Foreign tourists 795-6
Lyceum Theatre, Dance 705w
Museums & galleries, Collections 662
Overseas trade, Kuwait 595w
Railway transport, Ombudsman 661
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 102w

Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Questions
Horses, VAT 334-5w
Iran, Visas 710-1w
Taiwan, Visas 711w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1125-33
Questions
Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh 413-4w
Telephone charges 947-8

Griffiths, Mr Peter
Questions
Animal experiments, Licensing 457-8w
Residential care, Social security benefits 83w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1136, 1163-5, 1169-70, 1172, 1182-7, 1189, 1191
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 688

Grist, Mr Ian
Questions
EC Transport Council 399-400w
Industrial strategy 955
Wales Tourist Board, Marketing 586w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Questions
Middle East, Israel 185w

Ground, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 527-8
Questions
Attendance allowance, Social security recipients 82w

Ground water
Cardiff Bay barrage 73-4w, 267w, 509w
Wales 361w

Grylls, Sir Michael
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, USA 951
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 677-8
Trident 140
Unitary taxation 5-6w

Guaranteed minimum pensions
288w

Guided weapons
284w

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas, Ministerial statements (15:01:92) 969-82
Questions
Agricultural subsidies 301-2w
Agriculture, Czechoslovakia 690w
Anthrax, Disease control 367w
Cetaceans, Drift nets 78w
Common agricultural policy 440-1, 446
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 299w, 439-40, 446
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 78-9w
Common sheep meat regime 305-6w
Dioxins 436
Dioxins, Milk 435
Drinks 445
Environmentally sensitive areas 447
Food, Balance of trade 444-5
Food additives, Food standards 194w
Food contamination 309w, 435-6
Food contamination, Plastics 194w
Fruit, Agricultural production 76w
Fruit, Intervention stocks 76-7w
Hill livestock allowances 445-6
Irradiated food, Food labelling 143w
Mineral waters, Labelling 307w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Civil servants 690w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Government department reorganisation 193-4w
Regional panels, Public appointments 191-3w
Salmonella, Poultry meat 307w
Set-aside schemes 77-8w, 302w, 689w
Set-aside schemes, Sports facilities 302-6w
Vegetarianism, Nutrition 143w
Vegetarianism, Research 142w
Veterinary drugs, Food standards 194-5w
Veterinary Investigation Service 194w

Gurnell School Ealing
(17:01:92) 1218

Habitual offenders
Bail 197w

Haemoglobinopathies Working Party
Public appointments 590w

Hague, Mr William
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 981
Questions
Anthrax, Disease control 367w
Beef, Food exports 437
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 78-9w

Hain, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1143-5, 1162, 1172-5
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 688
Questions
Office of Telecommunications, Industrial disputes 110-1w
Trawsfynydd power station, Nuclear safety 475-6w

Hairdressing
Minimum wage 587w
Pay 633w

Halo Trust
711w

Halons
Fire services 172w

***Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie**, Minister of State for the Armed Forces*
Questions
Armed forces, Intimidation 141
Armed forces, Operating costs 58w
Armed forces casualties, Accident insurance 696w
Armed forces deployment 512w
Armed forces deployment, Belize 640w
Armed forces discharges, Homelessness 386w
Armed forces discharges, Removal expenses 386w
Armed forces discharges, Training 383-4w
Armed forces housing 385w
Armed forces housing, Building repairs 385w
Armed forces housing, Empty housing 160-1w, 512w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 384-6w
Armed forces housing, Housing associations 384w
Armed forces housing, Property transfer 384w
Armed Forces Housing Task Force, Expenditure 385w
Armed forces officers, Armed forces pensions 159-60w, 282-4w
Armed forces recruitment, Disclosure of information 286w
Armed forces strength, Scotland 512w
Armed forces training, Dartmoor National Park 160w
Armoured fighting vehicles 286w
Army 147w
Army, Convictions 641w
Army, York 150w
Army strength, Scotland 148w
Brittain, Simon, Armed forces retirement 696w
Crabb, Lionel, Disclosure of information 381w
Defence, Commonwealth of Independent States 605-6w
Defence land 131-2
Defence land, Land acquisition 148w
Drumadd Barracks, Flags 695w
Exservicemen, Housing 150w, 285-6w
Helicopters, Armed forces deployment 285w
Hydrographer of the Navy, Maps 383w
Libyan Arab Republic 148w
Marines, Armed forces women 161w
Menwith Hill, Trespass 605w
Menwith Hill, US bases 512-3w
MFV Antares, Shipping accidents 640w
Military ceremonies, Horses 147w
Military decorations, Shops 58w
Military vehicles, M25 382w
Ministry of Defence, Empty property 148w
Navy 148w
Navy Army & Air Force Institutes, Competition 511w
Navy Army & Air Force Institutes, Finance 57-8w, 512w
Nuclear submarines 381-2w
Nuclear weapons 135-6
Nuclear weapons, Commonwealth of Independent States 606w
Nuclear weapons, Defence research 606w
Nuclear weapons, Iraq 149w
Nuclear weapons, Safety standards 381w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 135, 696w
Nuclear weapons, USSR 284-5w
Nuclear weapons deployment 284w
Nuclear weapons tests, Cancer 282w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 381w

***Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie**—continued*
Nuclear weapons tests, Land reclamation 57w
Parachute Regiment, Armed forces recruitment 285w
Peace, International conferences 286w
Polaris 283w
Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital, Hospital patients 149w
Radiation hazards, Commonwealth of Independent States 606w
RAF Wittering, House purchase 640w
RNAD Ernesettle 146-7w
Rowner housing estate, Defective housing 641w
Royal Naval Reserve 136-7
Submarines, Shipping safety 640w
Territorial Army 147w
Trident missiles 283w

Hampton Court Green
(20:12:91) 643-50

Hand tools
Developing countries 588w

Handicap benefits
83-4w
British residents abroad 550w
Northern Ireland 697-8w
Publicity 697-8w
Vibration white finger 289-90w

Handicapped
Access to Parliament 18
Arts Council 166w

Handicapped children
Doncaster 129-30w

Handicapped drivers
Road tax 396w

***Hanley, Mr Jeremy**, Under-Secretary of State Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Agriculture, Public expenditure controls 316w
AIDS, Death 139w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 597w
Child benefit, Social security benefits rates 58w
Clenbuterol, Northern Ireland 598w
Council house tenant selection, Castlereagh 597-8w
Council housing, Newtownards 598w
Disability living allowance, Northern Ireland 698w
Disability working allowance, Northern Ireland 698w
Eastern Health & Social Services Board, Capital investment 332w
Eastern Health & Social Services Board, Public expenditure controls 334w
Emigration, Northern Ireland 331-2w
Fishing catches, Lough Foyle 312-4w
Fishing catches, Northern Ireland 313-6w
Handicap benefits, Publicity 697-8w
Heart diseases, Hospital waiting lists 332w
Hepatitis, Northern Ireland 138-40w
Hepatitis, Vaccination 139w
HIV infection, Health service staff 140w
HIV infection, Northern Ireland 139-40w
Hospitals, Construction 312w
Housing benefits, Northern Ireland 310w
Livestock, Waste disposal 478w
Migration, Northern Ireland 477-8w
National insurance contributions, Northern Ireland 58-9w
Northern Ireland health & social services trusts 315w
Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, Computer applications 312w
One parent benefit, Northern Ireland 332-3w
Pensioners, Northern Ireland 309w
Salmon, Fish farming 311w
Shellfish, Food contamination 699w
"Social Fund Manual" 537w
State earnings related pension scheme, Northern Ireland 333w

***Hanley, Mr Jeremy**—continued*
Stillbirths & Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry, Northern Ireland 478-9w
Teenage pregnancy, Northern Ireland 482-90w

Hannam, Sir John
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1158-60
Questions
General certificate of secondary education 321w
Special education, Educational assessment 321-2w
Special education, Further education colleges 27w
Special education, Performance targets 321w

Hanover Square Bradford
1-2

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 472
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 987, 999, 1017, 1032-5
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 976
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 756
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 178-9
Questions
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 99w
EC social charter 177w, 562w
Fossil fuel levy 98w
Foundation for Business Responsibilities, Charities 349w
House of Commons reform of procedure 19
Magnox reactors 98w
Oil revenues 165w
Old persons' pensions 9
Overseas aid, Arms trade 331w
Petroleum production, Offshore drilling 98w
Reading, Educational standards 322w
Schools, Inspections 323w
Social Fund, Loans 82w
Wood, Import controls 390w

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 412, (19:12:91) 534-5
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 886
Questions
Foreign patients 131w
House of Commons accommodation, Members 379-80w
House of Commons passes 380w
NHS numbers 132-3w
NHS reciprocal arrangements 131-2w

Hargreaves, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1235, 1277-8
Questions
Housing finance 59-62w
New Parliamentary building 228-30w

Harman, Ms Harriet
Questions
Aspartame, Health hazards 525w
Childbirth, Hertfordshire 520w
Childbirth, Statistics 519-20w
Death rate, Greater London 627-30w
Haemoglobinopathies Working Party, Public appointments 590w
London Ambulance Service, Emergency calls 558w
NHS finance 590-2w
NHS trusts 356w
North East Thames Regional Health Authority, Public appointments 357w
Sickle cell disease, Medical education 527-8w

Harman, Ms Harriet—continued
Sickle cell disease, Medical treatments 528w
Spectacles, Optical charges exemptions 357w
Stillbirths & Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry 520w
Stillbirths & Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry, Northern Ireland 478-9w

Harris, Mr David
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 978
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 97-9
Questions
Arms trade, Conventional weapons 340w
Environmentally sensitive areas 447
Tunisia, Foreign policy 340w
Warships, New Zealand 334w

Hartlepool Health Authority
522-3w

Haselhurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 376-9

Hastings-Ashford railway line
Railway electrification 608w

Hatfield Prison
246-7w

Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 535-41, 544

Havering
A13 422w

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 991-2

Haynes, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 985-6, 997-8, 999, 1043
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 836
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 717-9
RECHAR, Points of order (17:12:91) 149

Hayward, Mr Robert
Questions
Capital investment 1086
Govan Shipbuilders 452
Strikes, France 797

Hazardous wastes
Incinerators 326w, 480-2w
Londonderry 480-2w
Waste management 425-6w

Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Debates etc.
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 702-7, 719
Questions
Industrial investment 611w

Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 309-13, (19:12:91) 484

Health & Safety Executive
2-3w, 241w, 805
Employment agencies 2w
Inquiries 1w
Inspections 1-2w
Retirement age 1w

Health authorities
Contracts for services 50-1w

Health Benefits Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (14:01:92) 814-6

Health education
Dental health 54w
Drug prevention schemes 665w
Ecstasy 693-5w, 700w

Health hazards
Aspartame 525w
Fluoridation 624w
Northern Ireland 478w
Ozone layer 352-4w

Health insurance
523w
Tax allowances 221w

Health service staff
HIV infection 140w
Industrial health & safety 674-5w
Manpower 523-4w

Health services
Mid Glamorgan (14:01:92) 936-44

Hearing aids
520-1w
Prices 542w

Heart diseases
Hospital waiting lists 332w
Northern Ireland 332w
Surgery 505-6w
Wales 505-6w

Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David,
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Energy
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 986-8, 1057-60
Questions
Bradwell power station, Nuclear accidents 96-7w
British Coal Corporation, Directors 473w
British Coal Corporation, Mineworkers' pension scheme 17w
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 377w
Campaign for cold weather credits 472w
Coal, Imports 97w
Coal, Production 473w
Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, Orders & regulations 376w
Domestic energy conservation, Labelling 157-8w
Domestic energy consumption, Personal income 473w
Electricity distribution 376-7w
Electricity generation 377w
Electricity generation, Competition 377-8w
Electricity (Non-Fossil Fuel Sources) (England & Wales) Order 1990 17-8w
Electricity supply industry, Coal 474w
Energy conservation, Energy research 243w
Energy management assistance scheme 713-4w
Flue gas desulphurisation 243w
Flue gas desulphurisation, EC countries 243w
Fossil fuel levy 98w
Home energy efficiency scheme 474w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Government grants 473w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear safeguards 476w
International Atomic Energy Agency, UK contributions 18w
Magnox reactors 98w
Magnox reactors, Nuclear safety 95-6w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Eastern Europe 569w
Nuclear power, Billing 569w
Nuclear safeguards, Brazil 569w
Nuclear safety, Technical assistance 243-4w
Opencast mining, Northumberland 474w
Orimulsion 157w
Orimulsion, Subsidies 157w
Radioactive waste disposal, Sellafield 615w
Radioactive wastes, Dounreay 17w, 474-5w
Sizewell B 713w
Sizewell B, Non-fossil fuel obligation 713w
Trawsfynydd power station, Nuclear safety 475-6w

Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David—continued
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Land reclamation 568-9w
Uranium, Dounreay 376w

Heathrow Airport
100-1w

Heating
Housing estates 479-80w
Income support 634-5w

Heating allowances
Low incomes 204w

Hedgerow management grants
68-9w

Helicopters
Armed forces deployment 285w
Foreign companies in UK 154w
Licensing 154w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1138-42, 1155-8, 1198-9, 1205-6
Questions
Industrial development, North East region 952

Hepatitis
Northern Ireland 138-40w
Vaccination 139w

Hertfordshire
Childbirth 520w
Police civilians 463-4w

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for the Environment
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 217-9
Questions
"Age File The Facts" 538w
Dept of the Environment, Advertising 70w
Dept of the Environment, Civil service agencies 419w
Dept of the Environment, Civil service manpower 418w
Dept of the Environment, Day care of children 421w
Dept of the Environment, Directors 418w, 421w
Dept of the Environment, Higher civil servants 418-9w
Dept of the Environment, Pay incentives 419w
Dept of the Environment, Performance indicators 417-8w
Dept of the Environment, Publicity 418w
Dept of the Environment, Small businesses 433w
Dept of the Environment, Working hours 421w
EC Environment Council 104-6w
European Commission, Complaints 172w
Housing finance 59-62w
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council, Public appointments 645w
Local Authorities Credit Management Advisory Board 103w
New Parliamentary building 228-30w
Playing fields, Land acquisition 103-4w
Rateable value, Appeals 420w
Royal parks, Contracts for services 672w
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults, Books 423w
St James' Park, Contracts for services 672w
Uniform business rate, Appeals 537w

Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution
Prisoners' transfers 100w, 246-7w

Heywood
Training 454w

Hicks, Mrs Maureen
Questions
Industrial development, West Midlands 957-8
Midland Metro, Government grants 398-9w

Hicks, Mr Robert
Questions
RNAD Ernesettle 146-7w

Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L
Questions
Mortgage defaulters 3
Sunday trading, European Court of Justice 415w

High definition television
456-7w

High speed trains
Channel tunnel 568w
Railway network 501-2w

Higher civil servants
Civil service agencies 55w, 298w, 418-9w
Dept of the Environment 418-9w
Ministry of Defence 55w
Scottish Office 298w
Women 146w, 666-7

Higher education administration
University College of Swansea 360w

Higher education admission
449w

Higher education colleges
580-1w
Scotland 294-5w, 603-4w

Higher Education Funding Council for England
Public appointments 667-8w

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Public appointments 585-6w

Highland Health Board
Geriatric patients 530-1w
Hospital beds 602w

Highway assessment programme
49w

Hill, Mr James
Questions
Council housing 450-1

Hill livestock allowances
445-6
Departmental forms 705w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Questions
Compulsorily detained mental patients, Police powers 676w, 686w
Hospital catering, Cook-chill catering 676w
Hospital patients, Social security benefits 676w
Mining, Exports 594w
Poultry, Animal welfare 436-7
Yorkshire Mining Museum Trust, Upper Waiting Hall 94-5w

Hind, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc.
Peers speeches, Points of order (17:12:91) 150
Poultry (16:12:91) 126-7
Questions
Business statements 1112
English Tourist Board, Marketing 587-8w
Foreign investment in UK, Tax reform 1090
"Juliette" 161w
Social Fund 7-8
Wood fuels 244-5w

Historic buildings
Broadcasting complaints 344w
Government grants 265w
Wales 265w

Historic Buildings Council for Wales
265w

Historic Royal Palaces Agency
417-9w, 421w, (20:12:91) 643-50

Historic Scotland
296-7w

HIV infection
Blood transfusions (20:12:91) 620-7
Health service staff 140w
Immigration controls 524w
Industrial health & safety 651-2w
Medical research 667w
Northern Ireland 139-40w

HM Coastguard
495-8w, 649-50w
Expenditure 609-10w

HM Factory Inspectorate
see Factory Inspectorate

HM Inspectorate of Pollution
171w

HM Inspectorate of Schools
322w
Manpower 507w
Wales 266-7w, 504-5w, 507w

HMS Challenger
Decommissioning 150w, 512w

HMS Renown
132

HMS Trenchant
640w

HMS Warspite
641w

HMSO
117-9w
Packaging 26w

Hoey, Ms Kate
Debates etc.
Fire services, Greater London (20:12:91) 635-7, 638
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1261-2
Questions
Animal experiments, Food additives 344w
Children in care, Refugees 354w
Exhaust emission controls, Greater London 403-4w
Public transport, Greater London 400w
Road traffic, Greater London 404w
Trades Union Congress, Training 562w
Visas, Poland 352w

***Hogg, Mr Douglas**, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 854, 899-905
Questions
Bombings, Lockerbie 435w, 712w
Commonwealth of Independent States 259
Commonwealth of Independent States, Nuclear test ban 582w
Commonwealth of Independent States, Nuclear weapons 259, 549w
Croatia, Casualties 184w
European Security Conference, UK contributions 44w
Iran, Foreign relations 185w
Iran, Visas 710-1w
Israel, Occupied territories 264-5
Kuwait, Missing persons 435w
Libyan Arab Republic, Extradition 712w
Libyan Arab Republic, Terrorism 270-2
Middle East, Israel 185w
Middle East, Terrorism 270
Palestine, Occupied territories 263-4
Russia, Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 582w
Tunisia, Foreign policy 340w
Ukraine, Diplomatic relations 183w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 182w
Ukraine, Recognition of states 182w
United Nations, Iraq 583w
Uranium, International trade 583w
USSR, Human rights 435-6w
USSR, Nuclear weapons 257-9
"Verification in All Its Aspects" 582-3w
Yugoslavia 184w, 263
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 101-2w

Hogg, Mr Douglas—continued
Yugoslavia, Ethnic minorities 262-3
Yugoslavia, Recognition of states 184w

Hogg, Mr Norman
Questions
Defence procurement, Competition 147w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Cumbernauld 5
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 678-9

Holyrood House
Security 532w

Home energy efficiency scheme
474w
Government grants 473w

Home Office
249-50w
EC integration 100w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 408-11
Questions
Armed forces deployment 512w
Immigration controls, Complaints 100-1w

Home visits
Family doctors 619-20w, 694w

Homelessness
Armed forces discharges 386w
Easington 429w
Government grants 423w
Greater Manchester 423w
Social security recipients 86w
Wales 264-5w

Homicide
Greater London 463w
Terrorism 141-2w
Women 319w

Homicide (Amendment) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (18:12:91) 273-4
2R order read (17:01:92) 1286

Homosexuality
Prisons 350w

Hong Kong
Court of appeal 43w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1000, 1002, 1008-12
Questions
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 679

Hormone treatments
Packaging 508w, 526-7w
Wales 508w

Horses
309w, 443
Animal breeding 442-3
Military ceremonies 147w
VAT 334-5w, 613w

Hospital admissions
Mental patients 156w

Hospital beds
Charing Cross Hospital 334w
Highland Health Board 602w
Scotland 406-10w

Hospital catering
Cook-chill catering 676w

Hospital closures
Stoneyetts Hospital 150w

Hospital consultants
Job description 555w

Hospital patients
Per capita costs 364-7w
Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital 149w

Hospital patients—continued
Social security benefits 676w
Wales 364-7w

Hospital visitor benefits
85-6w

Hospital waiting lists
Charing Cross Hospital 354w
Heart diseases 332w
Surgery 51w
Transplant surgery 615w, 624w
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 51w

Hospitals
Capital investment 509w
Cardiff 507-8w
Coleraine 312w
Construction 312w
Ophthalmic services 356w
Smoking 138w
South Glamorgan Health Authority 508w, 619w
Wales 509w

House of Commons accommodation
Journalists 379-80w
Members 379-80w

House of Commons catering
Veal 642w

House of Commons debates
Select Committees 54w
Speaker's rulings & statements (13:01:92) 694-5, (14:01:92) 817, 932, (15:01:92) 1029

House of Commons passes
380w
Research assistants 99w

House of Commons questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 150-1, (18:12:91) 275

House of Commons reform
House of Commons times of sittings 54-5w

House of Commons reform of procedure
19-20

House of Commons souvenirs
54w

House of Commons special Standing Committees
55w

House of Commons staff
Speaker's rulings & statements (20:12:91) 650

House of Commons stationery
Facsimile transmission 378w

House of Commons times of sittings
16-9
House of Commons reform 54-5w

House of Fraser
Takeovers 388-9w, 596w

House purchase
Armed forces housing 384-6w
Council tenants 424w
RAF Wittering 640w
Stamp duties (15:01:92) 1064-75

Housing
Exservicemen 150w, 285-6w
Public expenditure controls 317w

Housing associations
Armed forces discharges 166-7w
Armed forces housing 384w
Mortgage defaulters 64w
Repossession orders 360-1w
Single homeless 173w
Wales 360-1w

Housing benefits
Employment training 637-8w
Northern Ireland 310w
Pensioners 146w
Social security benefits rates 87w

Housing compensation
Cardiff Bay barrage 361-2w

Housing construction
Easington 426w
Energy conservation 421w

Housing Corporation
59-62w, 66w, 108w

Housing estates
Heating 479-80w
Newtownabbey 479-80w

Housing finance
59-62w

Housing for Wales
360-1w

Housing insulation
Scotland 561-2w

Housing revenue accounts
59-62w, 108w, 644-5w
Housing subsidies 159w
Wales 159w

Housing stock
Waveney District Council 65w

Housing subsidies
Housing revenue accounts 159w

Housing tenure
Farm buildings 434w

Hove District Council
Standard spending assessments 62w

***Howard, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for Employment*
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 294-5
Questions
APEX Trust 965-8
APEX Trust, Bankruptcy 963-5
Confederation of British Industry, Industrial relations 796-7
Confederation of British Industry, Training 563w
EC social charter 562w
Employment protection, EC social policy 806
Employment Service local offices 801-2
English Tourist Board, Marketing 587-8w
Industrial democracy 797
Industrial disputes, Lost working days 563w
Industrial relations law 797
Minimum wage 797, 804
Part-time employment, Employment protection 803-4
Part-time employment, Working mothers 803-4
Strikes, France 797
Trades Union Congress, Unemployment 563-4w
Training 799-800
Training, Community development 798-9
Training, Take-up 799-800
Training & enterprise councils 805-6
Training & enterprise councils, Civil servants' secondment 4w
Working hours, EC action 563w

***Howarth, Mr Alan**, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science*
Debates etc.
Bible (20:12:91) 616-9
School admission (20:12:91) 630-4
Questions
Alzheimer's disease, Research finance 623-4w
Dept of Education & Science, EC integration 113-4w
Higher education admission 449w
HIV infection, Medical research 667w
Medical research, Pay 623w
Natural Environment Research Council, Annual reports 196w
Open University, Educational finance 668w

Howarth, Mr Alan—continued
Polytechnics 454w
Research councils, Public appointments 660-4w
Science & technology, Germany 27w
Students, Republic of Ireland 581-2w

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 63
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 234
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1236, 1244
Questions
Rent increases 430-4w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1044-7
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 502, 531-4
Questions
Millan, Bruce, RECHAR 948

Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 510-3

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 855-60

Howell, Rt Hon Denis
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1221, 1244-6

Howell, Mr Ralph
Questions
Income tax, Tax thresholds 611w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Performance indicators 636-7w

Howells, Mr Geraint
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 974-5
Questions
A44, Road works 584w
Beef, Food exports 508w
Bovine tuberculosis, Compensation 616-7w
Common agricultural policy, Wales 546-7w
Pigs, Wales 693w
Poultry, Animal welfare 506-7w
Regional government, Wales 159w
Repossession orders, Dyfed 586-7w
Sheep, Wales 693w
Sunday trading, Wales 265w
Water pollution, Wales 616w

Howells, Dr Kim
Debates etc.
Health services, Mid Glamorgan (14:01:92) 940-1
Questions
Aerospace industry 594-5w
Catalytic converters 800
Exhaust emission controls 492w
Regional aid, Expenditure 188-90w
Unemployment, Wales 617w
Valleys initiative, Expenditure 72w

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
Foreign investment in UK 946
House of Fraser, Takeovers 388-9w
Military decorations, Shops 58w
Navy Army & Air Force Institutes, Competition 511w
Navy Army & Air Force Institutes, Finance 57-8w, 512w
New Parliamentary building, Costs 511w
Pension funds, Investment 85w
Pollution control, Local government functions 428-9w
Waste disposal, Licensing 426w
Waste management, Hazardous wastes 425-6w

Hughes, Mr Robert

Hughes, Mr Robert—continued
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 591
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 54-5
Questions
Helicopters, Foreign companies in UK 154w

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 72-3, 92, 101-5
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 204
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 411-2
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace negotiations 184-5w
Business statements 1105
Development plans 169-71w
EC Environment Council 104-6w
Local government revenue, Capital investment 427-8w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Privatisation 225w

Hughes, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 687
Questions
Agricultural education 438-9
Cold weather payments 80w
Motor industry 593w

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 999, 1023-6
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1187-9, 1201
Oral question time intervention (13:01:92) 664
Questions
A27, Road construction 164-5w
Bradwell power station, Nuclear accidents 96-7w
Business & the Environment Advisory Committee 119w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 103w
Carbon dioxide, Climate 62-3w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Chlorine 329w
Church of England, Southwark 709w
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, Indonesia 420w
Dog fighting 683w
EC environmental policy, EC law 328-9w
Economic growth 612w
Environment Agency, Waste management 63-4w
Environment protection, Expenditure 169-70w
Income support, Unemployed 144w
London Docklands Development Corporation, Arts finance 664
Magnox reactors, Nuclear safety 95-6w
Mineral waters, Orders & regulations 230w
Offshore drilling 376w
Oxleas Wood, Ministers' domestic visits 658w
Ozone layer, Treaties 62w
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 642w
Rain forests, Soya beans 677w
Sunday trading, Office of Fair Trading 716w
Taxation, Energy consumption 708w
Trawsfynydd power station, Pollution monitoring 357w
Waste disposal, Departmental leaflets 167w
Waste disposal, Local government functions 63w

Human organs
Regional health authorities 521w

Human rights
East Timor 614w
Indonesia 183-4w
Kenya 330w
Sri Lanka 710w
USSR 435-6w

Humberside Holdings
(17:12:91) 147-8

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 341-3
Questions
Common agricultural policy 440

Hunt, Rt Hon David, Secretary of State for Wales
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Ministerial statements (13:01:92) 680-91
Questions
Air pollution, Wales 71-2w
Apprentices 695w
Bats, Nature conservation 136w
Beef, Food exports 508w
Bovine tuberculosis, Compensation 616-7w
British Aerospace, Ministers' domestic visits 618w
Bronglais Hospital Aberystwyth, NHS trusts 504w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Advertising controls 73w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Departmental correspondence 361w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Ground water 73-4w, 267w, 509w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Housing compensation 361-2w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Misleading advertising 268w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Water resources 267-8w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Vocational training 73w
Common agricultural policy, Wales 546-7w
Development Board for Rural Wales, Pay 506w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 615w
EC grants & loans, Wales 70-1w, 359w
Employment opportunities, Dyfed 362w
Employment schemes, Fishguard 362w
Farm incomes, Wales 71-2w
Food poisoning, Wales 271w
Forests, Land acquisition 134-5w
Further Education Funding Council for Wales, Public appointments 585-6w
Ground water, Wales 361w
NHS trusts, Wales 271-2w
Opera houses, Cardiff 507w
Pigs, Wales 693w
Poultry, Animal welfare 506-7w
Radioactive fallout, Agricultural land 265-6w
Radioactive fallout, Farms 584-5w
Railway travel, Wales 364w
RECHAR, Wales 358-9w
Regional development grants, Factory closures 269w
Regional government, Wales 159w
River Usk, Flood control 269w
RNAD Trecwn 362-3w
"Rural initiative" 159w
Sheep, Wales 693w
Shellfish, Fish conservation 135w
Shellfish, Food contamination 695w
Shotton steelworks 620w
Training & enterprise councils, South Glamorgan 73w, 271w, 360w
Trawsfynydd power station, Pollution monitoring 357w
Unemployment, Dyfed 362w
Unemployment, Wales 617w
University College Cardiff, Property development 508-9w
Valleys initiative, Expenditure 72w
Wales Tourist Board, Marketing 586w
Welsh Development Agency, Conditions of employment 695w
Welsh Development Agency, Jones, Gwyn 360w, 547-8w
Welsh Office, Disabled workers 358w
Welsh Office, Public appointments 272-82w, 503w
Wentloog Lagoon, Construction 269-70w
Wentloog Lagoon, Departmental correspondence 73w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Questions
AWE Aldermaston, Recruitment 282w
Caravan sites, Basingstoke 226w
Defence land 131
Set-aside schemes 689w

Hunterston power station
89w

Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 477-86, 489
Questions
Arms trade, Conventional weapons 340w
Council of Ministers 437w
EC external relations 182w, 255-7
EC Foreign Affairs Council 339-40w, 436-7w, 712-3w
Israel, Occupied territories 256-7
Maastricht summit 181-2w
Syrian Arab Republic, EC external relations 257
Yugoslavia 260-2, 265-6

Hydrographer of the Navy
Maps 383w

Hypothermia
Death 131w

Identity cards
Refugees 247w

ILEA
see Inner London Education Authority

Ilkley bypass
Road construction 48-9w

Illegitimate children
Teenage pregnancy 525w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 993, 1046
Questions
Cars, Instalment credit 593w
Community transport 494w

Immigrants
Personal income 251w
Republic of Ireland 251w

Immigrants' dependants
Somalia 344w

Immigration adjudicators
319-20w

Immigration appeals
Administrative delays 319-20w
Manpower 320w

Immigration Appellate Authorities
319-20w

Immigration applications
Administrative delays 688w
Indian subcontinent 688w
Members' correspondence 15-6w
Political refugees 349-50w
Refugees 339w

Immigration controls
Complaints 100-1w
HIV infection 524w

Import controls
Wood 390w

Incinerators
Construction 327w
Hazardous wastes 326w, 480-2w
Planning inquiries 423w

Income & Corporation Taxes Act 1988
Questions
5-6w

Income support
9
Community charge 67w

Income support—continued
Community charge benefits 201w
Computer applications 81w
Disabled workers 653w
Heating 634-5w
Interest payments (19:12:91) 462-8
Ministerial statements (19:12:91) 462-8
Mortgage defaulters 1-2
Mortgages 291w, 371w
Pensioners 8-9, 143-4w, 202w
Pregnant women 84w
Residential care 9, 80w, 83w, 636w
Social security benefits reductions 516w
Social security recipients 516w
Unemployed 144w
Youth training 89w

Income tax
Company cars 707-9w
Councillors' attendance allowances 441w
Tax allowances 221w, 443-4w
Tax rates & bands 611w
Tax thresholds 611w
Taxpayers 6w

India
Ministers' visits abroad 466-7w
Public records 630w
Terrorism 462w

Indian subcontinent
Immigration applications 688w
Visas 687w

Indonesia
Arms trade 582w, 640-1w
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species 420w
Human rights 183-4w

Industrial accidents
Ambrosia 22w
Chemicals 337w
Drake, Lewis 241w
Merseyside 337w

Industrial democracy
797

Industrial development
Machine tools industry 960
North East region 951-2
Rochdale 457w
West Midlands 957-8

Industrial Development Act 1982
Questions
952-3

Industrial disputes
Lost working days 563w
Office of Telecommunications 110-1w

Industrial health & safety
Asbestos 804-5
Building industry 3w
Compensation 805
EC action 633w
Health service staff 674-5w
HIV infection 651-2w

Industrial injuries scheme
Social security benefits rates 88-90w, 518w

Industrial investment
597w, 611w, 1082-3, 1087

Industrial policy
Association of British Chambers of Commerce 591w

Industrial production
956-7

Industrial relations
Confederation of British Industry 796-7

Industrial relations law
797, 809

Industrial research
Economic regions 714-6w

Industrial strategy
955, 960-1

Industrial training
Chelmsford 794-5

Industrial tribunals
348w

Industry
955

Infant mortality
126-9w

Inflation
612w, 1084-6

Inland Revenue
1082, 1092

Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
Public appointments 645w

Inner city areas
Crime prevention 268-9w
Wales 268-9w

Inner London boroughs
Local government expenditure 69-70w

Inner London Education Authority
Collections 213w

Instalment credit
Cars 593w
Fraud 593w

Insurance
Asbestosis 804-5

Integrated development operations
South Wales 359w

Intelligence services
Disclosure of information 460w
Parliamentary questions 467w, 630-1w
Public appointments 245w

Inter-City rail transport
94w, 659-60
Privatisation 655

Interest payments
291w
Income support (19:12:91) 462-8

Interest rates
Confederation of British Industry 611w
Government securities 120w
Public Works Loan Board 120w

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
62w

International Atomic Energy Agency
284w, 569w, 583w, 609w
Nuclear safeguards 476w
UK contributions 18w

International Chamber of Commerce
572w

International Civil Aviation Organisation
237-8w

International conferences
Climate 66w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 44w
Peace 286w

International Fund for Ireland
647w

International Information Centre on Special Needs Education
113w

International Red Cross
101w

International trade
Plutonium 583w
Uranium 583w

Intervention Board
78-9w

Intervention stocks
446-7
Fruit 76-7w

Intervention stocks—continued
Tobacco 190w
Vegetables 76-7w

Intimidation
Armed forces 141

Invalid care allowances
202w, 370w
British residents abroad 550w
Pensioners 635w
Social security benefits rates 202w
Social security benefits rules 549w

Invalidity benefits
Social security claims 12-3

Inverclyde enterprise zone
531w

Investment Management Regulatory Organisation
110w

Investment returns
Copeland Borough Council 328w
Rochdale Borough Council 328w

IRA
Arms trade 490-1w
Libyan Arab Republic 490-1w

Iran
EC external relations 257
Foreign relations 185w
Visas 710-1w

Iraq
Arms trade 709w, 716w, 1093
Exports 389w
Nuclear weapons 149w
Overseas aid 232w
United Nations 583w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Compensation 614-5w
Radiation hazards 583w

Iron & steel
Production 389w
Stocks of commodities 390w

Iron & steel industry
Dalzell 676
Production costs 389-90w
Scotland (13:01:92) 693, 807

Irradiated food
Food labelling 143w

Irvine, Mr Michael
Questions
Defence industries, Redundancy 1096
Maxwell companies, Occupational Pensions Board 288w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 110w, 144w
Occupational pensions, Liability 288w
Pension funds, Fraud 513w
Pension funds, Investment 82w

Isle of Grain
Railway freight transport 607w

Isle of Skye
Bridges 602w

Israel
Middle East 185w
Occupied territories 256-7, 264-5

Jack, Mr Michael, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Child benefit 4-5, 80w
Child Support Act 1991, Orders & regulations 81w
Consumer expenditure 517-20w
Family credit 5
Family credit, Earnings rules 81w
Family credit, One parent families 81w
Family credit, Social security recipients 81w

Jack, Mr Michael—continued
Heating allowances, Low incomes 204w
Income support, Pregnant women 84w
Income support, Unemployed 144w
Income support, Youth training 89w
Maintenance, Children 510w
Maintenance, Genetics 517w
National insurance contributions 85w
National insurance contributions, British residents abroad 291-2w
Retirement pensions, EC countries 550w
Severe hardship provision 143w
Social security, Maastricht summit 315w
Social security benefits 146w
Social security benefits rules, Part-time employment 86-7w
Standard of living 202-3w

Jackson, Mr Robert, Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Questions
Age discrimination 564w
Bridging allowances, Coventry 456w
Disabled workers 3-4w
Disabled workers, Training 563w
Employment opportunities, Tameside 797-8
Employment schemes, Older workers 563w
Industrial training, Chelmsford 794-5
Job release scheme, Non-contributory benefits 566w
Labour & employment, Written questions 126w
Manufacturing industries, Sheffield 564w
Prince of Wales Youth Business Trust, Upper Waiting Hall 126w
Redundancy, Northumberland 806
Textile industry, Employment opportunities 793-4
Textile industry, Government assistance 794
Trades Union Congress, Training 562w
Training, Europe 456w
Training, Heywood 454w
Training, School leaving 803
Training & enterprise councils, Contracts 634w
Training & enterprise councils, South Glamorgan 125-6w
Travel to interview scheme 241-2w
Unemployment, Chelmsford 795
Unemployment, Cumbria 801
Unemployment, EC countries 652w
Unemployment, Greater London 565w, 634w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 125w
Urban development corporations, Tameside 798
Youth training, Crewe 802
Youth training, Finance 3w
Youth training, Greater London 564w
Youth training, Labour Party 802-3
Youth training, School leaving 455w
Youth training scheme, Seaham 454w

Janman, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Members' speeches (14:01:92) 920
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 914-5, 917-20, 926-8
Questions
A13, Road construction 492w, 658-9
Criminal injuries compensation, Northern Ireland 333-4w
Job release scheme, Non-contributory benefits 566w
Ordnance Survey, Corporate plans 328w
Profit sharing, EC action 566w

Janner, Mr Greville
Questions
Business statements 1106
Israel, Occupied territories 264-5
Part-time employment, Employment protection 804

Japan
Foreign investment in UK 388w

Jessel, Mr Toby
Debates etc.
Hampton Court Green (20:12:91) 643-5, 646-7, 649-50
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 382-4
Questions
Museums & galleries, Collections 663
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 679
Switzerland, Upper Waiting Hall 435w

Jewellery
665-6

Job description
Hospital consultants 555w

Job release scheme
Non-contributory benefits 566w

Job satisfaction
Civil service unions 416w

Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 848-50
Questions
Defence research 135

Johnston, Sir Russell
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 307, 322, 368, 370, 380, 383, (19:12:91) 501, 513-5
Questions
Eastern Europe, Embassies 711-2w
EC Committee of the Regions, Scotland 705w
Gibraltar, Frontiers 43w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 682-5
Questions
Apprentices 695w
British Aerospace, Ministers' domestic visits 618w
Deeside Industrial Park, Road construction 357-8w
EC grants & loans, Wales 359w
Employment opportunities, Dyfed 362w
Employment schemes, Fishguard 362w
Forests, Land acquisition 134-5w
Heart diseases, Surgery 505-6w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Manpower 507w
Kidney patients, Wales 362w
Kinnerton School Clwyd 618w
NHS trusts, Wales 135w
Playing fields, Land acquisition 618w
RECHAR, Wales 358-9w
River Dee, Bridges 361w, 545-6w
RNAD Trecwn 362-3w
"Rural initiative" 159w
Schools, Land acquisition 618w
Shotton steelworks 620w
Teachers, Retirement 509w
Unemployment, Dyfed 362w
Welsh Office, Disabled workers 358w
Welsh Office, Public appointments 272-82w

Jones, Mr Gwilym
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 686
University Hospital of Wales, Planning permission (20:12:91) 596-601
Questions
Council housing, Empty housing 263-4w
Family doctors, Prescriptions 263w
Foreign investment in UK 144-5
Further Education Funding Council for Wales, Public appointments 585-6w
Homelessness, Wales 264-5w
Hospital patients, Per capita costs 364-7w
Housing revenue accounts, Housing subsidies 159w
National Rivers Authority Advisory Committee for Wales 272w
NHS trusts, Wales 271-2w
Smoking, Hospitals 138w

Jones, Mr Gwilym—continued
Tax reform 1094
Teacher training, Wales 75w

Jones, Gwyn
Welsh Development Agency 360w, 547-8w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 687
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 714-5
Questions
Foreign investment in UK 595w
Sewage, Ynys Mon 74-6w
Tourism, Wales 796

Jones, Mr Martyn
Questions
Building industry, Economic recession 571w
Capital investment 610w

Jones, Mr Robert B
Questions
British Petroleum, Exhibitions 109w
Police civilians, Hertfordshire 463-4w

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 974
Questions
Business statements 1100-1
Copeland Borough Council, Investment returns 328w

Journalists
House of Commons accommodation 379-80w

Judges
Age 19-20w
Kenya 102-3w
Retirement 20-2w

"Juliette"
161w

Junior hospital doctors
Doctors' & Dentists' Remuneration Review Body 26w

Jurisdiction
350w, 686w

Kashmir
180w
Public petitions (19:12:91) 557-8, (17:01:92) 1217-8

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 324-5, (19:12:91) 486-93, 545
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 819, 824-5, 829-39, 899
Questions
Yugoslavia 262

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 473
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 25
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1223, 1272, 1275
Questions
Adult education 206-7w
Defence industries 130

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 712-3
Questions
Business statements 1110
Hill livestock allowances, Departmental forms 705w

Kent
Networker trains 653
Police 12w

Kent—continued
Railway travel 492w, 652-3

Kenya
266-8
Human rights 330w
Judges 102-3w

***Key, Mr Robert**, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc.
Dangerous premises (18:12:91) 430-4
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 177
Questions
Community charge, Administrative costs 429w
Community charge, Bailiffs 66-7w
Community charge, Publicity 326w
Community charge, Tax collection 342w
Community charge exemptions, Residential care 570-1w
Copeland Borough Council, Investment returns 328w
Council tax 642w
Council tax, Administrative costs 425w
Council tax, Liability 425w
Council tax, Multiple occupation 424w
Council tax, Students 424w
Council tax exemptions, Student accommodation 424w
Local authority powers, Disclosure of information 69w
Local government borrowing 107w
Local Government Commission for England 575w
Local Government Commission for England, Expenditure 671w
Local government constituencies, Thamesmead 645w
Local government expenditure, Inner London boroughs 69-70w
Local government finance 108w
Local government revenue, Capital investment 427-8w
Local government revenue, Newcastle upon Tyne 324w
Local government staff, Pay 570w
Local income tax, Northamptonshire 63w
London Docklands Arena, Expenditure 225-6w
Public lavatories 69w
Rochdale Borough Council, Investment returns 328w
Shared ownership schemes 108w
Sports facilities, Rate rebates 69w, 429-30w
Standard spending assessments, Durham City Council 62w
Uniform business rate, Appeals 167-8w
Urban programme 642-4w

Khan, M
249w

Kidney patients
617w
Social security benefits 290-1w
Wales 362w

Kilfedder, Mr James
Debates etc.
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 769-72
Questions
Eastern Health & Social Services Board, Capital investment 332w
Economic situation, North Down 315w
Emigration, Northern Ireland 331-2w
Heart diseases, Hospital waiting lists 332w
Immigrants, Personal income 251w
Libyan Arab Republic, Terrorism 270-2
Northern Ireland health & social services trusts 315w
Pensioners, Northern Ireland 309w
Republic of Ireland 437w
South Eastern Education & Library Board, Capital investment 315w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1234-8, 1255
Questions
Lotteries, Local authority powers 342w

Kimberly Clark
Foreign investment in UK 810

King, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Calling of members (13:01:92) 695
Company cars, Taxation (20:12:91) 568-74
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 817
Questions
British Rail, Privatisation 492w
Business statements 1103-4
Dockyards, Ventilation 242w
Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991 130-1w
NHS trusts 259-62w
Recycling 171-2w
"Social Fund Manual" 537w
Unemployment benefits, Earnings rules 374w

***King, Rt Hon Tom**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 817-29, 835
Questions
Armed forces housing 138
Armed forces housing, Defence review 137-8
NATO, Nuclear test ban 148w
Nuclear weapons 132-3
Polaris submarines 132
Tactical nuclear weapons 141
TASM 140-1
Trident 139-40

King's Cross Railways Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (19:12:91) 435
Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 723-63
Order for resuming adjourned consideration read (16:01:92) 1081

King's Cross Station
(13:01:92) 723-63
Construction 495w

Kinnerton School Clwyd
618w

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 286-97
Questions
Mortgage defaulters 142-3
Tax reform, Budget 808-9
Unemployment 449-50, 1094-5

Kirklees Borough Council
Sunday trading 415w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 592
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 465
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 163-6, 181
Questions
Armed forces housing, Defence review 137-8
GATT, Textiles 621w
Housing benefits, Employment Training 637-8w
Mortgage defaulters 3
Nuclear weapons tests, Cancer 282w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 381w
Teachers, Medical examinations 578w
Textile industry, Employment opportunities 793-4
VAT, Horses 613w

Knapman, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 490-1
Questions
Beef 444

Knapman, Mr Roger—continued
Minimum wage 804

Knight, Dame Jill
Questions
Birmingham City Council, Banks 539w
Ophthalmic services, Hospitals 356w
Spectacles, Optical charges exemptions 356w

Know-how Fund
678-83w
Eastern Europe 677-8w
Latvia 470-2w

Knox, Mr David
Questions
Beef 443-4
Confederation of British Industry, Industrial relations 796-7
EC external relations 182w
Pupil-teacher ratios, Staffordshire 668-9w
Road construction, Expenditure 658

Korea
Nuclear disarmament 218-9w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Incinerators, Planning inquiries 423w

Kuwait
Missing persons 435w
Overseas trade 595w

Labelling
Domestic energy conservation 157-8w
Mineral waters 307w

Labour & employment
Written questions 126w

Labour Party
Buy British 951
Youth training 802-3

Laing, Eleanor
380w

Lamond, Mr James
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 464
Questions
Defence industries, North West region 129
Foreign investment in UK, EC labour policy 950
Kashmir 180w

Lamont, Norman
452

***Lamont, Rt Hon Norman**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 290-1, (19:12:91) 541-8
Mortgage defaulters, Ministerial statements (19:12:91) 453-61
Questions
Debts, USSR 439-40w
EC budget contributions 6w
EC social charter, UK contributions to EC budget 439w
Economic growth 1087-8
Economic policy 1084-5
Economic situation, USSR 441-2w
Foreign investment in UK 1087
Income tax, Company cars 707-9w
Industrial investment 1082-3, 1087
Inflation 1084-6
Mirror Group Newspapers, Pension funds 4w
National income, EC countries 440w
Public sector debt 544-5w
UK contributions to EC budget 4-6w

Lancashire
Motorways 387-8w
Police custody 348-9w

Land acquisition
Defence land 148w
Forestry Commission 197w

Land acquisition—continued
Forests 134-5w
Playing fields 103-4w, 215-6w, 453w, 618w, 666w
Road construction 616w
Schools 618w

Land reclamation
Nuclear weapons tests 57w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 568-9w

Land use
Forestry Commission 197w

Lang, Rt Hon Ian, Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, NHS trusts 200-2w, 298-9w
Ayr Hospital 603w
Council tax, Scotland 292w
Higher education colleges, Scotland 603-4w
Iron & steel industry, Dalzell 676
Mortgage defaulters, Scotland 602-3w
Non-domestic rates, Rating revaluations 604-5w
Objects in lieu of tax, Scotland 198-9w, 411-2w
Public appointments, Scotland 598-601w
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 669-79
Scottish Office, Annual reports 298w
Scottish Office, Civil service manpower 297w
Scottish Office, Day care of children 297w
Scottish Office, Directors 297-8w
Scottish Office, Higher civil servants 298w
Scottish Office, Pay incentives 297w
Scottish Office, Performance indicators 296-7w
Scottish Office, Publicity 297w
Scottish Office, Working hours 298w
Student numbers, Scotland 532w
Textile industry, Scotland 89w
Tree planting, Scotland 295-6w

Latham, Mr Michael
Questions
Black, John, Death 186w
EC external relations 256
Gas heaters, EC law 187w
Israel, Occupied territories 265

Latvia
Know-how Fund 470-2w

Law
Pension funds 81w

Law enforcement
Fishery protection 308w
Road tax 657w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Law reform
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 345w
Cannabis 1093
Public Records Act 1958 629w
Sunday trading 348w, 379-80w

Lawrence, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1219-34, 1266, 1272, 1285
Questions
Betting & gaming duties, Football pools 336w
Child benefit 80w
Lotteries 15
National Lottery Bill 1991/92 808
Prerogative of mercy 251w

Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Questions
Income tax, Company cars 707-9w

LD50 toxicity test
345-6w

Le Vay Committee
see Magistrates' Courts Review

Leadbitter, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 923-6

Lee, Mr John
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1228, 1232, 1284-5

Leeds Prison
Security equipment 1096-7

Leg protectors
Motorcycles 498w

Legal profession
Partnerships (16:12:91) 118

Legislation
Bank of England 543w

Leigh, Mr Edward Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs
Debates etc.
Rolls-Royce (20:12:91) 583-6
Questions
Aerospace industry 594-5w
Aerospace industry, Balance of trade 594w
Air pressure gauges, Standards specifications 173-4w
Assisted areas 953
Beer, Measurement 387-8w
British Petroleum, Exhibitions 109w
British Steel Corporation 112-3w
British Steel Corporation, Overseas investment 112-3w
Cars, Instalment credit 593w
City action teams, Administrative costs 390-1w
Cosmetics, Animal experiments 188w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Small businesses 392-6w
Devon & Cornwall Development Company, Government assistance 962
Direct mail 593w
Domestic electrical appliances, Plugs & sockets 542w
Environment, Investment 597w
Foreign investment in UK, Employment opportunities 388w
Foreign investment in UK, USA 595w
Gas heaters, EC law 187w
Government assistance to industry, Devon 953
Hearing aids, Prices 542w
Industrial development, Rochdale 457w
Industrial Development Act 1982 952-3
Industrial production 956-7
Industrial research, Economic regions 714-6w
Iron & steel, Production 389w
Iron & steel, Stocks of commodities 390w
Iron & steel industry, Production costs 389-90w
Machine tools industry, Industrial development 960
Millan, Bruce, RECHAR 948-50
Mortgages, Consumer protection 388w
Motor industry 593w
Motor industry, Buses 395w
Patients, Compensation 596w
Plugs & Sockets Etc (Safety) Regulations 1987 594w
Postal services, EC action 186w
Proteins, Research 596w
Radioactive wastes, Consultants 597w
RECHAR 948-9
Recycling, Paper 9w
Regional aid, Expenditure 188-90w
Research, Switzerland 388w
Rubber industry, Marketing 714w
Shipbuilding, EC countries 111-2w
Shipbuilding, EC grants & loans 112w
Shipbuilding, Government assistance 112w
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 541-2w
Thanet, Upper Waiting Hall 186w
Tyres, Recycling 714w

Leigh, Mr Edward—continued
Welsh Consumer Council, Public appointments 112w

Leighton, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 401-6
Questions
APEX Trust 966-7
Training, Community development 799

Leisure facilities
London Docklands Development Corporation 166w

Leith
144

LEK Partnership
Welsh Water 136w

Lennox-Boyd, Mr Mark, Under-Secretary of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Temporary immigrants, Visas (15:01:92) 1077-80
Questions
Abu Dhabi, British residents abroad 181w
Afghanistan, Peace negotiations 184-5w
Al Fasi, Muhummad 217w
Arms control, Conferences 217w
Baltic states, CFE Treaty 218w
Belize, Armed forces deployment 549w
Black, John, Death 186w
Cambodia, Bomb disposal 711w
China, Nuclear test ban 436w
Congo, Visas 186w
Diplomatic service 548-9w
East Timor 181w
East Timor, EC action 614w
East Timor, Human rights 614w
East Timor, Portugal 614w
Eastern Europe, Embassies 711-2w
Fiji, Constitutions 217w
Fiji, Elections 217w
Geneva Conventions 218w
Hong Kong, Court of appeal 43w
Indian subcontinent, Immigration applications 688w
Indonesia, Arms trade 582w
Indonesia, Human rights 183-4w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Compensation 614-5w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Radiation hazards 583w
Kashmir 180w
Korea, Nuclear disarmament 218-9w
Myanmar 268-9
Myanmar, Foreign policy 183w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, International conferences 44w
Royal Commonwealth Society, Libraries 338w
Singh, Partap, Visas 338w
Somalia, Refugees 339w
Sri Lanka, Human rights 710w
Sri Lanka, Political prisoners 710w
Sri Lanka, Students for Human Rights, 710w
Taiwan, Visas 711w
Tibet, Foreign policy 183w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 102w
UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission 583-4w
Yugoslavia, Airlines 101w

Lester, Mr Jim
Questions
Council of Ministers 437w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 436-7w
Myanmar 269
Personal income 612w

Leukaemia
Medical research 692w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 472
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1047

Lewis, Mr Terry—continued
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1126, 1202-3, 1205
Questions
Local government expenditure, Inner London boroughs 69-70w
Telephone services, Pornography 947

Lewisham
Educational finance (19:12:91) 558

Leyton
Demolition 403w

Liability
Council tax 425w
Occupational pensions 288w

Libraries
Royal Commonwealth Society 338w

Libyan Arab Republic
148w
Extradition 712w
IRA 490-1w
Terrorism 270-2

Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (19:12:91) 476
2R* (17:01:92) 1286

Licensing laws
Scotland (19:12:91) 476, (17:01:92) 1286
Sunday trading 348w

Life imprisonment
Prisoners 632w

***Lilley, Rt Hon Peter**, Secretary of State for Trade & Industry*
Questions
Association of British Chambers of Commerce, Industrial policy 591w
Confederation of British Industry, Maastricht summit 593w
Confederation of British Industry, West Midlands 591w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Civil servants' visits abroad 230w
Dept of Trade & Industry, EC integration 621w
EC labour policy, Trade competitiveness 946
Financial services, European currency unit 945-6
Foreign investment in UK 946
Foreign investment in UK, EC labour policy 945, 950
Foreign investment in UK, USA 951
Industrial development, North East region 951-2
Industrial development, West Midlands 957-8
Industrial strategy 955, 960-1
Labour Party, Buy British 951
Manufacturing industries 958-9
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 110w
Ravenscraig steelworks 955-6

LINK programme
714-6w

Litherland, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Dangerous premises (18:12:91) 428-30

Lithuania
470-2w

Little Heath School Reading
(20:12:91) 628-34

Liver diseases
Transplant surgery 529w

Liverpool
Community care grants 83w
Mental patients 156w

Liverpool Street-Chelmsford railway line
Railway travel 660

Livestock
Waste disposal 307w, 309w, 446w, 478w, 531w, 570w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Questions
"Campus Connection" 605w
Prisoners, Security 631w
Proteins, Research 596w

***Lloyd, Mr Peter**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Fire services, Greater London (20:12:91) 639-42
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1263-9
Offensive weapons (20:12:91) 609-11
Questions
Asian immigrants 162w
BBC Wales, Public appointments 349w
Betting shops, Opening hours 10w
Birmingham pub bombings 464w, 632w
Breathalysers, Police powers 465w
Broadcasting complaints, Historic buildings 344w
Broadcasting Council for Wales, Public appointments 462w
Children & Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 465-6w
Commission for Racial Equality, Asylum Bill 1991/92 461w
Drug prevention schemes, Youth clubs 684w
Ecstasy, Drug seizures 685w
Football, Public order offences 632-4w
Gambling 458w
Gambling, EC action 459w
Gambling, Television advertising 459w
Immigrants' dependants, Somalia 344w
Immigration applications, Members' correspondence 15-6w
Immigration controls, Complaints 100-1w
Lotteries 458-60w
Lotteries, Local authority powers 342w
Metropolitan Police, Parliamentary security 162w
Metropolitan Police, Police discipline 250-1w
Police, Kent 12w
Police, Manpower 462-3w
Police, Seaham 464w
Police authorities, Finance 161w
Police civilians, Hertfordshire 463-4w
Police Complaints Authority, Upper Waiting Hall 686-7w
Police national computer 341w
Political refugees, Immigration applications 349-50w
Refugees, Identity cards 247w
Refugees, Somalia 343-4w
Sikhs, Charities 461w
Stop & search, Police & ethnic minorities 251w
Sunday trading, Licensing laws 348w
Sunday trading, Police 348w
Taking & driving away, Young offenders 161w
Television licences, Video equipment 16w, 459-60w
Television programmes, Local broadcasting 15w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service 460-1w
Visas, Indian subcontinent 687w
Visas, Medical students 249w
Visas, Poland 352w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Questions
Chorlton School, Special education 447w
Industrial health & safety, Compensation 805
Low pay, North West region 174-6w
Part-time employment, Pay 175-8w
Private education, Trafford Park 27w
Standard of living 202-3w

Loans
Social Fund 82w

Local Authorities Credit Management Advisory Board
103w

Local Authorities etc (Notices of Decease) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (15:01:92) 983-4

Local authority powers
Disclosure of information 69w
Lotteries 342w

Local broadcasting
Television programmes 15w

Local education authorities
Capital investment 208-11w

Local government
Glasgow (16:12:91) 119

Local Government Act 1966
Questions
466w

Local government borrowing
107w
Fixed interest securities 117w

Local Government Boundary Commission for England
645w

Local Government Commission for England
575w
Expenditure 671w

Local government constituencies
Thamesmead 645w

Local government expenditure
Greater Manchester 69-70w
Inner London boroughs 69-70w
Road works 44w
Standard spending assessments 172-4w

Local government finance
107-8w
Community care 522w
Ministerial statements (13:01:92) 680-91
Passenger transport executives 93-4w
Scotland 560-1w
Wales (13:01:92) 680-91

Local Government Finance Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Rep (16:12:91) 22-118
Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 155-245

Local government functions
Air pollution control 573-4w
Civil defence 16-7w
Pollution control 428-9w
Sunday trading 567w
Waste disposal 63w

Local government pensions
Northern Ireland 489w
Pension funds 489w

Local government revenue
Capital investment 427-8w
Council house sales 437-8w
Newcastle upon Tyne 324w
Scotland 199-200w

Local government services
Contracts for services 539w
Scotland 295w

Local government social services
Day care of children 507w, 546w

Local government staff
Pay 570w

Local government stocks & bonds
106w, 644w

Local income tax
Northamptonshire 63w

Lockerbie
Bombings 435w, 469w, 534w, 712w

Loft insulation
671w

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 991, 1001, 1014-8, 1034
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 725
Questions
Business statements 1105
Cold weather payments 10

London Ambulance Service
526w
Emergency calls 558w

London Arts Board
668

London Buses
494w

London Docklands Arena
Expenditure 225-6w

London Docklands Development Corporation
491w
Arts finance 664
Leisure facilities 166w

London Docklands Railway Bill 1989/90
Debates etc.
Royal assent (19:12:91) 476

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham etc) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Rep* (15:01:92) 945

London Regional Transport
651
Investment 495w

London Tilbury & Southend line
Railway travel 654

London Underground
228-30w, 495w
Escalators 494-5w
Passengers 656

Londonderry
Hazardous wastes 480-2w
Water pollution 477w

Lord, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Poultry (16:12:91) 124

Lord Chancellor
232w, 249-50w
Professional qualifications 233w

Lorries
Road accidents 499w
Road damage 661
Speed limits 398w, 654w

Lost working days
Industrial disputes 563w

Lotteries
15, 458-60w, 665
Arts finance 664
Local authority powers 342w

Lough Foyle
Fishing catches 312-4w

Low flying
Armed forces training 380w

Low incomes
Domestic energy conservation 421-2w
Heating allowances 204w

Low pay
North West region 174-6w
Women 456w

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Questions
Brazil, Foreign policy 180w
Community care grants, Liverpool 83w
Navy 148w

Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 297-300
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1238-41

Lung diseases
Medical equipment 269-71w, 506w, 589w

Lyceum Theatre
Dance 705w

Lygo Committee
see Prison Service Management Review

M4
135w
Road closures 49w

M20
Road construction 164w, (17:01:92) 1287-94

M25
502w
Environmental impact assessment 501w
Military vehicles 382w

M27
500-1w

M66
Road construction 492w

Maastricht summit
43-4w, 98w, 100w, 102w, 113-4w, 181-2w, 233w, 255-6, (18:12:91) 275-427, 436w, (19:12:91) 477-555, 562w, 565-6w, 621w
Confederation of British Industry 593w
Occupational pensions 636w
Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 218w
Social security 515w
VAT 335w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 875-8
Questions
Annual reports, Ministry of Defence 56w
Annual reports, Scottish Office 298w
Civil service agencies, Dept of the Environment 419w
Civil service manpower, Dept of the Environment 418w
Civil service manpower, Scottish Office 297w
Cuba, Foreign policy 185w
Day care of children, Dept of the Environment 421w
Day care of children, Scottish Office 297w
Day nurseries, Ministry of Defence 56w
Directors, Dept of Health 50w
Directors, Dept of the Environment 418w, 421w
Directors, Ministry of Defence 56-7w
Directors, Scottish Office 297-8w
Directors, Treasury 117w
Higher civil servants, Dept of the Environment 418-9w
Higher civil servants, Ministry of Defence 55w
Higher civil servants, Scottish Office 298w
Pay incentives, Dept of the Environment 419w
Pay incentives, Scottish Office 297w
Performance indicators, Dept of the Environment 417-8w
Performance indicators, Scottish Office 296-7w
Performance indicators, Treasury 117-9w
Publicity, Dept of the Environment 418w
Publicity, Scottish Office 297w
Unemployment, Scotland 447-8
Working hours, Dept of the Environment 421w
Working hours, Scottish Office 298w

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Debates etc.
Cambuslang, Public petitions (16:12:91) 119
Questions
Balance of trade, Manufactured goods 595w

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 592
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 867-9
Questions
Guided weapons 284w
Nuclear weapons deployment 284w
Polaris 283w
Sheep, Export of live animals 639w
Trident missiles 283w
Trident missiles, Defence research 283w

McFall, Mr John
Questions
Nuclear weapons 136

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 770, 779-81
Questions
Carers' premium, Social security benefits rules 84-5w
EC grants & loans, Northern Ireland 1093-4
Fishing quotas 76w
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 305w
Housing benefits, Northern Ireland 310w
Invalid care allowances 202w
Invalid care allowances, Social security benefits rates 202w
Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, Computer applications 312w
Pensioners, Income support 202w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits rates 288w
Social security benefits uprating, Administrative delays 202w
Special education, Northern Ireland 646w

McGranaghan, John
Compensation 350w

MacGregor, Rt Hon John, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 469-76
Questions
Access to Parliament 17-8, 548w
Access to Parliament, Handicapped 18
Business statements 1099-113
European Standing Committees 20
House of Commons accommodation, Members 379-80w
House of Commons catering, Veal 642w
House of Commons debates, Select Committees 54w
House of Commons passes 380w
House of Commons passes, Research assistants 99w
House of Commons reform of procedure 19-20
House of Commons souvenirs 54w
House of Commons special Standing Committees 55w
House of Commons stationery, Facsimile transmission 378w
House of Commons times of sittings 16-9, 54-5w
Ministerial policy advisors 380w
New Members, Members' facilities 511w
New Parliamentary building, Costs 511w
Palace of Westminster, Mobility of disabled 379w
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 642w
Parliamentary security, Parliamentary recess 55w
Sunday trading, Law reform 379-80w
Top Salaries Review Body, Members' allowances 380w
Written questions, Members 378-9w

Machine tools industry
Industrial development 960

McKay, Mr Allen
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1002-3, 1007
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 160-2, 168, 196

McKay, Mr Allen—continued
Questions
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 446

MacKay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 985
Questions
Africa, Democracy 269-70
Business statements 1107
Coalite Group, Dioxins 171w
Foreign investment in UK 953-4
Halons, Fire services 172w
Inflation 1084
Mortgage defaulters 3

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 27, 37, 53-8, 63

Maclean, Mr David, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture Fisheries & Food
Questions
Agricultural chemicals, Imports 191w
Animal welfare 300w
Animal welfare, EC action 300w
Badgers Act 1991, Licensing 75-6w, 142w, 189-90w, 308w
Bovine tuberculosis, Badgers 446w, 638w
Bovine tuberculosis, Cattle 446w
Bovine tuberculosis, Deer 446w
Eggs, Food labelling 189w
Food & Drink Federation, Exhibitions 445w
Food labelling 300-1w
Horses 309w
Livestock, Waste disposal 307w, 309w, 446w
Mineral waters, Food standards 445w
Mineral waters, Orders & regulations 230w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Small businesses 191w
Papain, Slaughterhouses 191w
Poultry 437
Poultry, Animal welfare 436-7
Poultry meat, Exports 189w
Sheep, Export of live animals 639w
Slaughterhouses, Rendering industry 308w
Slaughterhouses, Waste disposal 308w
Veal 441-2

McLeish, Mr Henry
Questions
Employment Service local offices 801-2

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Questions
APEX Trust 966
Fishery protection, Scotland 197-8w
Prison staff 14w
St Charles' Youth Treatment Centre, Security 256w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick, Under-Secretary of State for Transport
Debates etc.
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 912-6, 919, 932-3
Railway travel, Greater Manchester (13:01:92) 787-92
Questions
Air fares, EC law 500w
Aircraft noise, Noise control 492-3w
Aircrew, Alcoholic drinks 47w
Airlines, Citizen's Charter 240w
Airport security 237-8w
Airport security, Scotland 46w
Clyde Port Authority, Privatisation 608w
Cornelis Johanna BM 204, Compensation 93w
Dept of Transport, Small businesses 164w
Ferries, Shipping safety 657-8
Helicopters, Foreign companies in UK 154w
HM Coastguard, Expenditure 609-10w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick—continued
MV Richard Montgomery, Wrecks 49w
Plutonium, Air freight transport 609w
Plymouth Airport, Safety 237w
Port of London Authority, Police 402w
Ports, Accounting 162w
Ports, Productivity 536w
Ports, Tilbury 400-1w
River Thames, Water transport 46w
RMS St Helena, Working conditions 163-4w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Safety standards 657
Sea rescue 495-7w, 658
Sea rescue, Manpower 497w, 649-50w
Sea rescue, Offices 497-8w
Sealink 239w
Shipping safety, Design 502w
Shipping safety, Inquiries 502w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Privatisation 238-9w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, RENAVAL 501w
Travelling expenses, Civil service recruitment 657w
Trust ports, Privatisation 239-40w

McMaster, Mr Gordon
Questions
Disabled workers, Training 563w
Industrial production 956
Textile industry, Government assistance 794

McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 485
Questions
Aircrew, Alcoholic drinks 47w
Food aid, Eastern Europe 445w
Human organs, Regional health authorities 521w
Nuclear weapons 135-6

McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1012-4
Questions
Agricultural chemicals, Imports 191w

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 72
Questions
Commission for Racial Equality, Asylum Bill 1991/92 461w
Immigration appeals, Administrative delays 319-20w
Immigration appeals, Manpower 320w
Income support, Mortgage defaulters 1-2
India, Ministers' visits abroad 466-7w
India, Public records 630w
Leeds Prison, Security equipment 1096-7
Menwith Hill, Trespass 605w
Menwith Hill, US bases 512-3w
Public Records Act 1958, Law reform 629w
Sikhs, Charities 461w
Singh, Partap, Departmental correspondence 469w
Singh, Partap, Visas 338w
Terrorism, Confiscation orders 462w
Terrorism, India 462w
United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service 460-1w
Uruguay round, Textiles 960

Madel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 466
Questions
Car tax 800
EC social charter 562w

Magharafelt Primary School
Repairs & maintenance 312w

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 473-4
Questions
AIDS, Death 139w
Criminal proceedings, Republic of Ireland 179-80w
Detention centres, Castlereagh 141w
Doherty, Daniel, Terrorism 59w
Hepatitis, Northern Ireland 138-40w
Hepatitis, Vaccination 139w
HIV infection, Health service staff 140w
HIV infection, Northern Ireland 139-40w
IRA, Libyan Arab Republic 490-1w
Livestock, Waste disposal 446w, 478w, 531w, 570w
Swimming, Primary education 140w
Terrorism, Homicide 141-2w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 140-1w

Magistrates
Community charge 22w
Coventry 22w
Newcastle upon Tyne 205w

Magistrates' courts
Administrative delays 541w
Rochdale 463w

Magistrates' Courts Review
249-50w

Magnox reactors
98w
Nuclear safety 95-6w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Health Benefits Bill, 1R (14:01:92) 814-6
Pensioners, Public petitions (16:12:91) 119
Questions
East Timor 181w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 135
Sri Lanka, Human rights 710w
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 710w
Sri Lanka, Political prisoners 710w
Sri Lanka, Students for Human Rights, 710w

Maintenance
Children 510w
Genetics 517w

Major, Rt Hon John, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 275-86, 296
Questions
Advisory Council on Science & Technology, Public appointments 658-60w
Baltic states, Technical assistance 232-3w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International Inquiry 629w
Bombings, Lockerbie 469w
Cold weather payments 146
Constituency size 542w
Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte, Prime Minister 469w
Council housing 450-1
Defamation, Damages 144
Defence 1097-8
Defence industries, Redundancy 1096
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 124-5w
Doctors' & Dentists' Remuneration Review Body, Junior hospital doctors 26w
EC grants & loans, Northern Ireland 1093-4
EC integration, Charities 468w
EC integration, European parties 468w, 658w
EC integration, Treaties 233w
EC social charter 125w, 180w
Economic & monetary union 448-9
Educational finance, Cambridgeshire 141-2
Employment training 451-2
Environment protection 577w
Espionage, Eastern Europe 629w
European central bank, Manchester City Council 125w

Major, Rt Hon John—continued
Family doctors, Budgeting 142
Foreign investment in UK 144-5
Foreign investment in UK, Assisted areas 576w
Govan Shipbuilders 452
Government achievements 22-5w
Greater London, Departmental correspondence 468w
HMSO, Packaging 26w
India, Public records 630w
Industrial relations law 809
Intelligence services, Parliamentary questions 467w, 630-1w
Iraq, Arms trade 1093
Iron & steel industry, Scotland 807
Kimberly Clark, Foreign investment in UK 810
Lamont, Norman 452
Leeds Prison, Security equipment 1096-7
Leith 144
Lord Chancellor, Professional qualifications 233w
MI5, Public appointments 467w
Ministers 232w
Mortgage defaulters 142-5, 449
National insurance contributions, Earnings limits 1095-6
National Lottery Bill 1991/92 808
Nuclear weapons, USSR 26w
Nuclear weapons deployment 469w
Nuclear weapons policy 810
Nuclear weapons tests 469w
Nuclear weapons tests, USA 469w
Official engagements 233w, 543w, 630w
Oxleas Wood, Ministers' domestic visits 658w
Perez de Cuellar, Javier 450
Prime Minister, Civil servants 660w
Public Records Act 1958, Law reform 629w
Radioactive waste disposal 577w
Railway transport, Privatisation 807-8
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 1096
RECHAR, Disclosure of information 467w
Roman Catholic church 468w
Singh, Partap, Departmental correspondence 469w
Standard of living 809-10
Standing charges 450
Sunday trading 334w, 448, 810-1
Tax reform 810, 1094
Tax reform, Budget 808-9
10 Downing Street, Televisions 660w
UN Conference on Environment & Development 577w, 630w
UN Security Council 807
Unemployment 449-50, 1094-5
Unemployment, Scotland 447-8
Warships, New Zealand 334w
Wexham Park Hospital, NHS trusts 146
"Women & the Environment" 577w
World Memorial Day 25-6w
Written questions, Government achievements 468w

Management agreements
Sites of special scientific interest 533w

Managers
Residential care of children 252-3w

Manchester
Council housing finance 425w

Manchester City Council
European central bank 125w

Manchester Metrolink
(13:01:92) 784-92

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 222
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 707
Questions
EC external relations, Eastern Europe 183w

Mans, Mr Keith—continued
Marines, Armed forces women 161w
River Wyre barrage 375w

"Manual of Environmental Policy"
UK contributions 672w

Manufactured exports
575w, 610w

Manufactured goods
Balance of trade 595w

Manufacturing industries
958-9
Sheffield 564w

Maples, Mr John, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Bank of England, Legislation 543w
Business & the Environment Advisory Committee 119w
Civil service, Working conditions 439w
Debts written off, Banks 438w
EC Finance Council 222-4w
Economic situation, Statistics 219w
Government data network 438w
Mortgage defaulters 545w
Oil revenues, North Sea oil 575w
Personal income 612w
Public Works Loan Board, Interest rates 120w
Retail price index, Sunday trading 6w
Retail trade 439w
Treasury, Civil service dispersal 165w
Treasury, Directors 117w
Treasury, Performance indicators 117-9w
Written questions, Costs 544w

Maps
Hydrographer of the Navy 383w

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 689-90
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1064-7
Questions
Fiji, Constitutions 217w
Fiji, Elections 217w
Higher civil servants, Women 667
Railway Inspectorate, Escalators 337-8w

Marie Stopes International
Government grants 470w

Marine animals
Research 151-2w
Sea pollution 151-2w

Marines
Armed forces women 161w

Marketing
English Tourist Board 587-8w
Rubber industry 714w
Wales Tourist Board 586w

Markets
Beef premiums 639w

Marland, Mr Paul
Questions
Common agricultural policy 441

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 311, 316, (19:12:91) 487
Questions
Common agricultural policy 440
Nationalisation, Water supply industry 1081
Yugoslavia 265-6

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Standing charges 450
Trades Union Congress, Unemployment 563-4w

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc. .
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 92, 95
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 237-8
Questions
Arts sponsorship 417w
Business statements 1101-2
Church Commissioners, Investment 13
Civil Service College, Cost effectiveness 95w
Cyprus, Foreign relations 185w
Foreign investment in UK, EC labour policy 945
House of Commons times of sittings 18-9
M25 502w
Ports, Productivity 536w
Prisoners, Life imprisonment 632w

Martin, Mr David
Questions
Handicap benefits 83-4w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Questions
Warships 133-4

Martlew, Mr Eric
Questions
Cold weather payments, Social security benefits rules 373-4w
Cold weather payments, Social security recipients 373w
Old persons' pensions, Social security benefits uprating 374w

Maternal mortality
126-9w

Mates, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 839-44
Questions
RAF Wittering, House purchase 640w

Maude, Mr Francis, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1066, 1073-4
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, 1R (15:01:92) 1075
Questions
British Telecom, Privatisation 543-4w
Car allowances, Voluntary work 119w
Corporation tax, Self-employed 225w
Corporation tax, Tax rates & bands 225w
Corporation tax, Taxpayers 6w
Counter inflation policy 612w
EC Finance Council, Direct taxation 120w
Enterprise zones, Tax allowances 7-8w
ESOPs 1091-2
European central bank 610w
European currency unit 610w
Foreign investment in UK, EC countries 120-1w
Income tax, Councillors' attendance allowances 441w
Income tax, Tax allowances 221w, 443-4w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 611w
Income tax, Tax thresholds 611w
Inflation 612w
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 612w
Mortgages 708w
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 221-2w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Privatisation 225w
Oil revenues 165w
Personal income 443w
Personal tax allowances 7w, 220-1w
Personal tax allowances, Tax rates & bands 123-4w
Personal taxation, Tax burden 121-4w
Privatisation, Income 119w
Public sector, Opinion polls 120w
Shareholders 443w
Tax allowances, Health insurance 221w

Maude, Mr Francis—continued
Tax allowances, Tax yields 335w
Tax burden 611w
Tax collection, Company liquidations 1092
Tax reform 119w
Tax reform, Retrospective legislation 1082
Taxation, Energy consumption 708w
Taxpayers 219-20w
Taxpayers, Personal income 220w
UN Economic Commission for Europe 123w
Unitary taxation 5-6w
Voluntary contributions 438-9w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian, Minister of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Belfast Prison, Explosions 646w
Capital investment, Northern Ireland 478-9w
Criminal damage, Compensation 310-1w
Criminal injuries compensation, Northern Ireland 333-4w
Criminal injuries compensation, Sexual offences 477w
Criminal proceedings, Republic of Ireland 179-80w
Detention centres, Castlereagh 141w
Doherty, Daniel, Terrorism 59w
Education, Northern Ireland 310w
IRA, Libyan Arab Republic 490-1w
Magharafelt Primary School, Repairs & maintenance 312w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 310w
Public expenditure controls, Strangford 317w
Road construction, Northern Ireland 646-7w
South Eastern Education & Library Board, Capital investment 315w
Special education, Northern Ireland 646w
Students, Tuition fees 647w
Swimming, Primary education 140w
Terrorism, Arson 696-7w
Terrorism, Homicide 141-2w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 140-1w, 688-9w
University of Ulster, Student numbers 317w, 647w
Urban development grants, Northern Ireland 647w

Maxton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 39-40, 46-7, 60, 62, 72, 74-6, 80-2, 104
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 160, 162-3, 169, 180, 183-7, 201-2, 231, 241
Questions
Business statements 1112-3
Crime, Scotland 292-4w
Employment training, Scotland 530w
Hospital beds, Scotland 406-10w
Public appointments, Scotland 598-601w

Maxwell companies
Occupational Pensions Board 288w
Pension funds 110w, 144w

Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Questions
EC external relations 256-7
Exeter bypass, Consultants 164w
Government assistance to industry, Devon 953

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Attorney-General
Questions
Ambrosia, Industrial accidents 22w
Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1992 319w
Divorce settlements 205w
Homicide, Women 319w
Immigration appeals, Administrative delays 319-20w
Immigration appeals, Manpower 320w
Judges, Age 19-20w

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick—continued
Judges, Retirement 20-2w
"Juliette" 161w
Magistrates, Community charge 22w
Magistrates, Newcastle upon Tyne 205w
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 607w
Repossession orders, Dyfed 586-7w
Sunday trading 321w, 537w
Sunday trading, European Court of Justice 415w, 567w
Sunday trading, Local government functions 567w
Takeover Panel, Defamation 567w
Treaty of Rome 320w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 462-4
Questions
Average earnings, EC countries 241w
Community charge, Income support 67w
Consumer expenditure 517-20w
Homelessness, Social security recipients 86w
Hospital visitor benefits 85-6w
Income support, Computer applications 81w
Income support, Social security recipients 516w
Income support, Youth training 89w
Industrial injuries scheme, Social security benefits rates 88-90w, 518w
Mortgage defaulters 3-4, 545w
National insurance contributions, British residents abroad 291-2w
Occupational pensions 6-7
Pension funds, Ringfenced funding 287w
Personal income 443w
Retirement pensions, EC countries 550w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits rates 87-8w, 368w
Retirement pensions, Social security reform 367-8w
Social security benefits 146w
Social security benefits rules, Part-time employment 86-7w
Supplementary benefits, Social security benefits rates 371-2w
Unemployment, EC countries 652w
Widows, Pensions 86w

Meadowell Estate
Urban programme 167w

Meale, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1021-3
Questions
GATT, Textiles 109w

Measurement
Beer 387-8w

Medical audit
556-7w

Medical certificates
Social security claims 676w

Medical education
Sickle cell disease 527-8w

Medical equipment
Diabetes 256w
Lung diseases 269-71w, 506w, 589w
Wales 269-71w, 506w
Waste disposal 653w

Medical ethics
Abortion 355w,
Genetic engineering 673w

Medical examinations
Teachers 578w

Medical records
Disclosure of information 52w

Medical rehabilitation
Brain injuries 625-6w

Medical research
Arachnoiditis 355w
Cancer 138w
Drug prevention schemes 674w
HIV infection 667w
Leukaemia 692w
Pay 623w

Medical Research Council
660-4w

Medical students
Visas 249w

Medical treatments
Breast cancer 627w
Drug prevention schemes 674w
Sickle cell disease 528w
Thalassaemia 528w

Meed International
716w

Mellor, Rt Hon David, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Balance of trade 543w
Bus services 336w
Capital investment 165-6w, 610w, 1086
Economic growth 612w
Economic policy 1081-2
Exchange rate mechanism 1086
Exports 1088
Industrial investment 611w
Local government borrowing, Fixed interest securities 117w
Local government revenue, Council house sales 437-8w
Manufactured exports 575w, 610w
Nationalisation, Water supply industry 1081
Privatisation, Income 1081

Members
House of Commons accommodation 379-80w
Written questions 378-9w

Members' allowances
Top Salaries Review Body 380w

Members' attendance
Speaker's rulings & statements (13:01:92) 684, (15:01:92) 985-6

Members' conduct
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 217, (18:12:91) 273, 297, (13:01:92) 684, 773, (14:01:92) 814

Members' correspondence
Administrative delays 684w, 686w
Immigration applications 15-6w

Members' facilities
New Members 511w

Members' interventions
Speaker's rulings & statements (14:01:92) 920

Members' speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 149, 150, (20:12:91) 591, (13:01:92) 675, (14:01:92) 817, 865, 891, (16:01:92) 1172

Memorial Fund for Disaster Relief
25-6w

MENCAP
see Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults

Mental health community care
256w

Mental patients
Ethnic groups 156w
Hospital admissions 156w
Liverpool 156w

Mentally disturbed offenders
10w

Mentally handicapped
Babies 129-30w

Menwith Hill
Trespass 605w
US bases 512-3w

Merseyside
Industrial accidents 337w
Pollution monitoring 325w

Meteorological satellites
Greenhouse effect 63w

Methane
Electricity generation 17w

Metropolitan Police
251w
Government departments 162w
Parliamentary security 162w
Police discipline 250-1w

Mexico
Ministers' visits abroad 665-6w

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 685
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 399-401
Questions
Residential care, Income support 9

MFV Antares
Shipping accidents 640w

MI5
Public appointments 467w

Michael, Mr Alun
Questions
Bronglais Hospital Aberystwyth, NHS trusts 504w
Cardiff Institute for the Blind, Defence contracts 387w
Crime prevention, Closed circuit television 246-7w, 343w
Crime prevention, Inner city areas 268-9w
Crime prevention, Wales 270w
Criminal liability, Minors 459w
Day care of children, Local government social services 507w, 546w
Employment training 451-2
Family doctors, Home visits 619-20w, 694w
Food labelling 300-1w
Hormone treatments, Packaging 508w, 526-7w
M4, Road closures 49w
NHS trusts, Wales 546w
Opera 664-5
Police, Manpower 462-3w
Political risk reinsurance 954-5
Prescription charges 589-90w
Prescription charges, Packaging 527w
Prescription charges, Wales 510w, 547-8w, 585w
Prescription drugs, Wales 617w
Prescriptions 626-7w
Prescriptions, Family health services authorities 552-6w
Prescriptions, Regional health authorities 555w
Prescriptions, Wales 547-8w
Safer cities scheme 246w
Safer cities scheme, Expenditure 245-6w
Safer cities scheme, Wales 245w
Severn bridge, Road closures 135w
Sunday trading 465w, 537w
Sunday trading, European Court of Justice 415w
Tax collection, Company liquidations 1092
Treaty of Rome 320w
Young offenders 347w
Young offenders, Prosecutions 540-1w

Michael Hopkins & Partners
228-30w

Michie, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1142-3
Oral questions, Points of order (17:12:91) 150

Michie, Mr Bill—continued
Questions
Crisis loans 371w
Defence industries 129-30
Housing associations, Armed forces discharges 166-7w
Manufacturing industries, Sheffield 564w
VAT, Maastricht summit 335w
Yugoslavia 265

Michie, Mrs Ray
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 37-40, 59, 80
Questions
Business statements 1107-8
Civil defence, Communication engineering 16w
Civil defence, Nuclear accidents 16-7w
Radioactivity, Coastal areas 90w
Sea rescue, Manpower 649-50w
Set-aside schemes 77-8w
Set-aside schemes, Crops 153w
Set-aside schemes, Scotland 152w

Mid Glamorgan
Health services (14:01:92) 936-44

Mid Glamorgan Health Authority
620w, (14:01:92) 936-44

Middle East
Israel 185w
Terrorism 270

Midland Metro
Government grants 398-9w

Migration
Northern Ireland 477-8w

Military ceremonies
Horses 147w

Military decorations
Shops 58w

Military vehicles
M25 382w

Milk
Dioxins 435

Millan, Bruce
RECHAR 948-50

Mills, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Official Report (14:01:92) 813
Questions
Industrial relations law 809

Mineral waters
Food standards 445w
Labelling 307w
Orders & regulations 230w

Mines
571-2w

Minesweepers
136

Mineworkers' pension scheme
British Coal Corporation 17w

Minimum wage
562w, 797, 804
Hairdressing 587w

Mining
Exports 594w

Ministerial policy advisors
380w

Ministerial speeches
Nuclear weapons 606w
Speaker's rulings & statements (14:01:92) 932

Ministerial statements
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 587-95
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 969-82

Ministerial statements—continued
Income support (19:12:91) 462-8
Local government finance (13:01:92) 680-91
Mortgage defaulters (19:12:91) 453-61
Speaker's rulings & statements (16:12:91) 21, (19:12:91) 456-7, 473, (20:12:91) 590, (13:01:92) 684

Ministers
232w

Ministers' domestic visits
British Aerospace 618w
Colleges of education 451-2w
Oxleas Wood 658w
Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr 584w

Ministers' visits abroad
India 466-7w
Mexico 665-6w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food
690w
Civil servants 690w
Civil service redundancies 193-4w
Government department reorganisation 193-4w
Small businesses 191w

Ministry of Defence
Annual reports 56w
Civil service redundancies 387w
Day nurseries 56w
Directors 56-7w
Dorset 139
Empty property 148w
Higher civil servants 55w
Redundancy pay 386-7w

Minors
Criminal liability 459w

Mirror Group Newspapers
Pension funds 4w

Miscarriages of justice
Compensation 350w

Misleading advertising
Cardiff Bay barrage 268w

Missing persons
Kuwait 435w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 990
Questions
British Telecom, Privatisation 543-4w
Business statements 1111-2
Industrial disputes, Lost working days 563w
Inflation 1084
Millan, Bruce, RECHAR 949
Road traffic, Nottingham 491w
Vietnam, Overseas aid 231-2w
Written questions, Costs 544w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
Motor industry 593w

Mitchell, Sir David
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 348-50
Questions
Corporation tax, Self-employed 225w
Environment Protection Act 1990, Small businesses 168w
Network SouthEast, Compensation 239w
Small businesses, Dept of Education & Science 196w
Small businesses, Dept of Employment 178w
Small businesses, Dept of Health 157w
Small businesses, Dept of the Environment 433w
Small businesses, Dept of Trade & Industry 392-6w
Small businesses, Dept of Transport 164w
Small businesses, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 191w

Mitchell, Sir David—continued
Small businesses, Northern Ireland Office 317-8w
Small businesses, Scottish Office 410-1w

Moate, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 912, 926, 930
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1067-9
Questions
British Rail, Citizen's Charter 494w
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 299w

Mobility of disabled
EC action 46-7w
Palace of Westminster 379w

Monktonhall colliery
377w

Monro, Sir Hector
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 975-6
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 52-3
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Tax harmonisation 442-3w
Beef 437-8
Higher education colleges, Scotland 603-4w
Tree planting, Scotland 295-6w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Greater Manchester (13:01:92) 784-7

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Questions
Ravenscraig steelworks 954

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 990
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1148-52, 1176-7, 1180-1, 1203-4
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 690
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 548
Questions
Alternative energy, Electricity generation 18w
Alternative energy, Finance 18w
Alternative energy, Research finance 18w
Alternative energy, Town & country planning 67w
BBC Wales, Public appointments 349w
Bridgend General Hospital, Ophthalmic services 620w
Broadcasting Council for Wales, Public appointments 462w
Cancer, Medical research 138w
Carbon tax 327-8w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Advertising controls 73w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Departmental correspondence 361w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Ground water 73-4w, 267w, 509w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Housing compensation 361-2w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Misleading advertising 268w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Water resources 267-8w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Vocational training 73w
Channel tunnel, Railway freight transport 493-4w
Cold weather payments, Disclosure of information 372-3w
Cold weather payments, Social security recipients 373w
Community care grants, Drug abuse 550-1w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri—continued
Community care grants, Social security claims 552w
Development Board for Rural Wales, Pay 506w
Directors, Pay 231w
EC social charter 102w, 242w
Electricity distribution 376-7w
Electricity generation 377w
Electricity generation, Competition 377-8w
Electricity (Non-Fossil Fuel Sources) (England & Wales) Order 1990 17-8w
Employment training, Day care of children 338w
Energy conservation, Energy research 243w
Energy management assistance scheme 713-4w
European Energy Charter 242-3w
Export credit guarantees 9-10w
Flue gas desulphurisation 243w
Flue gas desulphurisation, EC countries 243w
Gas heating, Gas safety 336-7w
Ground water, Wales 361w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Wales 266-7w, 504w
Hospitals, Capital investment 509w
Hospitals, Cardiff 507-8w
Hospitals, South Clamorgan Health Authority 508w, 619w
Housing associations, Repossession orders 360-1w
Hypothermia, Death 131w
Industrial research, Economic regions 714-6w
Lung diseases, Medical equipment 269-71w, 506w, 589w
Maintenance, Children 510w
Maintenance, Genetics 517w
Methane, Electricity generation 17w
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 607w
NHS, Cost effectiveness 618-9w
NHS finance, Wales 137-8w, 363-4w
NHS treatment centres, Wales 618w
Nuclear safety, Technical assistance 243-4w
Opera houses, Cardiff 507w
Photovoltaics, Energy research 99w
Prince of Wales Hospital Cardiff, Orthopaedics 619w
Public participation in planning 108w
Radioactive fallout, Agricultural land 265-6w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 656w
Railway signals, Railway safety 654
RECHAR, Disclosure of information 467w
Regional development grants, Factory closures 269w
River Ely, Water pollution 137w
River Usk, Flood control 269w
St David's Hospital Cardiff 616w
Shareholders 443w
Sizewell B 713w
Sizewell B, Non-fossil fuel obligation 713w
Training & enterprise councils, Contracts 634w
Training & enterprise councils, South Glamorgan 73w, 125-6w, 271w, 360w
University College Cardiff, Property development 508-9w
Water treatment, EC law 430w
Welsh Consumer Council, Public appointments 112w
Welsh Development Agency, Conditions of employment 695w
Welsh Development Agency, Jones, Gwyn 360w, 547-8w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Offices 136-7w
Welsh Water, Electricity supply industry 136w
Welsh Water, LEK Partnership 136w
Wentloog Lagoon, Construction 269-70w
Wentloog Lagoon, Departmental correspondence 73w

Morley, Mr Elliot
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 588-9

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Questions
Fishing gear, English Channel 689w
Fishing vessels, Inspections 689w, 691w
Rubber industry, Marketing 714w
Tyres, Recycling 714w
Veal 442

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Questions
Breast cancer, Medical treatments 627w
European central bank, Manchester City Council 125w
Hearing aids 520-1w
Hearing aids, Prices 542w
International Information Centre on Special Needs Education 113w
Mirror Group Newspapers, Pension funds 4w
Occupational pensions, Sex discrimination 636w
Social security benefits rules, Absence abroad 550w
VAT, Tax rates & bands 612w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Questions
Hong Kong, Court of appeal 43w

Morris, Mr Michael
Questions
Local government staff, Pay 570w
Sexual offences, Crimes outside national territories 350w

Morrison, Sir Charles
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 977

Mortgage defaulters
2-4, 142-5, 449, 545w
Housing associations 64w
Income support 1-2
Ministerial statements (19:12:91) 453-61
Repossession orders 607w, 612w, (19:12:91) 453-61
Scotland 602-3w
South Wales 507w
Wales 607w

Mortgages
708w
Consumer protection 388w
Income support 291w, 371w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1017-21
Questions
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 439-40
Training & enterprise councils, Civil servants' secondment 4w

Mother & baby units
Child care 341w
Prison accommodation 342w
Prison population 341-2w

Motor industry
593w
Buses 395w

Motor vehicle safety
Cars 403-4w

Motor vehicle theft
Crime prevention 44w
Peterlee 464w
Seaham 464w

Motor vehicles
608w
North West region 47w

Motorcycles
Leg protectors 498w

Motorways
Lancashire 387-8w
Road accidents 654-5w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 529-31, 533
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 701

***Moynihan, Mr Colin**, Under-Secretary of State for Energy*
Questions
Alternative energy, Electricity generation 18w
Alternative energy, Finance 18w
Alternative energy, Research finance 18w
EC energy policy 474w
Methane, Electricity generation 17w
Offshore drilling 376w
Petroleum production, Offshore drilling 98w
Photovoltaics, Energy research 99w
River Wyre barrage 375w
Wood fuels 244-5w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 836
Questions
Al Fasi, Muhummad 217w
Army, Convictions 641w
Birmingham pub bombings 464w, 632w
McGranaghan, John, Compensation 350w
Privatisation, Income 1081
Veal 441-2

Multiple occupation
Council tax 424w
Wales 133w

Murphy, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 690
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 103, 112-4
Questions
Road works, Expenditure 134w

Museums & galleries
Collections 662-3
Edinburgh 662-3

Music education
Wales 416w

MV Marchioness
237w

MV Richard Montgomery
Wrecks 49w

MVA Consultancy
295w

MVM Starpoint
157-8w

Myanmar
268-9
Foreign policy 183w

Myodil
355w

National Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders
270w

National Association for the Teaching of English
212w

National Association of Advisers in English
212w

National Audit Office
57-8w

National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting for Scotland
(13:01:92) 696-722

National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting in England
see English National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting

National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting in Wales
see Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting

National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting NI
(13:01:92) 696-722

National Dock Labour Board
338w

National Energy Foundation
157-8w

National Farmers' Union
443-4, 446

National Grid Company
713w

National Health Service (General Medical & Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992
Questions
676-7w

National home energy rating scheme
157-8w

National income
EC countries 440w

National insurance contributions
85w
British residents abroad 291-2w
Company cars 707-9w
Earnings limits 1095-6
Fringe benefits 221-2w
Northern Ireland 58-9w

National Lottery Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1219-86
Questions
808

National parks
Armed forces 227w
EC countries 227w

National Power
377-8w

National Radiological Protection Board
354w

National Rivers Authority
190w, 267-8w, 361w, 570w
Environment Agency 64w

National Rivers Authority Advisory Committee for Wales
272w

National Trust
265w

Nationalisation
Water supply industry 1081

NATO
Nuclear test ban 148w

Natural Environment Research Council
660-4w
Annual reports 196w

Natural resources
Overseas aid 232w

Natural Resources Institute
588-9w

Nature conservation
Bats 136w, 158-9w
Cetaceans 65w

Navy
148w
Defence procurement 149-50w

Navy Army & Air Force Institutes
Competition 511w
Finance 57-8w, 512w

Neale, Sir Gerrard
Questions
Electricity supply industry, Competition 179w

Nederlandsche Credietverzekering Maatschappij
9-10w

***Needham, Mr Richard**, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 764-6, 773, 781-3
Questions
Air pollution, Northern Ireland 480w
Economic situation, North Down 315w
Electricity supply industry, Competition 179w
Gas pipelines, Northern Ireland 477w
Housing estates, Heating 479-80w
Incinerators, Hazardous wastes 480-2w
Local government pensions, Pension funds 489w
Northern Ireland Airports, Pension funds 479w
Northern Ireland Airports, Pension rights 479w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Pensions 317w
Northern Ireland Office, Small businesses 317-8w
Public expenditure controls, Housing 317w
Public expenditure controls, Strangford 316w
Road works, Strangford 316w
Water pollution, Londonderry 477w

Neighbourhood nuisance
Nottingham 671w

Nellist, Mr Dave
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 466
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 191, 234-7
Questions
Bridging allowances, Coventry 456w
Business statements 1103
Community charge, Bailiffs 66-7w
Community charge, Magistrates 22w
Labour & employment, Written questions 126w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 686w

Nelson, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 289, 353-6

Network SouthEast
Compensation 239w
Performance targets 656w

Networker trains
652-3, 662
Kent 653

Neubert, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 230-1
Questions
EC social policy 565-6w
Pensioners, Owner occupied housing 12
Retail trade 439w

New businesses
587w

New Hall Prison
342w

New Members
Civil Service College 330w
Members' facilities 511w

New Parliamentary building
228-30w
Costs 511w

New Roads & Street Works Act 1991
Questions
655w

New Zealand
Warships 334w

Newcastle upon Tyne
Dept of Social Security local offices 514w
Local government revenue 324w
Magistrates 205w

Newport Gwent
Unemployment benefits 125w

***Newton, Rt Hon Tony**, Secretary of State for Social Security*
Debates etc.
Income support, Ministerial statements (19:12:91) 462-8
Questions
Cold weather payments 6
Income support, Mortgage defaulters 1-2
Income support, Mortgages 291w
Mortgage defaulters 2-4
Occupational pensions 5-7
Office of the Chief Adjudication Officer, Annual reports 145-6w
Pension funds, Law 81w
Pensioners, Owner occupied housing 12
Retirement age 145w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Performance indicators 636-7w
State earnings related pension scheme 83w

Newtownabbey
Housing estates 479-80w

Newtownards
Council housing 598w

NHS
Capital investment 254w, 355-6w
Cost effectiveness 618-9w
Energy conservation 675w
Expenditure 53w, 253-4w

NHS & private practice
Contracts for services 52w
Dentists 252w

NHS charges exemptions
519w, (14:01:92) 814-6
Expenditure 672w

NHS finance
590-2w
Regional health authorities 262-3w, 355w, 529-30w
Wales 137-8w, 363-4w

NHS Management Executive
259-62w

NHS numbers
132-3w

NHS reciprocal arrangements
131-2w

NHS reform
526w

NHS treatment centres
Cost effectiveness 619w
Wales 618w

NHS trusts
259-62w, 356w, 526w, 675w
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary 200-2w, 298-9w
Bronglais Hospital Aberystwyth 504w
Crown immunity 252w
Oxford 675w
Wales 135w, 271-2w, 546w
Wexham Park Hospital 146

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 467
Questions
Business statements 1110
Government achievements 22-5w
Income support, Mortgages 291w
National Dock Labour Board 338w
National insurance contributions, Earnings limits 1095-6

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 980
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 222

Nicholson, Mr David*—*continued
Questions
Animal experiments, Food additives 344w
Animal experiments, Genetic engineering 346w
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, Law reform 345w
Crops, Alternative energy 444-5w
Cruelty to Animals Inspectorate, Civil service manpower 345w
Debts written off, Banks 438w
Exports, Eastern Europe 594w
Foreign investment in UK 1090-1
LD50 toxicity test 345-6w
Oral tobacco, EC law 129w
Pension funds, Trusts 514w
Private rented housing, Tenants' rights 226w
Sunday trading 321w, 334w
Training & enterprise councils 805-6

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 982
Questions
APEX Trust 965-6
Business 947
Common sheep meat regime 305-6w
Commonwealth of Independent States, Nuclear weapons 259
Minimum wage 797

NIREX
see United Kingdom NIREX

Noise control
Aircraft noise 492-3w

Non-contributory benefits
Job release scheme 566w

Non-domestic rates
Rating revaluations 604-5w
Southend-on-Sea 420w

Non-Domestic Rating (Appropriate Fraction & Rateable Values) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(19:12:91) 555

Non-fossil fuel obligation
18w
Sizewell B 713w

Non-governmental organisations
64-5w, 217w, 572w, 577w

Norfolk
School administration 114-6w

Norris, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 465
Sheltered housing, Water charges (17:12:91) 249-50
Questions
Doctors' & Dentists' Remuneration Review Body, Junior hospital doctors 26w
General certificate of secondary education 449w
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 448w
Iraq, Overseas aid 232w
School administration, Budgeting 114-6w, 133-4w

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
see NATO

North Down
Economic situation 315w

North East Drift Net Fishery Inquiry
see Drift Net Fishing Inquiry

North East region
Industrial development 951-2

North East Thames Regional Health Authority
Expenditure 256-60w
Public appointments 357w

North Sea oil
Oil revenues 575w

North West region
Channel tunnel 493w
Defence industries 129
Low pay 174-6w
Motor vehicles 47w
Part-time employment 175-8w

North West Thames Regional Health Authority
354w

North York Moors National Park
445-6

Northamptonshire
Local income tax 63w

Northern Arts
Arts council grants 219w

Northern Ireland
AIDS 139w
Air pollution 480w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 597w
Buses 480w
Capital investment 478-9w
Child benefit 58w
Clenbuterol 598w
Criminal injuries compensation 310-1w, 333-4w, 477w
Disability living allowance 698w
Disability working allowance 698w
EC grants & loans 1093-4
Education 310w
Emigration 331-2w
Fishing catches 313-6w
Gas pipelines 477w, 688-9w
Handicap benefits 697-8w
Health hazards 478w
Heart diseases 332w
Hepatitis 138-40w
HIV infection 139-40w
Housing benefits 310w
Local government pensions 489w
Migration 477-8w
National insurance contributions 58-9w
One parent benefit 332-3w
Pensioners 309w
Public expenditure 310w
Road construction 646-7w
Salmon 311w
Shellfish 699w
Special education 646w
State earnings related pension scheme 333w
Stillbirths & Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry 478-9w
Swimming 140w
Teenage pregnancy 482-90w
Terrorism 140-2w, 688-9w, 696-7w
Urban development grants 647w
Widows' benefits 332-3w

Northern Ireland Airports
Pension funds 479w
Pension rights 479w
Privatisation 479w

Northern Ireland Electricity
179w
Pensions 317w
Privatisation 225w

Northern Ireland health & social services trusts
315w

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Computer applications 312w

Northern Ireland Office
Small businesses 317-8w

Northern Ireland Social Security Agency
Computer applications 312w

Northern Ireland Tourist Board
(13:01:92) 764-83

Northern region
Theatre 416w

Northern Regional Health Authority
Directors 156w
District health authorities 522-3w
Public appointments 522-3w
Retirement 156w

Northumberland
Opencast mining 474w
Redundancy 806

Northumbria Ambulance NHS Trust
Directors 155-6w

Northumbria Police Authority
161w

Nottingham
Neighbourhood nuisance 671w
Road traffic 491w

Nottingham University
212w

Nuclear accidents
Bradwell power station 96-7w
Chernobyl 265-6w
Civil defence 16-7w
Emergency planning 327w
Radiation protection 455w

Nuclear disarmament
Atomic Weapons Establishment 286w
Korea 218-9w

Nuclear Electric
95-8w, 713w

Nuclear fuel reprocessing
Eastern Europe 569w

Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive
see United Kingdom NIREX

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate
95-6w

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty
International conferences 44w
Russia 582w

Nuclear power
Billing 569w

Nuclear safeguards
Argentina 569w
Brazil 569w
International Atomic Energy Agency 476w

Nuclear safety
Bulgaria 243-4w
Magnox reactors 95-6w
Technical assistance 243-4w
Trawsfynydd power station 475-6w

Nuclear submarines
381-2w

Nuclear test ban
China 436w
Commonwealth of Independent States 582w
NATO 148w

Nuclear weapons
132-3, 135-6
Commonwealth of Independent States 259, 549w, 606w
Defence research 606w
Euratom 217-8w
Iraq 149w
Ministerial speeches 606w
Safety standards 381w
Transport of radioactive materials 135, 696w
USSR 26w, 257-9, 284-5w

Nuclear weapons deployment
284w, 469w

Nuclear weapons policy
810, (14:01:92) 817-911

Nuclear weapons tests
469w
Cancer 282w

Nuclear weapons tests—continued
Exservicemen 381w
Land reclamation 57w
USA 469w

Nurses
Career structure 523w

Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL) 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R & Money res* (13:01:92) 696-722

Nursing & Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council
523w

Nutrition
Vegetarianism 143w

Objects in lieu of tax
Scotland 198-9w, 411-2w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 992-3
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 726
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 204, 210-1
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 697, 699, 706, 716-7
Questions
Cold weather payments 82w
Estate Action, West Yorkshire 67w
Heating allowances, Low incomes 204w
Local authority powers, Disclosure of information 69w
Youth training, Finance 3w

Occupational health
56w, 297w, 421w

Occupational pensions
5-7, 145w
Divorce 84w
Liability 288w
Maastricht summit 636w
Sex discrimination 636w

Occupational Pensions Board
Maxwell companies 288w

Occupied territories
Israel 256-7, 264-5
Palestine 263-4

Offensive weapons
(20:12:91) 605-11

Office of Electricity Regulation
376-7w, (16:01:92) 1114-206

Office of Electricity Regulation for Northern Ireland
179w

Office of Fair Trading
Sunday trading 716w

Office of Gas Supply
(16:01:92) 1114-206

Office of Telecommunications
Industrial disputes 110-1w

Office of the Chief Adjudication Officer
Annual reports 145-6w

Office of the President of Social Security Appeal Tribunals
see Social security appeal tribunals

Office of Water Services
(16:01:92) 1114-206

Offices
Sea rescue 497-8w
Sports administration 667w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority 136-7w

Official engagements
233w, 543w, 630w
Dept of Health 525w

Official engagements—continued
Dept of Social Security 517w

Official Report
Speaker's rulings & statements (14:01:92) 813

Offshore drilling
376w
Petroleum production 98w

OFGAS
see Office of Gas Supply

OFT
see Office of Fair Trading

OFTEL
see Office of Telecommunications

OFWAT
see Office of Water Services

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 524-7
Questions
Housing associations, Mortgage defaulters 64w
Nuclear accidents, Radiation protection 455w
Shellfish, Fish conservation 135w

Oil pollution control
Persian Gulf 571-2w
UK contributions 571-2w

Oil revenues
165w
North Sea oil 575w

Old persons' pensions
9
Social security benefits uprating 374w

Older workers
Employment schemes 563w

Ombudsman
Railway transport 661

One parent benefit
Northern Ireland 332-3w
Social security benefits rates 374-5w

One parent families
Family credit 81w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 894-9
Questions
Armed forces discharges, Homelessness 386w
Armed forces discharges, Training 383-4w
Armed forces housing 385w
Armed forces housing, Building repairs 385w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 384-6w
Armed forces housing, Housing associations 384w
Armed forces housing, Property transfer 384w
Armed Forces Housing Task Force, Expenditure 385w
Armed forces recruitment, Disclosure of information 286w
Armoured fighting vehicles 286w
Defence equipment 382w
Defence industries 130
Defence procurement, Costs 382w
Exservicemen, Housing 285-6w
Helicopters, Armed forces deployment 285w
Hydrographer of the Navy, Maps 383w
Nuclear weapons, USSR 284-5w
Parachute Regiment, Armed forces recruitment 285w
Royal Naval Reserve 137
Walter Somers, Departmental correspondence 383w
Warships, Defence procurement 385-6w

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Questions
Drift Net Fishing Inquiry 190w
Fishery protection, Scotland 198w
Speed limits, Rural areas 655-6w

Open University
Educational finance 668w

Opencast mining
Northumberland 474w
Planning appeals 420-1w

Opening hours
Betting shops 10w, 197w

Opera
664-5
Arts finance 667-8

Opera houses
Cardiff 507w

Ophthalmic services
Bridgend General Hospital 620w
Hospitals 356w

Opinion polls
Public sector 120w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1055
Questions
Business, East Midlands 125w
Business statements 1102-3
Confederation of British Industry, Interest rates 611w
Industrial production 956-7
Manufactured exports 575w

Optical charges
Eye tests 129w

Optical charges exemptions
Eye tests 129w
Spectacles 356-7w

Oral questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 150

Oral tobacco
EC law 129w

Orange badge scheme
Orders & regulations 498w

Orders & regulations
Child Support Act 1991 81w
Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 376w
Mineral waters 230w
Orange badge scheme 498w

Ordination of women
15-6

Ordnance Survey
417-9w, 421w
Corporate plans 328w

Organ donors
Casualties 624w

Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development
345-6w

Orimulsion
157w
Subsidies 157w

Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1241-2

Orthopaedics
Prince of Wales Hospital Cardiff 619w

Osteoporosis
142w

Overseas aid
Africa 588w
Arms trade 331w

Overseas aid—continued
Baltic states 470-2w
Czechoslovakia 678-83w
Economic policy 330w
Family planning 470w
Iraq 232w
Natural resources 232w
Sri Lanka 710w
Treaty of Rome 331w
Vietnam 231-2w

Overseas Development Administration
43w

Overseas investment
British Steel Corporation 112-3w

Overseas trade
620-1w
Kuwait 595w

Owner occupied housing
Pensioners 12

Oxford
NHS trusts 675w

Oxleas Wood
Ministers' domestic visits 658w

Ozone layer
Cancer hazards 327w
Health hazards 352-4w
Treaties 62w

PA Consulting Group
539w

Packaging
Drugs 585w, 589-90w
HMSO 26w
Hormone treatments 508w, 526-7w
Prescription charges 527w

Page, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 472

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 386-9
Questions
APEX Trust 967

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 515-7
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 458
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1242-3

Palace of Westminster
Mobility of disabled 379w
Parliamentary security 55w
Recycling 642w

Palestine
Occupied territories 263-4

Papain
Slaughterhouses 191w

Paper
Recycling 9w

Parachute Regiment
Armed forces recruitment 285w

Parent's Charter
450w

Parking offences
Contracts 568w
London boroughs 568w

Parliamentary questions
Intelligence services 467w, 630-1w

Parliamentary recess
Parliamentary security 55w

Parliamentary security
Metropolitan Police 162w
Palace of Westminster 55w

Parliamentary security—continued
Parliamentary recess 55w

Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community
436w
Maastricht summit 218w

Parry, Mr Robert
Questions
Kenya, Human rights 330w
Somalia, Armed conflict 330-1w
Somalia, Immigrants' dependants 344w
Somalia, Refugees 339w, 343-4w

Partnerships
Legal profession (16:12:91) 118

Part-time employment
Employment protection 803-4
North West region 175-8w
Pay 175-8w
Social security benefits rules 86-7w
Women's employment 456w
Working mothers 803-4

Passenger transport executives
Local government finance 93-4w

Passengers
London Underground 656

Passenger's Charter
239w, 656w

Patchett, Mr Terry
Questions
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 299w
Lamont, Norman 452

Patients
Compensation 596w
Personal savings 50w

Patnick, Mr Irvine, Lord Commissioner to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1065-6

Patten, Rt Hon John, Minister of State, Home Office
Questions
Assaults on police, Greater London 464w
Bail hostels 11-2w
Bail hostels, Contracts for services 12w
Civil defence, Communication engineering 16w
Civil defence, Nuclear accidents 16-7w
Community charge, Non-payment 687-8w
Compulsorily detained mental patients, Police powers 686w
Crime 465w
Crime, Computer applications 251w
Crime prevention, Closed circuit television 246-7w, 343w
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 683-4w
Criminal liability, Minors 459w
Dog fighting 683w
Drug prevention schemes 685w
Drug prevention schemes, Death 684-6w
Drug prevention schemes, Government grants 351w
Ecstasy, Drug prevention schemes 685-6w
Ecstasy, EC action 685w
Extradition 686w
Fire Precautions Act 1971 683w
Foundation for Business Responsibilities, Charities 349w
Homicide, Greater London 463w
Magistrates' courts, Rochdale 463w
McGranaghan, John, Compensation 350w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 684w
Miscarriages of justice, Compensation 350w
Motor vehicle theft, Seaham 464w
Prerogative of mercy 251w
Private investment, Public sector 458w
RAF Greenham Common, Compensation 350w

Patten, Rt Hon John*—*continued
Rugby, Sportsgrounds 633w
Safer cities scheme 246w
Safer cities scheme, Expenditure 245-6w
Safer cities scheme, Wales 245w
Sexual offences, Crimes outside national territories 350w
Sikhs, Charities 461w
Sunday trading, Shoplifting 10w
Taking & driving away, Young offenders 161-2w
Young offenders 347w
Young offenders, Prosecutions 540-1w

Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 522-4

Pawsey, Mr James
Questions
Agriculture, Expenditure 301w
Employment schemes, Older workers 563w
Export credit guarantees, Fees & charges 961-2
Exports 1088
Road accidents, Motorways 654-5w

Pay
Development Board for Rural Wales 506w
Directors 231w
Family doctors 155w, 702w
Hairdressing 633w
Local government staff 570w
Medical research 623w
Part-time employment 175-8w
Pharmacists 255-6w
Social security appeal tribunals 289w

Pay incentives
Civil service agencies 297w, 419w
Dept of the Environment 419w
Scottish Office 297w

Peace
International conferences 286w

Peace negotiations
Afghanistan 184-5w
Cyprus 712w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 472
Questions
Part-time employment, Working mothers 803-4
Uruguay round, Textiles 959-60

Peak District National Park
Bypasses 503w
Structure plans 503w

Pedestrian areas
Priority routes 655w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 710-2
Questions
Employment opportunities, Tameside 797-8
Football, Public order offences 632-4w
Football Association, Upper Waiting Hall 31w
Football pools, Betting & gaming duties 612-3w, 621-2w
Local Government Commission for England 575w
Physical education, Schools & parents 450w
Playing fields, Land acquisition 453w, 666w
Playing fields, School closures 622-3w
Rugby, Sportsgrounds 633w
Sports 211-2w
Sports, Young people 453w
Sports administration 666w
Sports administration, Offices 667w
Sports Council, Finance 452w
Sports Council, Manpower 666w
Sports facilities, Rate rebates 69w, 74w, 429-30w
Tobacco duties, Retail price index 613w

Pendry, Mr Tom*—*continued
United Kingdom Sports Commission 452w

Pennines
Roads 503w

Pension funds
Fraud 374w, 513w
Investment 82w, 85w
Law 81w
Local government pensions 489w
Maxwell companies 110w, 144w
Mirror Group Newspapers 4w
Northern Ireland Airports 479w
Ringfenced funding 287w
Trusts 514w

Pension rights
Northern Ireland Airports 479w

Pensioners
10-1
Central heating 10
Eye tests 129w
Housing benefits 146w
Income support 8-9, 143-4w, 202w
Invalid care allowances 635w
Northern Ireland 309w
Owner occupied housing 12
Personal income 635-6w
Public petitions (16:12:91) 119

Pensioners' Association
80w

Pensions
Northern Ireland Electricity 317w
Widows 86w

Percy, Lindis
Civil proceedings 605w

Perez de Cuellar, Javier
450

Performance indicators
Civil service agencies 117-9w, 296-7w, 417-8w
Dept of the Environment 417-8w
Scottish Office 296-7w
Social Security Benefits Agency 636-7w
Treasury 117-9w

Performance targets
Community care 521-2w
Network SouthEast 656w
Special education 321w

Permanent secretaries
Equal opportunities 666

Persian Gulf
Oil pollution control 571-2w

Personal income
443w, 612w
Domestic energy consumption 473w
Immigrants 251w
Pensioners 635-6w
Taxpayers 220w

Personal injury compensation
Armed forces casualties (17:12:91) 152-4
Social security benefits reductions 289w

Personal savings
Patients 50w

Personal social services
Fees & charges 51-2w

Personal tax allowances
7w, 220-1w
Tax rates & bands 123-4w

Personal taxation
Tax burden 121-4w

Pesticides
Animal experiments 249w

Peterlee
Motor vehicle theft 464w
Police 464w

Petroleum Engineering Directorate
Civil service dispersal 472w

Petroleum production
Offshore drilling 98w

Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme
255w

Pharmacists
Pay 255-6w

Philippines
Wood 390w

Photovoltaics
Energy research 99w

Physical education
Schools & parents 450w

Pigs
Wales 693w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Kashmir, Public petitions (19:12:91) 557-8
Questions
Agricultural education 439
Community charge, Non-payment 687-8w
Demolition, Conservation areas 538w
Industrial investment 597w
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 612w
Police custody, Prisoners 348-9w
Social Fund 7

Piper B platform
Upper Waiting Hall 157w

Planning & Compensation Act 1991
Questions
67-8w

Planning appeals
Costs 67-8w
Opencast mining 420-1w
Wales 692w

Planning inquiries
Incinerators 423w

Planning permission
104w
Enforcement notices 68w
University Hospital of Wales (20:12:91) 596-604

Plant genetics
Trees 151w

Plastic surgery
Tattooing 51w

Plastics
Food contamination 194w

Playing fields
Land acquisition 103-4w, 215-6w, 453w, 618w, 666w
School closures 622-3w
Wales 618w

Plugs & sockets
Domestic electrical appliances 542w

Plugs & Sockets Etc (Safety) Regulations 1987
Questions
594w

Plutonium
Air freight transport 609w
International trade 583w

Plymouth Airport
Safety 237w

Poetry
Arts finance 667-8

Points of order
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 154, 183, (19:12:91) 460-1, (14:01:92) 834, 932, (17:01:92) 1234

Poland
Visas 352w

Polaris
283w

Polaris submarines
132

Polegate bypass
397w

Police
Kent 12w
Manpower 462-3w
Peterlee 464w
Port of London Authority 402w
Scotland 292w
Seaham 464w
Sunday trading 348w

Police & ethnic minorities
Stop & search 251w

Police authorities
Finance 161w

Police cautions
161w, 347w

Police civilians
Hertfordshire 463-4w

Police Complaints Authority
Upper Waiting Hall 686-7w

Police custody
Lancashire 348-9w
Prisoners 348-9w

Police discipline
Early retirement 250-1w
Metropolitan Police 250-1w

Police national computer
341w

Police powers
Breathalysers 465w
Compulsorily detained mental patients 676w, 686w

Political prisoners
Sri Lanka 710w

Political refugees
Immigration applications 349-50w

Political risk reinsurance
954-5

Pollution control
Local government functions 428-9w
Water pollution 434w

Pollution Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Pollution

Pollution monitoring
Cetaceans 66w
Merseyside 325w
Trawsfynydd power station 357w

Polytechnics
31-3w, 454w

Pompidou Group
see Council of Europe Cooperation Group to Combat Drug Abuse

Pornography
Telephone services 947

Port of London Authority
Police 402w

Porter, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 57, 76, 79-80
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 236
Questions
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 676-7

Porter, Mr David
Questions
Housing stock, Waveney District Council 65w
Sunday trading, Confiscation orders 576w

Porter, Mr David—continued
Sunday trading, European Court of Justice 567w
Sunday trading, Local government functions 567w
Tattooing, Plastic surgery 51w

Portillo, Mr Michael, Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 22-3, 27-30, 82-5, 94-5, 109-12
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 155, 179-83, 207-10
Questions
Birmingham City Council, Banks 539w
Community charge, Income support 67w
Council tax, Publicity 642w
Coventry City Council, Government grants 538w
Direct labour departments, Contracts for services 417w
Local government expenditure, Standard spending assessments 172-4w
Local government finance 107w
Local government services, Contracts for services 539w
Local government stocks & bonds 106w, 644w
London Docklands Development Corporation, Leisure facilities 166w
Standard spending assessments, Shropshire 422w
Uniform business rate, Rateable value 323-4w

Ports
Accounting 162w, 405-6w
Productivity 536w
Scotland 405-6w
Tilbury 400-1w

Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(14:01:92) 912-35

Portsmouth
Dockyards 242w

Portugal
East Timor 614w

Postal services
EC action 186w

Poultry
437
Animal welfare 436-7, 506-7w
Salmonella (16:12:91) 120-8
Wales 506-7w

Poultry meat
Exports 189w
Salmonella 307w

Powell, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
Health services, Mid Glamorgan (14:01:92) 941

Powell, Mr William
Questions
Judges, Age 19-20w
Judges, Retirement 20-2w
Latvia, Know-how Fund 470-2w
Local income tax, Northamptonshire 63w

Pregnant women
Income support 84w
Standard of living 50w

Prerogative of mercy
251w

Pre-school education
EC countries 323w
School population 214-6w

Prescott, Mr John
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (13:01:92) 653
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 917

Prescott, Mr John—continued
Questions
Airport security 237-8w
Inter-City rail transport, Privatisation 655
Networker trains, Kent 653
Plymouth Airport, Safety 237w

Prescription charges
522w, 589-90w
Packaging 527w
Wales 510w, 547-8w, 585w

Prescription drugs
Wales 617w

Prescriptions
626-7w
Family doctors 263w
Family health services authorities 552-6w
Regional health authorities 555w
Wales 547-8w

Press advertising
Greenhouse effect 326w

Price, Sir David
Questions
Councillors' attendance allowances, Income tax 441w
Councillors' attendance allowances, Social security benefits rules 515w

Prices
Coal 474w
Hearing aids 542w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Debates etc.
Homicide (Amendment) Bill, 1R (18:12:91) 273
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 175-8
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 279
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 460
Questions
APEX Trust 968

Primary education
667w
Educational assessment 208w, 669-71w
Science education 28w
Swimming 140w

Primary Education Inquiry
114w

Prime Minister
629w
Civil servants 660w
Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte 469w

Prime Minister's questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (19:12:91) 477

Prince of Wales Hospital Cardiff
Orthopaedics 619w

Prince of Wales Youth Business Trust
Upper Waiting Hall 126w

Priority routes
Pedestrian areas 655w

Prison accommodation
Mother & baby units 342w

Prison administration
Styal Prison 342-3w

Prison population
Chelmsford Prison 15w
Mother & baby units 341-2w

Prison Service
13w, 342w

Prison Service Management Review
13w

Prison staff
14w

Prisoners
Life imprisonment 632w
Police custody 348-9w

Prisoners—continued
Security 631w

Prisoners on remand
Durham 540w

Prisoners' transfers
Blakenhurst Prison 683w
Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution 100w, 246-7w
Wolds Remand Prison 683w

Prisons
Homosexuality 350w
Private sector 631w
Security 13-4w

Private bills
Speaker's rulings & statements (13:01:92) 724

Private education
Trafford Park 27w

Private investment
Public sector 458w

Private Members' motions
(16:01:92) 1113

Private notice questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 148

Private rented housing
Tenants' rights 226w

Private sector
Prisons 631w

Privatisation
British Coal Corporation 377w
British Rail 492w
British Telecom 543-4w
Clyde Port Authority 608w
Income 119w, 1081
Inter-City rail transport 655
Northern Ireland Airports 479w
Northern Ireland Electricity 225w
Railway network 653
Railway transport 807-8
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority 162-3w, 238-9w, 501w
Trust ports 239-40w

Productivity
Ports 536w

Professional misconduct
(13:01:92) 696-722

Professional qualifications
Attorney General 233w
Lord Chancellor 233w

Profit sharing
EC action 566w

Profits
Sunday trading 347-8w

Property development
University College Cardiff 508-9w

Property transfer
Armed forces housing 384w
Road construction 657-8w

Property values
Council tax 323-4w

Prosecutions
Fishing catches 308w
Young offenders 540-1w

Proteins
Research 596w

PSA Services
Billing 419-20w

Public appointments
Advisory Council on Science & Technology 658-60w
Animal Procedures Committee 100w

Public appointments—continued
BBC Wales 349w
Broadcasting Council for Wales 462w
Further Education Funding Council for England 667-8w
Further Education Funding Council for Wales 585-6w
Haemoglobinopathies Working Party 590w
Higher Education Funding Council for England 667-8w
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales 585-6w
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council 645w
Intelligence services 245w
MI5 467w
North East Thames Regional Health Authority 357w
Northern Regional Health Authority 522-3w
Regional panels 191-3w
Research councils 660-4w
Scotland 598-601w
Scottish Natural Heritage 533w
Welsh Consumer Council 112w
Welsh Office 272-82w, 503w

Public expenditure
Northern Ireland 310w

Public expenditure controls
Agriculture 316w
Eastern Health & Social Services Board 334w
Housing 317w
Strangford 316-7w, 334w

Public inquiries
Road construction 691-3w

Public lavatories
69w

Public order offences
Football 632-4w

Public participation in planning
108w

Public petitions
Asbestos (17:01:92) 1217
Cambuslang (16:12:91) 119
Education (17:01:92) 1218
Educational finance (19:12:91) 558
Foreign adoptions (19:12:91) 557
Greenwich Park (17:12:91) 246
Kashmir (19:12:91) 557-8, (17:01:92) 1217-8
Pensioners (16:12:91) 119
Royal Regiment of Wales (20:12:91) 567
RU486 (19:12:91) 558, (20:12:91) 567

Public records
India 630w

Public Records Act 1958
Questions
Law reform 629w

Public sector borrowing requirement
544-5w

Public sector debt
544-5w

Public sector housing
Young people 66w

Public sector housing sales
West Kent Housing Association 226-7w

Public transport
Greater London 400w, 652

Public utilities
(15:01:92) 983-4, (16:01:92) 1114-206
Road works 655w

Public Works Loan Board
Interest rates 120w

Publicity
Civil service agencies 297w, 418w
Dept of the Environment 418w
Scottish Office 297w

Pupil-teacher ratios
Staffordshire 668-9w

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
417-9w, 421w

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital
Hospital patients 149w

Queen's University Belfast
Student numbers 317w, 647w

Quin, Ms Joyce
Questions
Cosmetics, Animal experiments 188w
Restraint equipment 9w
Shipbuilding, EC countries 111-2w
Shipbuilding, EC grants & loans 112w
Shipbuilding, Government assistance 112w

Race Relations Act 1976
Questions
461w

Radiation hazards
Commonwealth of Independent States 606w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 583w

Radiation protection
Nuclear accidents 455w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 311, (19:12:91) 498, 521-2
Questions
Taxation 1084

Radio pagers
497w

Radioactive fallout
Agricultural land 265-6w
Farms 584-5w
Wales 584-5w

Radioactive waste disposal
574w, 577w
Dounreay 648w
Scotland 89w
Sellafield 615w

Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee
64w

Radioactive wastes
Consultants 597w
Dounreay 17w, 474-5w

Radioactivity
Coastal areas 90w
Scotland 90w

RAF Greenham Common
Compensation 350w

RAF regiment
58w

RAF Wittering
House purchase 640w

Raffan, Mr Keith
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Tax harmonisation 442-3w

Railway accidents
Glasgow 656-7
Severn tunnel 654, 656w

Railway electrification
East coast railway line 401w
Hastings-Ashford railway line 608w
Scotland 401w
West coast railway line 401w
West Yorkshire 399w

Railway freight transport
Channel tunnel 493-4w
Isle of Grain 607w
Severn tunnel 45w

Railway Inspectorate
654
Escalators 337-8w

Railway network
Channel tunnel 653
East Midlands 536w
High speed trains 501-2w
Privatisation 653
Republic of Ireland 501-2w

Railway safety
655
Cardiff-Paddington railway line 654
Railway signals 654, 659
Rolling stock 401w

Railway signals
241w, 654, 656w, 660
East coast railway line 401w
Railway safety 654, 659
Safety equipment 49w

Railway stations
Ashford 240w

Railway transport
662
Ombudsman 661
Privatisation 807-8
Security 656
Sound insulation 396w
Transport subsidies 655-6

Railway travel
Greater Manchester (13:01:92) 784-92
Kent 492w, 652-3
Liverpool Street-Chelmsford railway line 660
London Tilbury & Southend line 654
Wales 364w

Railway workers
Alcoholism 499w

Rain forests
Soya beans 677w

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Asbestos, Public petitions (17:01:92) 1217
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1230, 1269-73
Questions
Terrorism, Warnings 463w

Rapid transit systems
Coventry 426-7w

Rate rebates
Sports facilities 69w, 74w, 429-30w

Rate Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(14:01:92) 812

Rateable value
Appeals 420w
Uniform business rate 323-4w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 392-4
Questions
Drug prevention schemes 674w, 685w
Drug prevention schemes, Death 684-6w
Drug prevention schemes, Health education 665w
Drug prevention schemes, Medical research 674w
Drug prevention schemes, Medical treatments 674w
Drug prevention schemes, Youth clubs 684w
Ecstasy, Drug prevention schemes 685-6w
Ecstasy, Drug seizures 685w
Ecstasy, EC action 685w
Ecstasy, Health education 693-5w, 700w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Safety standards 657

Ratlag revaluations
Non-domestic rates 604-5w
Scotland 604-5w

Ravenscraig steelworks
954-6
Factory closures 669-79, 1096

Ravenscraig steelworks—continued
Standing Order No 20 applications (13:01:92) 693

Reading
Educational assessm[illegible]-80w
Educational standards [illegible]2w

RECHAR
948-9, 1091
Disclosure of information 467w
Millan, Bruce 948-50
Wales 358-9w

Recognition of states
Ukraine 182w
USSR 184w
Yugoslavia 184w

Recruitment
AWE Aldermaston 282w

Recycling
171-2w
Palace of Westminster 642w
Paper 9w
Tyres 714w

Red Cross
see International Red Cross

Redmond, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 988
Questions
Airport security, Scotland 46w
Babies, Mentally handicapped 129-30w
British Coal Corporation, Mineworkers' pension scheme 17w
Cambodia, Bomb disposal 711w
Coal, Imports 97w
Crime, Computer applications 251w
Dysentery 130w
Family doctors, Pay 155w
Fishery protection, Law enforcement 308w
Fishing catches, Prosecutions 308w
Hospital waiting lists, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 51w
Inter-City rail transport 94w
Low flying, Armed forces training 380w
NHS trusts, Crown immunity 252w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 696w
Orimulsion 157w
Orimulsion, Subsidies 157w
Patients, Personal savings 50w
Radioactive waste disposal, Scotland 89w
Surgery, Hospital waiting lists 51w
Tobacco, Intervention stocks 190w
Tornado aircraft, Air accidents 380w
Upholder class submarines, Repairs & maintenance 380w
Uranium, Dounreay 376w
Weapons, Testing 381w

Redundancy
Defence industries 1096
Northumberland 806

Redundancy pay
Ministry of Defence 386-7w

Redundant churches
14-5

Redundant Churches Fund
13-4

Redwood, Mr John, Minister of State for Industry
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1114, 1125, 1127, 1132-6, 1138, 1145-8, 1151-2, 1161-2, 1174-5, 1177, 1179-81, 1204-6
Questions
Broadcasting reception 621w
Building industry, Company liquidations 8-9w
Business 947
Cars, EC internal trade 9w

Redwood, Mr John—continued
Directors, Pay 231w
EC Internal Market Council 595-6w
EC Telecommunications Council 456-7w
Foreign investment in UK 593-4w, 953-4
House of Fraser, Takeovers 388-9w, 596w
Industrial investment 597w
Office of Telecommunications, Industrial disputes 110-1w
Ravenscraig steelworks 954
Sunday trading, Office of Fair Trading 716w
Telephone charges 946-8
Telephone services, Pornography 947
Telephone systems, Standardisation 542w
Trade competitiveness 592w

Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 283
Questions
Business statements 1104
Yugoslavia 261

Refugees
Children in care 354w
Croatia 42-3w
Identity cards 247w
Immigration applications 339w
Somalia 339w, 343-4w

Regional aid
European economic area 388w
Expenditure 188-90w

Regional development grants
Factory closures 269w
Wales 269w

Regional government
Wales 159w

Regional panels
Public appointments 191-3w

Regional selective assistance
269w, 576w, 952-3

Registered Foreign Lawyers Order 1991
Debates etc.
(16:12:91) 118

Registers of Scotland
see Dept of the Registers of Scotland

Reid, Dr John
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 902
Ravenscraig steelworks (13:01:92) 695
Questions
Armed forces housing 138
Ravenscraig steelworks 955-6
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 673-4

Removal expenses
Armed forces discharges 386w

RENAVAL
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority 501w

Rendering industry
308-9w
Slaughterhouses 308w

Rent increases
430-4w

Renton, Rt Hon Tim, Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Minister of State for the Arts)
Questions
Art works, Export licensing 416w
Arts, Children 668
Arts Council, Handicapped 166w
Arts finance, Lotteries 664
Arts sponsorship 417w
Civil servants, Clothing 665-6
Civil service, Equal opportunities 416w
Civil service, Women 667
Civil Service College, Cost effectiveness 95w
Civil Service College, New Members 330w

Renton, Rt Hon Tim—continued
Civil Service College, Operating costs 330w
Civil service unions, Job satisfaction 416w
Design Museum, Government grants 663-4
Government departments, Disabled workers 95w
Higher civil servants, Women 666-7
London Docklands Development Corporation, Arts finance 664
Lotteries 665
Lyceum Theatre, Dance 705w
Museums & galleries, Collections 662-3
Museums & galleries, Edinburgh 662-3
Music education, Wales 416w
Northern Arts, Arts council grants 219w
Opera 664-5
Opera, Arts finance 667-8
Permanent secretaries, Equal opportunities 666
Theatre, Northern region 416w
Yorkshire Mining Museum Trust, Upper Waiting Hall 94-5w

Rents
VAT 119w

Rents to mortgages scheme
Scotland 295w

Repossession orders
Dyfed 586-7w
Housing associations 360-1w
Mortgage defaulters (19:12:91) 453-61, 607w, 612w

Republic of Ireland
437w
Criminal proceedings 179-80w
Immigrants 251w
Railway network 501-2w
Students 581-2w, 647w

Research
Cetaceans 65-6w
Marine animals 151-2w
Proteins 596w
Scottish Natural Heritage 533w
Switzerland 388w
Vegetarianism 142w

Research assistants
House of Commons passes 99w

Research councils
Public appointments 660-4w

Research finance
Alternative energy 18w
Alzheimer's disease 623-4w
Science & technology research 33-4w

Residential care
Community charge exemptions 570-1w
Income support 9, 80w, 83w, 636w
Social security benefits 82-3w

Residential care of children
Child safety 352w
Managers 252-3w
Wales 359-60w
Women 252-3w

Restraint equipment
9w

Retail price index
Gambling 441w
Sunday trading 6w
Tobacco duties 441w, 613w

Retail trade
439w

Retirement
Judges 20-2w
Northern Regional Health Authority 156w
Teachers 509w

Retirement age
145w
Costs 287w
Health & Safety Executive 1w
Skill shortages 287w

Retirement age—continued
Women 286-7w

Retirement pensions
EC countries 550w
Social security benefits rates 87-8w, 288w, 368-70w
Social security benefits rules 368-70w
Social security benefits uprating 288w
Social security reform 367-8w

Retrospective legislation
Tax reform 1082

Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Questions
Perez de Cuellar, Javier 450

Richardson, Ms Jo
Questions
Miscarriages of justice, Compensation 350w
RAF Greenham Common, Compensation 350w

Riddick, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 976
Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill, Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1073

Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm, Secretary of State for Transport
Questions
Bus services, Greater London 651
Crossrail 536w, 651
East coast railway line, Vandalism 659
EC Transport Council 399-400w
Inter-City rail transport 659-60
Inter-City rail transport, Privatisation 655
London Underground, Passengers 656
Public transport, Greater London 652
Railway accidents, Glasgow 656-7
Railway safety 655
Railway signals, Railway safety 654, 659
Railway transport, Ombudsman 661
Railway transport, Security 656
Railway transport, Transport subsidies 655-6
Roads, Capital investment 233-6w
Shipping safety, Inquiries 237w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Privatisation 162-3w
Underground railways, South London 652

Ringfenced funding
Community care 522w
Pension funds 287w

River Dee
Bridges 361w, 545-6w

River Ely
Water pollution 137w

River pollution
Coal mining 619w
Rochdale 570w
Wales 619w

River Thames
Police 400w
Water transport 46w

River Usk
Flood control 269w

River Usk Barrage Bill (HL) 1990/91
Questions
269w

River Wyre barrage
375w

RMS St Helena
Working conditions 163-4w

RNAD Ernesettle
146-7w

RNAD Trecwn
362-3w

Road accidents
Lorries 499w
Motorways 654-5w

Road closures
382w
M4 49w
Severn bridge 49w, 135w

Road construction
A13 491-2w, 658-9
A27 164-5w
Bedford bypass 608w
Bypasses 503w
Central Africa 470w
Deeside Industrial Park 357-8w
Environmental impact assessment 499-500w
Expenditure 658
Ilkley bypass 48-9w
Land acquisition 616w
M20 164w, (17:01:92) 1287-94
M66 492w
Northern Ireland 646-7w
Property transfer 657-8w
Public inquiries 691-3w
Wales 357-8w, 616w

Road damage
Lorries 661

Road safety
Tyres 567-8w

Road tax
Handicapped drivers 396w
Law enforcement 657w

Road tolls
Urban areas 402w

Road traffic
404w, 491w
Greater London 404w
Nottingham 491w

Road Traffic Act 1991
Questions
568w

Road works
500-1w
A44 584w
A6119 607-8w
East Sussex 397w
Environmental impact assessment 501w
Expenditure 134w
Local government expenditure 44w
Public utilities 655w
Strangford 316w
Wales 134w

Roads
Capital investment 233-6w
Pennines 503w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn, Minister of State for Wales
Questions
A44, Road works 584w
Deeside Industrial Park, Road construction 357-8w
Historic buildings, Government grants 265w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Manpower 507w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Wales 266-7w, 504-5w
Kinnerton School Clwyd 618w
Playing fields, Land acquisition 618w
River Dee, Bridges 361w, 545-6w
Road construction, Land acquisition 616w
Road construction, Public inquiries 691-3w
Road works, Expenditure 134w
School administration, Budgeting 133-4w
Schools, Land acquisition 618w
Severn bridge, Road closures 135w
Teacher training, Wales 75w
Teachers, Retirement 509w
University College of Swansea, Higher education administration 360w
University of Wales, Student numbers 135-6w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn—continued
Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr, Ministers' domestic visits 584w

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 388, 389, 396, 412-9, 422
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 851
Questions
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 678
USSR, Nuclear weapons 258-9

Robinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 776-9

Rochdale
Industrial development 457w
Magistrates' courts 463w
River pollution 570w

Rochdale Borough Council
Investment returns 328w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
Alzheimer's disease, Research finance 623-4w
Medical research, Pay 623w
Occupational pensions 6

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Health services, Mid Glamorgan (14:01:92) 936-40
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 870

Rolling stock
Channel tunnel 657w
Railway safety 401w

Roll-on roll-off ships
Safety standards 657

Rolls-Royce
(20:12:91) 577-86

Roman Catholic church
468w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Questions
Business statements 1113
Official engagements, Dept of Health 525w
Official engagements, Dept of Social Security 517w
Severe disability premium, Social security appeals 653w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Industrial strategy 960-1
Israel, Occupied territories 256

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 765
Questions
Criminal damage, Compensation 310-1w
Dioxins 436
Education, Northern Ireland 310w
Fishing catches, Lough Foyle 312-4w
Fishing catches, Northern Ireland 313-6w
Hospitals, Construction 312w
Incinerators, Construction 327w
Incinerators, Hazardous wastes 326w, 480-2w
Magharafelt Primary School, Repairs & maintenance 312w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 310w
Salmon, Fish farming 311w, 405w
Severn tunnel, Railway freight transport 45w
Severn tunnel, Ventilation 45w
Terrorism, Arson 248-9w, 696-7w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 688-9w
Tunnels, Ventilation 45-6w
Water pollution, Londonderry 477w

Rossi, Sir Hugh
Questions
Mortgage defaulters 143
Roman Catholic church 468w

Rost, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 991

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 465
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 477, 484-5
Questions
Channel tunnel, Earthquakes 94w
Civil service, Women 667
Confederation of British Industry, Training 563w
Labour Party, Youth training 802-3

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1032, 1051-2
Local government finance, Wales (13:01:92) 686-7
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 459
Questions
Mortgage defaulters, South Wales 507w

Rowner housing estate
Defective housing 641w, 644w

Royal Commonwealth Society
Libraries 338w

Royal Fleet Auxiliary
149w

Royal Group of Hospitals HSS Trust
315w

Royal Mint
117-9w

Royal Naval Reserve
136-7

Royal parks
Contracts for services 672w, 700w
Cycling 226w
Scotland 700w

Royal Regiment of Wales
Public petitions (20:12:91) 567

Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults
Books 423w

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Upper Waiting Hall 100w

Royal Ulster Constabulary
141w

RU486
Abortion (19:12:91) 558, (20:12:91) 567
Public petitions (19:12:91) 558, (20:12:91) 567

Rubber industry
Marketing 714w

Ruddock, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
Educational finance, Public petitions (19:12:91) 558
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 280-1
Oral question time intervention (13:01:92) 652
Questions
Bus services, Greater London 494w
Channel tunnel, Stratford station 493w
Channel tunnel, Waterloo Station 493w
Freight transport 498-9w
Passenger transport executives, Local government finance 93-4w
Public transport, Greater London 652

Ruddock, Mrs Joan—continued
Royal parks, Cycling 226w

Rugby
Sportsgrounds 633w

Rumbold, Rt Hon Angela, Minister of State, Home Office
Questions
Animal experiments, Food additives 344w
Animal experiments, Genetic engineering 346w
Animal experiments, Licensing 457-8w
Animal experiments, Pesticides 249w
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, Law reform 345w
Chelmsford Prison 14-5w
Chelmsford Prison, Prison population 15w
Community charge, Non-payment 342w
Computer privacy, Election forecasting 576w
Cruelty to Animals Inspectorate, Civil service manpower 345w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 99w
Electoral register 632w
Ethnic minorities, Government grants to local authorities 100w, 466w
Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution, Prisoners' transfers 100w, 246-7w
LD50 toxicity test 345-6w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 686w
Mentally disturbed offenders 10w
Mother & baby units, Child care 341w
Mother & baby units, Prison accommodation 342w
Mother & baby units, Prison population 341-2w
Police custody, Prisoners 348-9w
Prison staff 14w
Prisoners, Life imprisonment 632w
Prisoners, Security 631w
Prisoners on remand, Durham 540w
Prisons, Homosexuality 350w
Prisons, Private sector 631w
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Upper Waiting Hall 100w
Styal Prison, Prison administration 342-3w
Sunday trading 348w, 465w
Sunday trading, Confiscation orders 10-1w, 576w
Sunday trading, Feldman, Basil 347w
Sunday trading, France 348w
Sunday trading, Law reform 348w
Sunday trading, Profits 347-8w
Sunday trading, Women 348w
Wandsworth Prison 11w
Wolds Remand Prison, Prisoners' transfers 683w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 466w

Rural areas
Speed limits 655-6w

"Rural Initiative"
159w

Rushdie, Salman
257

Russia
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 582w

Rutherglen
(16:12:91) 119

Ryeish Green School
(20:12:91) 628-34

Safer cities scheme
246w, 268-9w
Expenditure 245-6w
Wales 245w

Safety equipment
Railway signals 49w

Safety standards
Escalators 337-8w
Nuclear weapons 381w
Roll-on roll-off ships 657

***Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim**, Minister of State for Trade*
Questions
Arms exports, Export licensing 230-1w
Arms trade, Iraq 716w
Arms trade, Television programmes 395w
Balance of trade, Manufactured goods 595w
Bicycles, China 188w
Environmental health, EC law 109-10w
European economic area, Regional aid 388w
Export credit guarantees 9-10w
Export credit guarantees, Fees & charges 961-2
Exports, Eastern Europe 594w
Exports, Iraq 389w
Foreign investment in UK 595w
GATT, Textiles 109w, 596-7w, 621w
Government assistance to industry, EC action 187w
Industry 955
Mining, Exports 594w
Overseas trade 620-1w
Overseas trade, Kuwait 595w
Political risk reinsurance 954-5
Restraint equipment 9w
Textile industry, Government assistance 187w
Uruguay round 959
Uruguay round, Textiles 959-60
Wood, Import controls 390w

St Charles' Youth Treatment Centre
Security 256w

St David's Hospital Cardiff
616w

St James' Park
Contracts for services 672w

St Thomas' Hospital
Upper Waiting Hall 157w

St Thomas More School Greenwich
Capital investment 449w

Salmon
EC external trade 445w
Fish farming 311w, 405w
Northern Ireland 311w
Scotland 405w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 284
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 831, 833
Poultry (16:12:91) 120
Questions
European central bank 1090
Iron & steel industry, Dalzell 676
Petroleum Engineering Directorate, Civil service dispersal 472w

Salmonella
Poultry (16:12:91) 120-8
Poultry meat 307w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 827
Questions
Agricultural education 439
Royal Naval Reserve 136

School administration
Budgeting 114-6w, 133-4w
Ealing 208w
Norfolk 114-6w
Wales 133-4w

School admission
Berkshire (20:12:91) 628-34

School buildings
Building repairs 453-4w
Capital investment 534w
Scotland 534w

School closures
Playing fields 622-3w

School Examinations & Assessment Council
665w

School governors
450w

School leaving
Training 803
Youth training 455w

School meals
Durham 195w

School population
Pre-school education 214-6w

Schools
Inspections 323w
Land acquisition 618w
Voluntary work 207w
Wales 618w

Schools & parents
559w
Physical education 450w

Science & Engineering Research Council
660-4w

Science & technology
Germany 27w

Science & technology research
Research finance 33-4w

Science budget
33-4w

Science education
Curriculum 28w
Primary education 28w

Scope of debate
Speaker's rulings & statements (16:12:91) 47, 72, (17:12:91) 175, (13:01:92) 728, 730, 741, (14:01:92) 913, 915-6, (15:01:92) 979, 1007, 1017

Scotland
Airport security 46w
Armed forces strength 512w
Army strength 148w
Bail 197w
Cold weather payments 648w
Council tax 292w
Crime 292-4w
EC Committee of the Regions 705w
Ecstasy 700w
Electoral register 702-4w
Employment training 530w
European Parliament constituencies (19:12:91) 556
Family doctors 702w
Fish farming 411w
Fishery protection 197-8w
Higher education colleges 294-5w, 603-4w
Hospital beds 406-10w
Housing insulation 561-2w
Iron & steel industry (13:01:92) 693, 807
Licensing laws (19:12:91) 476, (17:01:92) 1286
Local government finance 560-1w
Local government revenue 199-200w
Local government services 295w
Mortgage defaulters 602-3w
Objects in lieu of tax 198-9w, 411-2w
Police 292w
Ports 405-6w
Public appointments 598-601w
Radioactive waste disposal 89w
Radioactivity 90w
Railway electrification 401w
Rating revaluations 604-5w
Rents to mortgages scheme 295w
Royal parks 700w
Salmon 405w
School buildings 534w
Sea rescue 649-50w
Set-aside schemes 89-90w, 152-3w, 411-4w
Shellfish 700-1w
Sheriffs 532w
Sites of special scientific interest 533w
Student numbers 532w

***Scotland**—continued*
Textile industry 89w
Tree planting 295-6w
Unemployment 447-8
Youth training 91-2w, 530w

***Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas**, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Attendance allowance, Social security benefits rules 653-4w
Attendance allowance, Social security recipients 82w
Campaign for cold weather credits 635w
Cold weather payments 10, 82w, 290w, 635w, 654w
Cold weather payments, Social security recipients 515w
Community care grants, Drug abuse 550-1w
Community care grants, Liverpool 83w
Community care grants, Social security claims 552w
Disability living allowance 634w
Disability living allowance, Social security claims 514w
Disability working allowance, Social security benefits rules 291w
Disability working allowance, Social security claims 514w
Family credit, Administrative delays 11-2
Handicap benefits 83-4w
Hospital visitor benefits 85-6w
Industrial injuries scheme, Social security benefits rates 88-90w, 518w
Invalid care allowances 202w
Invalid care allowances, Pensioners 635w
Invalid care allowances, Social security benefits rates 202w
Invalid care allowances, Social security benefits rules 549w
Invalidity benefits, Social security claims 12-3
Pensioners 10-1
Pensioners, Central heating 10
Severe disablement allowance, Social security benefits rules 84w
Social Fund 7-8, 576w
Social Fund, Dept of Social Security local offices 515w
Social Fund, Loans 82w
Social Fund inspectors 144-5w
Social security benefits reductions, Personal injury compensation 289w
Social security benefits rules, Absence abroad 550w
Social security benefits rules, Councillors' attendance allowances 515w
Spastics Society 85w
Unemployment benefits, Earnings rules 374w
Vibration white finger, Handicap benefits 289-90w

Scottish Arts Council
Edinburgh 413-4w

Scottish Development Agency
Company liquidations 405w

Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency
197-8w, 296-7w

Scottish National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting
see National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting for Scotland

Scottish National Liberation Army
533-4w

Scottish Natural Heritage
533w
Public appointments 533w
Research 533w

Scottish Office
Annual reports 298w
Civil service manpower 297w
Day care of children 297w
Directors 297-8w

Scottish Office*—*continued
Higher civil servants 298w
Pay incentives 297w
Performance indicators 296-7w
Publicity 297w
Small businesses 410-1w
Working hours 298w

Screening
AIDS 524-5w

Sea Fisheries Inspectorate
308w

Sea pollution
Marine animals 151-2w

Sea rescue
495-7w, 658
Manpower 497w, 649-50w
Offices 497-8w
Scotland 649-50w

Sea Systems Controllerate
139

Seaham
Motor vehicle theft 464w
Police 464w
Youth training scheme 454w

Sealink
239w

Seas & oceans
Waste disposal 557-9w

Security
Holyrood House 532w
Prisoners 631w
Prisons 13-4w
Railway transport 656
St Charles' Youth Treatment Centre 256w

Security equipment
Leeds Prison 1096-7

Security industry
247-8w

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Questions
Crossrail 651

Select Committees
House of Commons debates 54w

Self-employed
Corporation tax 225w

Self-regulating organisations
1089-90

Self-regulatory system
1089

Sellafield
254-5w
Inquiries 227-8w, 455w
Radioactive waste disposal 615w

Serbia
101w

Set-aside schemes
77-8w, 302w, 689w
Crops 153w
Fraud 412w
Scotland 89-90w, 152-3w, 411-4w
Sports facilities 302-6w, 411-4w

Severe disability premium
Social security appeals 653w

Severe disablement allowance
Social security benefits rules 84w

Severe hardship provision
143w

Severn bridge
Road closures 49w, 135w

Severn tunnel
Railway accidents 654, 656w
Railway freight transport 45w

Severn tunnel*—*continued
Ventilation 45w

Sewage
Ynys Mon 74-6w

Sex discrimination
Occupational pensions 636w

Sexual offences
Crimes outside national territories 350w
Criminal injuries compensation 477w

Shared ownership schemes
59-62w, 108w

Shareholders
443w

Shaw, Mr David
Questions
Environment Protection Act 1990, Codes of practice 108-9w
Prince of Wales Youth Business Trust, Upper Waiting Hall 126w

Shaw, Sir Michael
Questions
Hill livestock allowances 445-6

Sheep
Export of live animals 639w
Wales 693w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Questions
Diesel vehicles, Exhaust emission controls 397w
Mentally disturbed offenders 10w
Mineral waters, Food standards 445w
Mother & baby units, Child care 341w
Mother & baby units, Prison accommodation 342w
Mother & baby units, Prison population 341-2w
Styal Prison, Prison administration 342-3w

Sheffield
Manufacturing industries 564w

Sheffield Forgemasters
709w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 327-9
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 458
Questions
Capital investment 1086

Shellfish
Fish conservation 135w
Food contamination 689-90w, 695w, 699-701w
Food hygiene 639w
Northern Ireland 699w
Scotland 700-1w
Wales 135w

Sheltered housing
Anchor Housing Association 104w
Community care 538w
Water charges (17:12:91) 247-54

Shephard, Mrs Gillian, Minister of State, Treasury
Debates etc.
Company cars, Taxation (20:12:91) 574-6
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Tax harmonisation 442-3w
Arms trade, Iraq 709w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Compensation 1089
Betting & gaming duties 440-2w
Betting & gaming duties, Football pools 336w, 612-3w
Company liquidations 437w
Confederation of British Industry, Interest rates 611w
Drug seizures 1093
European central bank 1090

Shephard, Mrs Gillian*—*continued
Foreign investment in UK 1090-1
Foreign investment in UK, Tax reform 1090
RECHAR 1091
Retail price index, Gambling 441w
Self-regulating organisations 1089-90
Tax yields, Spirits 165w
Taxation 1084
Tobacco duties, Income 1083-4
Tobacco duties, Retail price index 441w, 613w
Unpaid taxes 224w
VAT, Horses 334-5w, 613w
VAT, Maastricht summit 335w
VAT, Rents 119w
VAT, Tax rates & bands 612w
VAT, UK contributions to EC budget 575-6w
VAT zero rated goods, EC action 706-8w

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Local Authorities Etc (Notices of Decease) Bill, 1R (15:01:92) 983-4

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 410, (19:12:91) 505-7

Sheriffs
Scotland 532w

Shersby, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Offensive weapons (20:12:91) 608-9
Questions
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 683-4w
EC countries, Visas 217w
USSR, Nuclear weapons 258
Ukraine, Diplomatic relations 183w

Shipbuilding
EC countries 111-2w
EC grants & loans 112w
Government assistance 112w

Shipping accidents
MFV Antares 640w

Shipping safety
Design 502w
Ferries 657-8
Inquiries 237w, 502w
Submarines 640w

Shoplifting
Sunday trading 10w

Shops
Military decorations 58w

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 346-8, 354
Questions
EC budget contributions 6w
UK contributions to EC budget 4-6w

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 325, 336-9, 378, 380, 381

Shotton steelworks
620w

Shropshire
Standard spending assessments 422w

Sickle cell disease
Medical education 527-8w
Medical treatments 528w

Sikhs
Charities 461w

Sillars, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 290
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 460

Sillars, Mr Jim—continued
Questions
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 124-5w
Police, Scotland 292w
UN Conference on Environment & Development, Women 64-5w
USSR, Nuclear weapons 259

Simplified planning zones
227w

Sims, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Child abuse, Teachers (16:01:92) 1211
Nurses, Midwives & Health Visitors Bill (HL), 2R & Money res (13:01:92) 707-10
Questions
Drinks 445

Singh, Partap
Departmental correspondence 469w
Visas 338w

Single homeless
Housing associations 173w

Sites of special scientific interest
Management agreements 533w
Scotland 533w

Sittings of the House Select Committee
16-7

Sizewell B
713w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 713w

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 371
Temporary immigrants, Visas (15:01:92) 1076-7
Questions
Bedford bypass, Road construction 608w
Child Support Act 1991, Orders & regulations 81w
Structure plans, Bedfordshire 644w

Skewis, Iain
506w

Skill shortages
Retirement age 287w

Skin disorders
Cancer 352-3w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 471
Child abuse, Teachers (16:01:92) 1215-6
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 971, 977
House of Commons questions (18:12:91) 275
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 300-1, 303
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1219-20, 1234
Oral questions, Points of order (17:12:91) 151
Private notice question intervention (13:01:92) 678
Questions
Business statements 1106-7
Civil servants, Clothing 666
Civil service, Working conditions 439w
Dioxins, Milk 435
Economic policy 1081-2
House of Commons times of sittings 16-7

Skye & Lochalsh
Geriatric patients 530-1w

Slaughterhouses
Papain 191w
Rendering industry 308w
Waste disposal 308w

Small businesses
Dept of Education & Science 196w
Dept of Employment 178w
Dept of Health 157w

Small businesses—continued
Dept of the Environment 433w
Dept of Trade & Industry 392-6w
Dept of Transport 164w
Environment Protection Act 1990 168w
Government assistance 157w, 164w, 178w, 191w, 196w, 317-8w, 392-6w, 410-1w, 433w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 191w
Northern Ireland Office 317-8w
Scottish Office 410-1w

SMART awards
714-6w

Smith, Mr Andrew
Questions
Council tax, Liability 425w
Council tax, Multiple occupation 424w
Council tax, Students 424w
Council tax exemptions, Student accommodation 424w
Grant maintained schools 28-30w
NHS & private practice, Contracts for services 52w
NHS trusts 675w
NHS trusts, Oxford 675w
Polytechnics 454w
Refugees, Identity cards 247w

Smith, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 723-39, 742, 745, 747-51, 753, 758-62
Questions
AIDS, Screening 524-5w
Foreign investment in UK 1091
London Regional Transport, Investment 495w

Smith, Sir Dudley
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 473

Smith, Rt Hon John
Questions
Industrial investment 1083

Smith, Mr John P
Questions
European central bank 610w

Smith, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Competition & Service (Utilities) Bill, Rep & 3R (16:01:92) 1175-6, 1178
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 457
Questions
Inflation 1085
Mortgages, Consumer protection 388w

Smoking
Hospitals 138w
Wales 138w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 503-5
Questions
Community charge exemptions, Residential care 570-1w
Disability living allowance, Northern Ireland 698w
Disability working allowance, Northern Ireland 698w
Family planning, Young people 526w
Handicap benefits, Publicity 697-8w
Teenage pregnancy, Illegitimate children, 525w
Teenage pregnancy, Northern Ireland 482-90w

Snape, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 728, 731, 739-41, 743-4
Questions
Confederation of British Industry, West Midlands 591w

Snape, Mr Peter—continued
Railway accidents, Glasgow 656-7

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 306, 315, 369-73
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, EC labour policy 950
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 678

Social Fund
7-8, 576w
Dept of Social Security local offices 515w
Loans 82w

Social Fund inspectors
144-5w

"Social Fund Manual"
537w

Social security
Maastricht summit 515w

Social Security Agency for Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Social Security Agency

Social security appeal tribunals
Pay 289w

Social security appeals
Evidence 654w
Severe disability premium 653w

Social security benefits
146w
Expenditure 370-1w
Hospital patients 676w
Kidney patients 290-1w
Residential care 82-3w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Performance indicators 636-7w

Social security benefits disqualification
Unemployment benefits 125w

Social security benefits rates
Child benefit 58w
Housing benefits 87w
Industrial injuries scheme 88-90w, 518w
Invalid care allowances 202w
One parent benefit 374-5w
Retirement pensions 87-8w, 288w, 368-70w
Supplementary benefits 371-2w
Widows' benefits 374-5w

Social security benefits reductions
Community charge 372w
Income support 516w
Personal injury compensation 289w

Social security benefits rules
Absence abroad 550w
Attendance allowance 653-4w
Carers' premium 84-5w
Cold weather payments 373-4w
Concessionary coal 204w
Councillors' attendance allowances 515w
Disability working allowance 291w
Invalid care allowances 549w
Part-time employment 86-7w
Retirement pensions 368-70w
Severe disablement allowance 84w

Social security benefits uprating
Administrative delays 202w
Old persons' pensions 374w
Retirement pensions 288w

Social security claims
Community care grants 552w
Dept of Social Security local offices 84w
Disability living allowance 514w
Disability working allowance 514w
Invalidity benefits 12-3
Medical certificates 676w

Social security payments
Christmas 636w

Social security recipients
Attendance allowance 82w
Cold weather payments 373w, 515w
Family credit 81w
Homelessness 86w
Income support 516w
Unemployment benefits 144w

Social security reform
Retirement pensions 367-8w

Soley, Mr Clive
Questions
Armed forces housing, Empty housing 160-1w
Local government revenue, Council house sales 437-8w
West Kent Housing Association, Public sector housing sales 226-7w

Somalia
Armed conflict 330-1w, 584w
Immigrants' dependants 344w
Refugees 339w, 343-4w

Sound insulation
Railway transport 396w

South Eastern Education & Library Board
Capital investment 315w

South Glamorgan
Training & enterprise councils 73w, 125-6w, 271w, 360w

South Glamorgan Health Authority
Hospitals 508w, 619w

South London
Underground railways 652

South Wales
144-5, 376-7w
Integrated development operations 359w
Mortgage defaulters 507w

Southend-on-Sea
Non-domestic rates 420w
Uniform business rate 537w

Southport
Tourist industry 564w

Southwark
Church of England 709w

Sovereignty
Falkland Islands 614w

Soya beans
Rain forests 677w

Spastics Society
85w

Speaker and his deputies. For rulings & statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings & statements
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (16:12:91) 22, 30, 69, 88, (17:12:91) 191, (18:12:91) 275, 327, (13:01:92) 724, (16:01:92) 1114, 1135, 1138, 1155, 1163, 1166, 1180, 1182-3
Business questions (16:01:92) 1100
Members' interventions (18:12:91) 283, 285, 288, 292, 294
Members' speeches (18:12:91) 353
Oral questions (15:01:92) 951, (16:01:92) -1098
Orders & regulations motions (14:01:92) 812
Procedure (16:12:91) 11, 69, 81, 91, (17:12:91) 140, 177, 249, (18:12:91) 261, 282-3, 285, 288, 295, 313, 422, (19:12:91) 448, 450, (18:12:91) 460, (20:12:91) 596, 608, 611, (14:01:92) 808, 811, 823, 832, 882, (15:01:92) 967, 974, 1043, (16:01:92) 1082, 1095, 1213, (17:01:92) 1257, 1272
Scope of debate (15:01:92) 965
Standing Order No 20 applications, BCCI (13:01:92) 692-3
Standing Order No 20 applications, Ports (17:12:91) 148

Speaker and his deputies—continued
Standing Order No 20 applications, Ravenscraig steelworks (13:01:92) 693
Supplementary questions (14:01:92) 795

Speaker's rulings & statements
Business questions (19:12:91) 470
Calling of members (19:12:91) 473, 477, (13:01:92) 653, 678, 695, (14:01:92) 817, (17:01:92) 1221
House of Commons debates (13:01:92) 694-5, (14:01:92) 817, 932, (15:01:92) 1029
House of Commons questions (17:12:91) 150-1, (18:12:91) 275
House of Commons staff (20:12:91) 650
Members' attendance (13:01:92) 684, (15:01:92) 985-6
Members' conduct (17:12:91) 217, (18:12:91) 273, 297, (13:01:92) 684, 773, (14:01:92) 814
Members' interventions (14:01:92) 920
Members' speeches (17:12:91) 149, 150, (20:12:91) 591, (13:01:92) 675, (14:01:92) 817, 865, 891, (16:01:92) 1172
Ministerial speeches (14:01:92) 932
Ministerial statements (16:12:91) 21, (19:12:91) 456-7, 473, (20:12:91) 590, (13:01:92) 684
Official Report (14:01:92) 813
Oral questions (17:12:91) 150
Points of order (17:12:91) 154, 183, (19:12:91) 460-1, (14:01:92) 834, 932, (17:01:92) 1234
Prime Minister's questions (19:12:91) 477
Private bills (13:01:92) 724
Private notice questions (17:12:91) 148
Scope of debate (16:12:91) 47, 72, (17:12:91) 175, (13:01:92) 728, 730, 741, (14:01:92) 913, 915-6, (15:01:92) 979, 1007, 1017
Standing Order No 20 applications (17:12:91) 150
Supplementary questions (16:12:91) 10, 11, 15, 16, (17:12:91) 143, (18:12:91) 264, (19:12:91) 440
Ten minutes rule (19:12:91) 477, 505, 513, (14:01:92) 817, 865, 891, (17:01:92) 1219, 1234, 1243, 1273
Unparliamentary expressions (17:12:91) 160, 201, (18:12:91) 258, 292, (16:01:92) 1095, 1132

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 278, 341, 388, 423, (19:12:91) 494-8
Questions
Colleges of education 452w
Colleges of education, Manpower 451w
Colleges of education, Ministers' domestic visits 451-2w
EC integration, Charities 468w
EC integration, European parties 468w, 658w
EC integration, Treaties 233w, 436w
Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 436w
Ports, Tilbury 400-1w
Railway network, Privatisation 653
Reading, Educational assessment 578-80w
Royal Commonwealth Society, Libraries 338w
Shipping safety, Design 502w
Shipping safety, Inquiries 502w
Teacher training 450-1w, 559-60w
VAT, UK contributions to EC budget 575-6w
VAT zero rated goods, EC action 706-8w

Special education
Chorlton School 447w
Educational assessment 321-2w
Further education colleges 27w
Northern Ireland 646w
Performance targets 321w

Spectacles
Optical charges exemptions 356-7w

Speed, Mr Keith
Questions
Diabetes, Medical equipment 256w
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 255w
Pharmacists, Pay 255-6w
Railway stations, Ashford 240w

Speed governors
399-400w
EC action 398w, 535w

Speed limits
501w
Danbury 608-9w
Exhaust emissions 535w
Lorries 398w, 654w
Rural areas 655-6w

Speller, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 980
Questions
Hedgerow management grants 68-9w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 466w

Spicer, Mr Michael
Questions
Uniform business rate, Rateable value 323-4w

Spirits
Tax yields 165w

Sports
211-2w
Young people 453w

Sports administration
666w
Offices 667w

Sports Council
211-2w, 452w, 666w
Finance 452w
Manpower 666w

Sports facilities
Rate rebates 69w, 74w, 429-30w
Set-aside schemes 302-6w, 411-4w
Wales 74w

Sportsgrounds
Rugby 633w

Squire, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 70
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 204
Questions
A13, Havering 422w
Family credit 5
Maastricht summit 181-2w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 262-3w, 529-30w
Nuclear weapons policy 810

Sri Lanka
Human rights 710w
Overseas aid 710w
Political prisoners 710w
Students for Human Rights 710w

Staffordshire
Pupil-teacher ratios 668-9w

Stamp duties
House purchase (15:01:92) 1064-75

Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (15:01:92) 1075
House of Commons procedure (16:01:92) 1206
Ways & means res (15:01:92) 1064-75

Stanbrook, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 475

Standard assessment tasks
208w, 669-71w

Standard of living
202-3w, 809-10
Pregnant women 50w

Standard spending assessments
Durham City Council 62w
Hove District Council 62w
Local government expenditure 172-4w
Shropshire 422w

Standardisation
Telephone systems 542w

Standards specifications
Air pressure gauges 173-4w

Standing charges
450

Standing Order No 20 applications
Bank of Credit & Commerce International (13:01:92) 692
Ravenscraig steelworks (13:01:92) 693
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 150
Tees & Hartlepool Port (17:12:91) 147-8

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
M20, Road construction (17:01:92) 1287-90
Questions
M20, Road construction 164w
Network SouthEast, Compensation 239w
Network SouthEast, Performance targets 656w
Road construction, Property transfer 657-8w

State earnings related pension scheme
83w, 372w
Northern Ireland 333w

Stationery Office
see HMSO

Statistics
Childbirth 519-20w
Economic situation 219w

Statutory Instruments Joint Select Committee (19:12:91) 556

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Questions
Congo, Visas 186w
Kenya 266-7
Textile industry, Scotland 89w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Armed forces training, Dartmoor National Park 160w
Armed forces training, National parks 227w
Asian immigrants 162w
Computer privacy, Election forecasting 576w
Cornelis Johanna BM 204, Compensation 93w
Orange badge scheme, Orders & regulations 498w
Simplified planning zones 227w
Tree planting, Government grants 151w
Uniform business rate, Appeals 167-8w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
East coast railway line, Vandalism 241w
Farmers 306-7w
Northern Arts, Arts council grants 219w
Planning appeals, Opencast mining 420-1w
School meals, Durham 195w
Standard spending assessments, Durham City Council 62w

Stephen, Mr Nicol
Questions
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, NHS trusts 200-2w, 298-9w

Stevens, Mr Lewis
Questions
Road tax, Law enforcement 657w
Ukraine, Foreign relations 182w

Stewart, Mr Allan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 38-9
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 166, 240-1
Questions
Britannia Life Assurance, Business premises 531w
Britannia Life Assurance, Government assistance 531w
Community charge, Publicity 531w
EC Committee of the Regions, Scotland 705w
Employment training, Scotland 530w
Glenesk Foods, Factory closures 152w
Local government finance, Scotland 560-1w
Local government revenue, Scotland 199-200w
Local government services, Scotland 295w
Radioactive waste disposal, Scotland 89w
Scottish Development Agency, Company liquidations 405w
Scottish Office, Small businesses 410-1w
Youth training, Scotland 91-2w

Stewart, Mr Andy
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1006-8, 1012, 1042-3, 1046
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 460
Questions
Brain injuries, Medical rehabilitation 625-6w
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 377w
Clinical Standards Advisory Group 625w
GATT, Textiles 596-7w

Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Questions
Industrial investment 1083

Stillbirths & Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry
520w
Northern Ireland 478-9w

Stocks of commodities
Iron & steel 390w

Stoneyetts Hospital
Hospital closures 150w

Stop & search
Police & ethnic minorities 251w

Stott, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 767-9

Strang, Mr Gavin
Debates etc.
HIV infection, Blood transfusions (20:12:91) 620-2, 625-6
Maastricht summit (19:12:91) 517-9
Questions
Crown Office for Scotland, Buildings 430w

Strangford
Public expenditure controls 316-7w, 334w
Road works 316w

Stratford station
660
Channel tunnel 493w

Strathclyde Regional Council Order Confirmation Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Royal assent (19:12:91) 476

Straw, Mr Jack
Questions
Education, EC law 207w
Educational assessment, Primary education 208w, 669-71w
Grammar schools 207-8w

Straw, Mr Jack—continued
Local education authorities, Capital investment 208-11w
Ministers' visits abroad, Mexico 665-6w
Primary education 667w

Strikes
France 797

Structure plans
Bedfordshire 644w
Peak District National Park 503w

Student accommodation
Council tax exemptions 424w

Student numbers
Dundee University 699w
Queen's University Belfast 317w, 647w
Scotland 532w
University of Ulster 317w, 647w
University of Wales 135-6w

Students
Council tax 424w
Republic of Ireland 581-2w, 647w
Tuition fees 647w

Students for Human Rights
Sri Lanka 710w

Styal Prison
Prison administration 342-3w

Submarines
Shipping safety 640w

Subsidiarity
EC integration 185w

Subsidies
Orimulsion 157w

Suckler cow premiums
443-4

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 287
Railway travel, Greater Manchester (13:01:92) 787
Questions
Plugs & Sockets Etc (Safety) Regulations 1987 594w

Summerson, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 468
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1273-4
Questions
Corporation tax, Tax rates & bands 225w

Sunday trading
321w, 334w, 348w, 448, 465w, 537w, 810-1
Confiscation orders 10-1w, 576w
European Court of Justice 415w, 567w
Feldman, Basil 347w
France 348w
Kirklees Borough Council 415w
Law reform 348w, 379-80w
Licensing laws 348w
Local government functions 567w
Office of Fair Trading 716w
Police 348w
Profits 347-8w
Retail price index 6w
Shoplifting 10w
Torfaen Borough Council 415w
Wales 265w
Women 348w

Sunderland Health Authority
522-3w

Supplementary benefits
Social security benefits rates 371-2w

Supplementary questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (16:12:91) 10, 11, 15, 16, (17:12:91) 143, (18:12:91) 264, (19:12:91) 440

Support for products under research scheme
714-6w

Surgery
Heart diseases 505-6w
Hospital waiting lists 51w

Surplus land
131

Swansea University
see University College of Swansea

Swimming
Northern Ireland 140w
Primary education 140w

Swindon
Armed forces housing 160-1w

Switzerland
Research 388w
Upper Waiting Hall 435w

Syrian Arab Republic
Diplomatic relations 270
EC external relations 257

Tactical nuclear weapons
141

Tai Cymru
see Housing for Wales

Taiwan
Visas 711w

Takeover Panel
596w
Defamation 567w

Takeovers
House of Fraser 388-9w, 596w

Taking & driving away
Young offenders 161-2w

Tameside
Employment opportunities 797-8
Urban development corporations 798

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 330-2, (19:12:91) 538
Questions
Economic & monetary union 448-9
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Compensation 614-5w
Self-regulating organisations 1089-90

TASM
140-1

Tattooing
Plastic surgery 51w

Tax allowances
Enterprise zones 7-8w
Health insurance 221w
Income tax 221w, 443-4w
Tax yields 335w

Tax burden
611w
Personal taxation 121-4w

Tax collection
Community charge 342w
Company liquidations 1092

Tax harmonisation
Alcoholic drinks duties 442-3w

Tax rates & bands
Corporation tax 225w
Income tax 611w
Personal tax allowances 123-4w
VAT 612w

Tax reform
119w, 810, 1094
Budget 808-9
Foreign investment in UK 1090
Retrospective legislation 1082

Tax thresholds
Income tax 611w

Tax yields
Spirits 165w
Tax allowances 335w

Taxation
1084
Commercial television (16:12:91) 118
Company cars (20:12:91) 568-76
Energy consumption 708w

Taxpayers
219-20w
Corporation tax 6w
Income tax 6w
Personal income 220w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Questions
Cancer, Skin disorders 352-3w
Health hazards, Ozone layer 353-4w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 100, 102, 108-9
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 830, 832
Questions
Agricultural education, Children 438
ESOPs 1091-2
Family credit, Social security recipients 81w
Overseas aid, Natural resources 232w
Planning permission, Enforcement notices 68w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1224
Questions
Belfast Prison, Explosions 646w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 597w
Capital investment, Northern Ireland 478w
Channel tunnel, High speed trains 568w
Clenbuterol, Northern Ireland 598w
Council house tenant selection, Castlereagh 597-8w
Council housing, Newtownards 598w
Criminal injuries compensation, Sexual offences 477w
Drumadd Barracks, Flags 695w
Dundee University, Student numbers 699w
EC Cohesion Fund 613-4w
EC external relations 256
European economic area, Regional aid 388w
Gas pipelines, Northern Ireland 477w, 688-9w
Migration, Northern Ireland 477-8w
Public expenditure controls, Agriculture 316w
Public expenditure controls, Eastern Health & Social Services Board 334w
Public expenditure controls, Housing 317w
Public expenditure controls, Strangford 316-7w
Railway network, High speed trains 501-2w
Road construction, Northern Ireland 646-7w
Road works, Strangford 316w
Students, Republic of Ireland 581-2w
Students, Tuition fees 647w
University of Ulster, Student numbers 317w, 647w

Taylor, Mr John M, Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 43

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
Devon & Cornwall Development Company, Government assistance 962
Educational policy 665w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 358-61
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 916, 931

Taylor, Sir Teddy—continued
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Agricultural subsidies 77w
EC integration, Dept of Education & Science 113-4w
EC integration, Dept of Energy 98w
EC integration, Dept of Trade & Industry 621w
EC integration, Home Office 100w
London Tilbury & Southend line, Railway travel 654
Maastricht summit 181-2w
MV Richard Montgomery, Wrecks 49w
Ravenscraig steelworks, Factory closures 674-5
Speed governors, EC action 398w

TDG
716w

Teacher training
450-2w, 559-60w
English education 212w, 322w
Wales 75w

Teachers
449w
Child abuse (16:01:92) 1207-16
Medical examinations 578w
Retirement 509w
Wales 509w

Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 299, 318, 322-7, 332, 336, 377, 418, 421-2, (19:12:91) 481

Technical assistance
Baltic states 232-3w
Nuclear safety 243-4w

Technology schools initiative
208-11w

Teenage pregnancy
Illegitimate children 525w
Northern Ireland 482-90w

Tees & Hartlepool Port
Standing Order No 20 applications (17:12:91) 147-8

Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority
Privatisation 162-3w, 238-9w, 501w
RENAVAL 501w

Teesside Holdings
162-3w

Telephone charges
946-8

Telephone services
Pornography 947

Telephone systems
Standardisation 542w

Television advertising
Gambling 459w

Television licences
Video equipment 16w, 459-60w

Television programmes
Arms trade 395w
Local broadcasting 15w

Televisions
10 Downing Street 660w

Temporary immigrants
Visas 687w, (15:01:92) 1076-80.

10 Downing Street
Televisions 660w

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings & statements (19:12:91) 477, 505, 513, (14:01:92) 817, 865, 891, (17:01:92) 1219, 1234, 1243, 1273

Tenants' rights
Private rented housing 226w

Territorial Army
147w, (20:12:91) 567

Terrorism
Arson 248-9w, 696-7w
Confiscation orders 462w
Criminal proceedings 179-80w
Doherty, Daniel 59w
Homicide 141-2w
India 462w
Libyan Arab Republic 270-2
Middle East 270
Northern Ireland 140-2w, 688-9w, 696-7w
Warnings 463w

Textile industry
EC grants & loans 541-2w
Employment opportunities 793-4
Government assistance 187w, 794
Scotland 89w

Textiles
GATT 109w, 596-7w, 621w
Uruguay round 959-60

Thalassaemia
Medical treatments 528w

Thamesmead
Local government constituencies 645w

Thanet
Upper Waiting Hall 186w

Theatre
Northern region 416w

Theft
Church property 14-5

Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Questions
Air pollution 324-6w
Air pollution monitoring 326w
Greenhouse effect, Press advertising 326w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Wales 504-5w

Thompson, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Coal Industry Bill, Rep & 3R (15:01:92) 1019, 1037-40
Questions
Assisted areas 953
Industrial investment 1082-3

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 344-6
Questions
Defective housing, Government grants to local authorities 574-5w
Maastricht summit 182w

Thorn Cross Youth Custody Centre
100w

Thorne, Mr Neil
Questions
Mortgage defaulters 449

THORP
615w, 801

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Adoption (19:12:91) 559-62
Foreign adoptions, Public petitions (19:12:91) 557
Questions
Access to Parliament 17-8
Civil Service College, Operating costs 330w
EC presidency 181w
Foreign adoptions, Fees & charges 155w
Foreign investment in UK, EC countries 120-1w
Health authorities, Contracts for services 50-1w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 684w
NHS, Capital investment 254w
Overseas trade 620-1w
Telephone charges 946-7
UN Security Council 807

Thurnham, Mr Peter—continued
Voluntary contributions 438-9w

Tibet
Foreign policy 183w

Tidworth
Armed forces housing 385w

Tilbury
Ports 400-1w

Tobacco
Intervention stocks 190w

Tobacco advertising
Advertising controls 521w

Tobacco duties
Income 1083-4
Retail price index 441w, 613w

Top Salaries Review Body
Members' allowances 380w

Torfaen Borough Council
Sunday trading 415w

Tornado aircraft
Air accidents 380w

Torness power station
89w

Torquay Market Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
Royal assent (19:12:91) 476

Tourism
796
Wales 796, (17:01:92) 1286

Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992
Debates etc.
(13:01:92) 764-83

Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Wales) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R* (17:01:92) 1286

Tourist industry
Manpower 564w
Southport 564w

Town & country planning
Alternative energy 67w

Townsend, Mr Cyril D
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 865-7
Questions
Child benefit 80w

Tracey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1251-3, 1257, 1263
Questions
Arts finance, Lotteries 664
Business statements 1104-5

Trade competitiveness
592w
EC labour policy 946

Trades Union Congress
Training 562w
Unemployment 563-4w

Trading standards departments
109-10w, 387-8w

Trafford Park
Private education 27w

Training
799-800
Armed forces discharges 383-4w
Community development 798-99
Confederation of British Industry 563w
Disabled workers 563w
Europe 456w
Factory Inspectorate 2w
Heywood 454w

Training—continued
School leaving 803
Take-up 799-800
Trades Union Congress 562w

Training & enterprise councils
3w, 794-5, 798-9, 802, 805-6, 963-5
Civil servants' secondment 4w
Contracts 634w
South Glamorgan 73w, 125-6w, 271w, 360w

Translation services
Dept of Social Security local offices 144w

Transplant surgery
Hospital waiting lists 615w, 624w
Liver diseases 529w
Wales 615w

Transport Act 1981
Questions
240-1w

Transport & Road Research Laboratory
498w

Transport of radioactive materials
Nuclear weapons 135, 696w

Transport subsidies
Railway transport 655-6

Transport supplementary grants
Bus services 655w

Travel to interview scheme
241-2w

Travelling expenses
Civil service recruitment 657w

Trawsfynydd power station
95-6w
Nuclear safety 475-6w
Pollution monitoring 357w

Treasury
Civil service dispersal 165w
Directors 117w
Performance indicators 117-9w

Treaties
EC integration 233w, 435-6w
Ozone layer 62w

Treaty of Rome
320w, 436w
Overseas aid 331w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 819
Questions
Pensioners, Income support 8-9
Residential care of children, Child safety 352w

Tree planting
Government grants 151w
Scotland 295-6w

Trees
Plant genetics 151w

Trespass
Menwith Hill 605w

Trevi Group
351-2w

Trident
139-40
Defence procurement 57w

Trident missiles
283w
Defence research 283w

Trimble, Mr David
Debates etc.
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders (19:12:91) 457-8
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 774-5

Trimble, Mr David—continued
Questions
Capital investment, Northern Ireland 479w
Urban development grants, Northern Ireland 647w

Trippier, Mr David, Minister for the Environment and Countryside
Questions
Environment Protection Act 1990, Codes of practice 108-9w
Environment Protection Act 1990, Small businesses 168w
Halons, Fire services 172w
Water pollution, Pollution control 434w

Trotter, Mr Neville
Questions
Bus services 609w
Channel tunnel, Rolling stock 657w
Magistrates' Courts Review 249-50w

Trust ports
162-3w, 238-9w, 501w, (14:01:92) 912-35
Privatisation 239-40w

Trustee Savings Bank
443w

Trusts
Pension funds 514w

TUC
see Trades Union Congress

Tuition fees
Students 647w

Tunisia
Foreign policy 340w

Tunnels
Ventilation 45-6w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Questions
Industrial development, West Midlands 957
Local government borrowing 107w

"Two Edged Sword"
395w

Tyne & Wear Development Corporation
167w

Type 42 destroyers
133

Tyres
Recycling 714w
Road safety 567-8w

UK Central Council for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting
(13:01:92) 696-722

UK contributions
European Security Conference 44w
International Atomic Energy Agency 18w
"Manual of Environmental Policy" 672w
Oil pollution control 571-2w
UN Conference on Environment & Development 572w

UK contributions to EC budget
4-6w
EC social charter 439w
VAT 575-6w

UK Transplant Support Service Authority
521w

Ukraine
Diplomatic relations 183w
Foreign relations 182w
Recognition of states 182w

UN
see United Nations

UN Advance Mission in Cambodia
583-4w, 711w

UN Centre for Social Development & Humanitarian Affairs

UN Centre for Social Development & Humanitarian Affairs—continued
588w

UN Conference on Environment & Development
104-6w, 325-6w, 572-3w, 577w, 630w
UK contributions 572w
Urban planning 671w
Women 64-5w

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
102w

UN Economic Commission for Europe
123w

UN Fund for Population Activities
470w

UN High Commissioner for Refugees
42-3w

UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission
583-4w

UN Security Council
807

UN Special Commission on Iraq
716w

UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia
711w

UNCTAD
43w

Underground railways
South London 652

Unemployed
Income support 144w

Unemployment
449-50, 1094-5
Chelmsford 795
Cumbria 801
Dyfed 362w
EC countries 652w
Greater London 565w, 634w
Scotland 447-8
Trades Union Congress 563-4w
Wales 617w

Unemployment benefits
Carers 370w
Earnings rules 374w
Newport Gwent 125w
Social security benefits disqualification 125w
Social security recipients 144w

Uniform business rate
Appeals 167-8w, 537w
Rateable value 323-4w
Southend-on-Sea 537w

Unitary taxation
5-6w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Land reclamation 568-9w

United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service
460-1w

United Kingdom NIREX
574w

United Kingdom Sports Commission
452w, 666-7w
Finance 452w

United Nations
265, 340w, 583w
Iraq 583w
Verification 582-3w

University closures
263-4

University College Cardiff
Property development 508-9w

University College of Swansea
Higher education administration 360w

University Hospital of Wales
138w
Planning permission (20:12:91) 596-604

University of Ulster
Student numbers 317w, 647w

University of Wales
Student numbers 135-6w

Unpaid taxes
224w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:12:91) 160, 201, (18:12:91) 258, 292, (16:01:92) 1095, 1132

Upholder class submarines
Repairs & maintenance 380w

Upper Waiting Hall
109w, 445w
Football Association 31w
Piper B platform 157w
Police Complaints Authority 686-7w
Prince of Wales Youth Business Trust 126w
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 100w
St Thomas' Hospital 157w
Switzerland 435w
Thanet 186w
Yorkshire Mining Museum Trust 94-5w

Uranium
Dounreay 376w
International trade 583w

Urban areas
Road tolls 402w

Urban development corporations
Tameside 798

Urban development grants
Northern Ireland 647w

Urban planning
UN Conference on Environment & Development 671w

Urban programme
642-4w
Meadowell Estate 167w

Uruguay round
109w, 596-7w, 959
Textiles 959-60

US bases
Menwith Hill 512-3w

USA
Foreign investment in UK 595w, 950-1
Nuclear weapons tests 469w

USSR
Debts 439-40w
Economic situation 441-2w
Human rights 435-6w
Nuclear weapons 26w, 257-9, 284-5w
Recognition of states 184w

Vacancies
Greater London 565w

Vaccination
Hepatitis 139w

Valleys initiative
617w
Expenditure 72w

Valuation & community charge tribunals
167-8w

Valuation Office
117-9w

Vandalism
East coast railway line 241w, 659

VAT
Horses 334-5w, 613w
Maastricht summit 335w
Rents 119w
Tax rates & bands 612w
UK contributions to EC budget 575-6w

VAT zero rated goods
EC action 706-8w

Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Debates etc.
School admission (20:12:91) 629-30, 631, 634

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Standing Order No 20 applications (13:01:92) 692
Questions
Abu Dhabi, British residents abroad 181w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Compensation 1089
Bank of Credit & Commerce International Inquiry 629w
Indian subcontinent, Immigration applications 688w
Indian subcontinent, Visas 687w
Severe disablement allowance, Social security benefits rules 84w

Veal
441-2
House of Commons catering 642w

Vegetables
Agricultural production 76w
Intervention stocks 76-7w

Vegetarianism
Nutrition 143w
Research 142w

Ventilation
Dockyards 242w
Severn tunnel 45w
Tunnels 45-6w

Verification
United Nations 582-3w

"Verification in All Its Aspects"
582-3w

Verification Technology Information Centre
582-3w

Veterinary drugs
Food standards 194-5w

Veterinary Investigation Service
194w

Vibration white finger
Handicap benefits 289-90w

Victoria Tower
17-8

Video equipment
Television licences 16w, 459-60w

Vietnam
Overseas aid 231-2w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 861-2, 873-5
Questions
Arachnoiditis, Medical research 355w
Defence land 131
Rowner housing estate, Defective housing 641w, 644w

Visas
Congo 186w
EC countries 217w
Gabon 186w
Indian subcontinent 687w
Iran 710-1w
Medical students 249w
Poland 352w

Visas—continued
Singh, Partap 338w
Taiwan 711w
Temporary immigrants 687w, (15:01:92) 1076-80

Vocational training
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation 73w

Voluntary contributions
438-9w

Voluntary schools
Capital investment 34-42w

Voluntary work
Car allowances 119w
Schools 207w

Von Roll Steel Products
709w

Wages councils
587w

***Wakeham, Rt Hon John**, Secretary of State for Energy*
Questions
Dept of Energy, EC integration 98w
European Energy Charter 242-3w
Petroleum Engineering Directorate, Civil service dispersal 472w
Piper B platform, Upper Waiting Hall 157w

***Waldegrave, Rt Hon William**, Secretary of State for Health*
Questions
Brain injuries, Medical rehabilitation 625-6w
Clinical Standards Advisory Group 625w
NHS, Capital investment 254w, 355-6w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 262-3w, 355w, 529-30w
NHS trusts 259-62w, 356w
NHS trusts, Oxford 675w

Wales
Air pollution 71-2w
Bats 158-9w
Beef 508w
Common agricultural policy 546-7w
Community charge 75w
Crime prevention 270w
Day care of children 507w, 546w
District health authorities 545w, 691w
EC Committee of the Regions 615w
EC grants & loans 70-1w, 359w
Ecstasy 693-5w
Empty housing 263-4w
Family doctors 263w, 619-20w, 694w
Farm incomes 71-2w
Fluoridation 694w
Food poisoning 271w
Gas safety 336-7w
Ground water 361w
Heart diseases 505-6w
Historic buildings 265w
HM Inspectorate of Schools 266-7w, 504-5w, 507w
Homelessness 264-5w
Hormone treatments 508w
Hospital patients 364-7w
Hospitals 509w
Housing associations 360-1w
Housing revenue accounts 159w
Inner city areas 268-9w
Kidney patients 362w
Local government finance (13:01:92) 680-91
Medical equipment 269-71w, 506w
Mortgage defaulters 607w
Multiple occupation 133w
Music education 416w
NHS finance 137-8w, 363-4w
NHS treatment centres 618w
NHS trusts 135w, 271-2w, 546w
Pigs 693w
Planning appeals 692w
Playing fields 618w
Poultry 506-7w
Prescription charges 510w, 547-8w, 585w

Wales—continued
Prescription drugs 617w
Prescriptions 547-8w
Radioactive fallout 584-5w
Railway travel 364w
RECHAR 358-9w
Regional development grants 269w
Regional government 159w
Residential care of children 359-60w
River pollution 619w
Road construction 357-8w, 616w
Road works 134w
Safer cities scheme 245w
School administration 133-4w
Schools 618w
Sheep 693w
Shellfish 135w
Smoking 138w
Sports facilities 74w
Sunday trading 265w
Teacher training 75w
Teachers 509w
Tourism 796, (17:01:92) 1286
Transplant surgery 615w
Unemployment 617w
Water pollution 616w

Wales Tourist Board
(17:01:92) 1286
Marketing 586w

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 471
Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, 1R (19:12:91) 476
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 162-3, 186, 221
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Tax harmonisation 442-3w
Common agricultural policy 446
Dundee Institute of Technology 603w
Fish farming, Scotland 411w
Higher education colleges, Scotland 294-5w
Local government services, Scotland 295w
Non-domestic rates, Rating revaluations 604-5w
Objects in lieu of tax, Scotland 198-9w, 411-2w

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Business statements (19:12:91) 470
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 590
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 69-75, 82, 85-6
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 278
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 928-9
Questions
Business statements 1101
Departmental correspondence 517w
Industrial democracy 797
Open University, Educational finance 668w
Salmon, EC external trade 445w
Schools, Voluntary work 207w
Shellfish, Food contamination 689-90w, 695w, 699-701w
Travelling expenses, Civil service recruitment 657w
Travel to interview scheme 241-2w

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 732-3, 746-52, 755, 757-8
Questions
Family credit, One parent families 81w
House of Commons reform of procedure 19-20
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 399w

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Ports Act 1991 (Levy on Disposals of Land etc) Order 1991 (14:01:92) 916-20, 932
Questions
"Age File" The Facts 538w

Walley, Ms Joan*—*continued
Arts Council, Handicapped 166w
Bypasses, Road construction 503w
Car allowances, Voluntary work 119w
Community care, Sheltered housing 538w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Translation services 144w
Ferries, Shipping safety 657-8
Fire Precautions Act 1971 683w
Fire prevention, Certification 571w
Hairdressing, Minimum wage 587w
Hairdressing, Pay 633w
HM Coastguard, Expenditure 609-10w
Industrial health & safety, EC action 633w
Invalid care allowances, Pensioners 635w
M25, Environmental impact assessment 501w
Port of London Authority, Police 402w
Ports, Accounting 162w, 405-6w
RMS St Helena, Working conditions 163-4w
Road construction, Environmental impact assessment 499-500w
Road works 500-1w
Road works, Environmental impact assessment 501w
Roads, Pennines 503w
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults, Books 423w
School buildings, Building repairs 453-4w
Sea rescue 495-7w
Sea rescue, Manpower 497w
Sea rescue, Offices 497-8w
Sealink 239w
Speed limits 501w
Speed limits, Exhaust emissions 535w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Privatisation 238-9w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, RENAVAL 501w
Trust ports, Privatisation 239-40w
Water transport, Government grants 240-1w

Walter Somers
709w
Departmental correspondence 383w

Walters, Sir Dennis
Questions
Israel, Occupied territories 264

Wandsworth Prison
10-1w

Ward, Mr John
Questions
International Atomic Energy Agency, UK contributions 18w
Mortgage defaulters 2

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Questions
Croatia, Refugees 42-3w
District health authorities, Wales 545w, 691w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 615w
Fluoridation 673-4w
Fluoridation, Health hazards 624w
Fluoridation, Wales 694w
Food poisoning, Wales 271w
Health service staff, Industrial health & safety 674-5w
HIV infection, Industrial health & safety 651-2w
HIV infection, Medical research 667w
Leukaemia, Medical research 692w
Medical equipment, Waste disposal 653w
Organ donors, Casualties 624w
Planning appeals, Wales 692w
Railway travel, Wales 364w
Road construction, Land acquisition 616w
Road construction, Public inquiries 691-3w
Transplant surgery, Hospital waiting lists 615w, 624w
Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr, Ministers' domestic visits 584w
Yugoslavia, Airlines 101w
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 101-2w
Yugoslavia, Recognition of states 184w

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
King's Cross Railways Bill, Rep adjourned (13:01:92) 725
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 284, 373-5, 400
Questions
Indonesia, Human rights 183-4w
Industrial investment 1087
Railway safety 655
Training, Community development 798-9

Warnings
Terrorism 463w

Warren, Mr Kenneth
Questions
Hastings-Ashford railway line, Railway electrification 608w
Motor vehicles 608w

Warships
133-4
Defence procurement 133, 385-6w
New Zealand 334w

Waste disposal
Ammunition 557-9w
Departmental leaflets 167w
Licensing 426w
Livestock 307w, 309w, 446w, 478w, 531w, 570w
Local government functions 63w
Medical equipment 653w
Seas & oceans 557-9w
Slaughterhouses 308w

Waste management
426w
Environment Agency 63-4w
Hazardous wastes 425-6w

Water charges
Sheltered housing (17:12:91) 247-54

Water pollution
Londonderry 477w
Pollution control 434w
River Ely 137w
Wales 616w

Water resources
Cardiff Bay barrage 267-8w

Water supply industry
Nationalisation 1081

Water transport
Government grants 240-1w
River Thames 46w

Water treatment
EC law 430w

Waterloo Station
493w
Channel tunnel 493w

Watson, Mr Mike
Questions
Palestine, Occupied territories 263-4

Watts, Mr John
Debates etc.
Income support, Interest payments (19:12:91) 468
Questions
Wexham Park Hospital, NHS trusts 146

Waveney District Council
Housing stock 65w

Weapons
Testing 381w

Weights & Measures Act 1985
Questions
387-8w

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc.
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 407-8
Questions
Yugoslavia 261

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Poultry (16:12:91) 120-3, 126
Questions
Bail, Habitual offenders 197w
Employment protection, EC social policy 806
Glenesk Foods, Factory closures 152w
Poultry meat, Exports 189w
Sea rescue 658

Welsh, Mr Michael
Questions
Nuclear weapons, USSR 26w

Welsh Affairs Select Committee
364w

Welsh Consumer Council
Public appointments 112w

Welsh Development Agency
Conditions of employment 695w
Jones, Gwyn 360w, 547-8w

Welsh Development Agency Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Royal assent (19:12:91) 476

Welsh Health Common Services Authority
Offices 136-7w

Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting
(13:01:92) 696-722

Welsh National Opera
664-5

Welsh Office
Disabled workers 358w
Forests 134-5w
Public appointments 272-82w, 503w

Welsh Water
Electricity supply industry 136w
LEK Partnership 136w

Wentloog Lagoon
Construction 269-70w
Departmental correspondence 73w

West coast railway line
Railway electrification 401w

West Kent Housing Association
Public sector housing sales 226-7w

West Midlands
Confederation of British Industry 591w
Industrial development 957-8

West Yorkshire
Estate Action 67w
Railway electrification 399w

Westminster & Chelsea Hospital
Construction 253w

Wexham Park Hospital
NHS trusts 146

Wheeler, Sir John
Questions
Animal Procedures Committee, Public appointments 100w
Assaults on police, Greater London 464w
Crime 465w
Criminal injuries compensation scheme 351w
Homicide, Greater London 463w
Magistrates' courts, Administrative delays 541w
Prison Service Management Review 13w
Prisons, Security 13-4w
Security industry 247-8w
Trevi Group 351-2w

Whitney, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
Kashmir, Public petitions (17:01:92) 1217-8
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1220

Widdecombe, Miss Ann, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Carers' premium, Social security benefits rules 84-5w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann—continued
Cold weather payments 79-80w
Cold weather payments, Disclosure of information 372-3w
Cold weather payments, Social security benefits rules 373-4w
Cold weather payments, Social security recipients 373w
Community charge benefits, Concessionary coal 291w
Community charge benefits, Income support 201w
Crisis loans 371w
Dept of Social Security, Official engagements 517w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Cumbernauld 5
Dept of Social Security local offices, Cunninghame 370w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Manpower 514w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Translation services 144w
Departmental correspondence 517w
Disabled workers, Income support 653w
Homelessness, Social security recipients 86w
Housing benefits, Employment training 637-8w
Housing benefits, Pensioners 146w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rates 87w
Income support 9
Income support, Computer applications 81w
Income support, Heating 634-5w
Income support, Mortgages 371w
Income support, Social security benefits reductions 516w
Income support, Social security recipients 516w
Invalid care allowances 370w
Kidney patients, Social security benefits 290-1w
Maxwell companies, Occupational Pensions Board 288w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 144w
Occupational pensions 145w
Occupational pensions, Divorce 84w
Occupational pensions, Liability 288w
Occupational pensions, Sex discrimination 636w
Old persons' pensions 9
Old persons' pensions, Social security benefits uprating 374w
One parent benefit, Social security benefits rates 374-5w
Pension funds, Fraud 374w, 513w
Pension funds, Investment 82w, 85w
Pension funds, Ringfenced funding 287w
Pension funds, Trusts 514w
Pensioners, Income support 8-9, 143-4w, 202w
Pensioners, Personal income 635-6w
Residential care, Income support 9, 80w, 83w, 636w
Residential care, Social security benefits 82-3w
Retirement age 145w
Retirement age, Costs 287w
Retirement age, Skill shortages 287w
Retirement age, Women 286-7w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits rates 87-8w, 288w, 368-70w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 288w
Retirement pensions, Social security reform 367-8w
Severe disability premium, Social security appeals 653w
Social security appeal tribunals, Pay 289w
Social security appeals, Evidence 654w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 370-1w
Social security benefits reductions, Community charge 372w
Social security benefits rules, Concessionary coal 204w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann—continued
Social security benefits rules, Part-time employment 87w
Social security benefits uprating, Administrative delays 202w
Social security claims, Dept of Social Security local offices 84w
Social security payments, Christmas 636w
State earnings related pension scheme 372w
Supplementary benefits, Social security benefits rates 371-2w
Unemployment benefits, Carers 370w
Widows, Pensions 86w

Widows
Pensions 86w

Widows' benefits
Northern Ireland 332-3w
Social security benefits rates 374-5w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Debates etc.
Environmentally sensitive areas (15:01:92) 976
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 350-3, 423
Questions
Air pollution, Wales 71-2w
Climate, International conferences 66w
East Timor 181w
EC grants & loans, Wales 70-1w
Farm incomes, Wales 71-2w
Industrial Development Act 1982 952-3
Multiple occupation, Wales 133w
Music education, Wales 416w
Social security claims, Dept of Social Security local offices 84w
UN Conference on Environment & Development, Urban planning 671w
University of Wales, Student numbers 135-6w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 77-9, 83, 102, 105-6, 111
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep & 3R (17:12:91) 205, 209, 220, 225, 226
Questions
Royal Naval Reserve 137
Yugoslavia 266

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Royal Regiment of Wales, Public petitions (20:12:91) 567
Questions
University College of Swansea, Higher education administration 360w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Questions
Energy conservation 227w

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
EC Fisheries Council (20:12:91) 594
Local Government Finance Bill, Rep (16:12:91) 44-5
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 350
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1229, 1252, 1254, 1282-4
Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (13:01:92) 765
Questions
Betting shops, Opening hours 10w, 197w
Bridges, Isle of Skye 602w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Cunninghame 370w
Forestry Commission, Access to countryside 197w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 197w
Historic buildings, Broadcasting complaints 344w
Historic buildings, Government grants 265w
Holyrood House, Security 532w
Inter-City rail transport 659-60
Scottish National Liberation Army 533-4w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Public appointments 533w

Wilson, Mr Brian—continued
Scottish Natural Heritage, Research 533w
Sites of special scientific interest, Management agreements 533w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Armed Forces (Liability for Injury) Bill, 1R (17:12:91) 154
Business statements (19:12:91) 476
Intelligence services, Points of order (17:12:91) 151
Maastricht summit (18:12:91) 318, 367-9, 376
Nuclear weapons policy (14:01:92) 819, 836, 903
Questions
Cold weather payments 6, 79-80w, 290w, 654w
EC social charter 102w, 125w
Intelligence services, Disclosure of information 460w
Intelligence services, Public appointments 245w
Iraq, Arms trade 1093
Northern Ireland Electricity, Pensions 317w
Pensioners, Personal income 635-6w
Prime Minister, Civil servants 660w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 288w
10 Downing Street, Televisions 660w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Questions
Cranage Hall Hospital 132w
Mental health community care 256w
Sunday trading, Confiscation orders 10-1w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Manufacturing industries 958-9
NHS, Expenditure 53w
Shared ownership schemes 108w

Wise, Mrs Audrey
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1232-3, 1274-6
Questions
Ethnic minorities, Government grants to local authorities 466w
Pregnant women, Income support 84w
Pregnant women, Standard of living 50w
Severe hardship provision 143w

Withholding tax
120w

Wolds Remand Prison
Prisoners' transfers 683w

Wolfson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, 2R adjourned (17:01:92) 1252
Questions
NHS, Energy conservation 675w

Women
Civil service 667
Higher civil servants 146w, 666-7
Homicide 319w
Low pay 456w
Residential care of children 252-3w
Retirement age 286-7w
Sunday trading 348w
UN Conference on Environment & Development 64-5w

"Women & the Environment"
577w

Women clergy
15-6

Women's employment
Part-time employment 456w

Wood
Import controls 390w
Philippines 390w

CAMBRIDGE REFERENCE LIBRARY

Wood fuels
244-5w

Woolwich Arsenal
606w

Woolwich Common Estate
Expenditure 423-4w

Working conditions
Civil service 439w
EC action (19:12:91) 556
RMS St Helena 163-4w

"Working for Patients White Paper"
52w

Working hours
Civil service agencies 298w, 421w
Dept of the Environment 421w
EC action 563w
Scottish Office 298w

Working mothers
Part-time employment 803-4

World Association of Nuclear Operators
243-4w

World Memorial Day
25-6w

Worthington, Mr Tony
Questions
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rates 87w
School buildings, Capital investment 534w
Youth training, Scotland 91-2w

Wray, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Tibet, Foreign policy 183w

Wrecks
MV Richard Montgomery 49w

Written questions
Costs 468w, 544w
Government achievements 468w
Labour & employment 126w
Members 378-9w

Yeo, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment
Debates etc.
Hampton Court Green (20:12:91) 645-9
Questions
A13, Havering 422w
Anchor Housing Association, Sheltered housing 104w
Building industry, Economic recession 571w
Campaign for cold weather credits 429w
Caravan sites, Basingstoke 226w

Yeo, Mr Tim—continued
Community care, Sheltered housing 538w
Council house sales, Defective housing 422w
Council housing, Community care 104w
Council housing finance, Manchester 425w
Council tenants, House purchase 424w
Crown Office for Scotland, Buildings 430w
Demolition, Conservation areas 538w
Domestic energy conservation, Low incomes 421-2w
Energy conservation 227w
Estate Action, West Yorkshire 67w
Farm buildings, Housing tenure 434w
Fire prevention, Certification 571w
Homelessness, Easington 429w
Homelessness, Government grants 423w
Housing associations, Armed forces discharges 166-7w
Housing associations, Mortgage defaulters 64w
Housing construction, Easington 426w
Housing construction, Energy conservation 421w
Housing revenue accounts 108w
Housing stock, Waveney District Council 65w
Loft insulation 671w
Meadowell Estate, Urban programme 167w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Nottingham 671w
Planning appeals, Costs 67-8w
Planning appeals, Opencast mining 420-1w
Pollution control, Local government functions 428-9w
Private rented housing, Tenants' rights 226w
PSA Services, Billing 419-20w
Public participation in planning 108w
Public sector housing, Young people 66w
Rent increases 430-4w
Republic of Ireland 437w
Rowner housing estate, Defective housing 644w
Royal parks, Cycling 226w
Simplified planning zones 227w
Single homeless, Housing associations 173w
Town & country planning, Alternative energy 67w
Woolwich Common Estate, Expenditure 423-4w

Ynys Mon
Sewage 74-6w

York
Army 150w

Yorkshire Mining Museum Trust
Upper Waiting Hall 94-5w

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 51w

Young, Mr David
Questions
Carers 131w
Sunday trading, Shoplifting 10w

Young, Sir George, Minister for Housing and Planning
Questions
Defective housing, Government grants to local authorities 574-5w
Development plans 169-71w
Housing revenue accounts 644-5w
Planning permission 104w
Planning permission, Enforcement notices 68w
Rapid transit systems, Coventry 426-7w
Structure plans, Bedfordshire 644w
West Kent Housing Association, Public sector housing sales 226-7w

Young offenders
347w
Burglary 161-2w
Custodial treatment 466w
Prosecutions 540-1w
Taking & driving away 161-2w

Young people
Family planning 526w
Public sector housing 66w
Sports 453w

"Your Child & the National Curriculum"
Cleveland 27w

Youth clubs
Drug prevention schemes 684w

Youth training
805-6
Crewe 455w, 802
Finance 3w
Greater London 564w
Income support 89w
Labour Party 802-3
School leaving 455w
Scotland 91-2w, 530w

Youth training scheme
Seaham 454w

Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr
Ministers' domestic visits 584w

Yugoslavia
184w, 260-3, 265-6
Airlines 101w
Armed conflict 101-2w
Ethnic minorities 262-3
Recognition of states 184w